

MUSIC BEFORE 1800

Louise Basbas, director

# Diderot String Quartet

## *From Russia with Love* *String Quartets for Catherine the Great*

Johanna Novom, Adriane Post, violins

Kyle Miller, viola

Paul Dwyer, cello

### Quartet No. 1 in G Major

Anton Ferdinand Titz (1742 - 1811)

*I. Adagio - Allegro*

*II. Adagio*

*III. Allegretto*

*IV. Rondo*

### Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 33/2 "The Joke"

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)

*I. Allegro moderato*

*II. Scherzo - Allegro*

*III. Largo*

*IV. Presto*

This program is followed by an interactive Q and A with the performers,  
and will be available to online subscribers/ticket holders until mid-July.

The video production is supported, in part, by a generous gift from Roger and Whitney Bagnall.

This program is sponsored, in part, by Bob and Chris Britton.

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Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Virtual concert 4 p.m. Sunday, May 2, 2021  
Recorded at Corpus Christi Church, April 26, 2021

MUSIC BEFORE 1800  
46th Season, 2020-2021

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**February 14:** *Forty-five years of New Performances of "Music Before 1800"* Louise Basbas and Henry Lee

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*Recordings are available on Music Before 1800's YouTube channel*

**Virtual Concerts, Sundays at 4 p.m.**

**May 2:** *From Russia with Love*  
Diderot String Quartet

**May 23:** *Portraits et Caractères*  
Aya Hamada, harpsichord

**June 13:** *Byways and Backwaters*  
Peter Sykes, harpsichord

**June 27:** *Plein Jeu* Martin Bernstein, recorder  
Justin Taylor, harpsichord and organ

*Concerts will be available on demand until July 15*



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## PROGRAM NOTES

Juicy accounts of the dramatic personal and professional relationship between Franz Joseph Haydn and his far lesser-known contemporary, **Anton Ferdinand Titz** (1742-1811), would, sadly, be entirely fabricated. Any evidence that these two ever met in person eludes us, but it is inconceivable that Titz was not heavily influenced by Haydn, particularly his quartet writing. Little is known about Titz himself. In 1842, the centennial of Titz's birth, a profile was published in a theater journal in St. Petersburg, where anecdotal evidence and documented facts are almost indistinguishable. Titz, born and raised in Nuremberg, was orphaned at an early age and received his first instruction in painting from his close-by uncle and aunt, the Dietzsch's. (Confusion about the family name may have contributed to Anton's somewhat untraceable legacy: his name and family often appeared in different versions, such as Dietzsch, Dietz and Tietz.) After showing little to no interest or talent in the visual arts, he was compelled by his aunt to take violin lessons. By the age of seventeen, he established himself as a violinist at the local St. Sebaldus church. Supposedly a love affair gone wrong—and perhaps professional ambition—drove him out of the city and led him to Vienna. His most meaningful and closest acquaintance here seems to have been Christoph Willibald Gluck, who eventually facilitated Titz's engagement as violinist in the opera orchestra. It is during this time in Vienna that Titz may have studied with Haydn. Titz was also spending some time playing at the “musical academies” of Prince Lobkowitz—who would, decades later, become instrumental in Beethoven's career.

In 1771, a Russian diplomat passing through Vienna heard the sweet sounds Titz was producing on his violin. He was so impressed that he vehemently invited Titz to return with him to St. Petersburg. Titz followed the beckoning and quickly found his calling at the Imperial Court in St. Petersburg, where he became a revered member of the Hofkapelle, playing violin and viola d'amore, teaching at the theater school, and giving lessons to the likes of the future Tsar Alexander I. Catherine the Great was still in the first third of her thirty-four year reign as Emperor of All Russia, was a lover of Viennese chamber music and a long-distance admirer and supporter of Haydn's. Haydn never made it to Russia himself, but had correspondence with Catherine and dedicated his six quartets of Opus 33 to her. Perhaps Catherine heard something of Haydn in Titz's music, as Titz became the highest-paid musician at her court. He was clearly very well respected, despite eagerly stepping away from the limelight of public performance: as his Russian biographer notes, “He never could have become a concert violinist due to his shyness, but in the quartet he was in his element.” Writing and performing chamber music in the familiar confines of the court became one of his main duties. No wonder Titz chose to spend the next four decades and the rest of his life under such auspices. (We like to imagine Denis Diderot, our namesake, discussing Haydn quartets with Titz during his visit to Catherine the Great in late 1773....)

Many of Titz's works are lost, but fortunately for us, several of his string quartets have survived. *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* describes his oeuvre as “mainly chamber works in the Viennese Classical style; his string quartets strive for a large dramatic compass and the three upper parts have considerable independence.” In the string quartet you'll hear today, one can even safely say that all four parts have considerable independence, with extravagant viola and cello solos unusual for this period of chamber music writing.

Titz appears to have lived out his life in very human and unspectacular fashion. Violinist and composer Louis Spohr writes in his autobiography that he met Titz on a visit to St. Petersburg in 1803 and noticed that Titz's technical assurance on the violin had gone. He was also reported to have suffered a mental disorder in his final years, and was generally known for his silence, going extended periods of time without saying a word. It speaks to Titz's renown that one of the most famous Russian poets at the time, Ivan Dmitriev, wrote:

*What do I hear, Titz?  
Your inspired bow Sings and speaks and moves all hearts.  
O harmony's son! You deserve the laurel wreath,  
and you can scorn normal speech.*

**Franz Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) was no stranger to royal patronage. Perhaps a bit more loquacious than Titz overall (though we were unable to find any poetry on the subject), he was comfortably and prosperously employed for decades at the court of Esterázy. Many of his works were sponsored by music-lovers with titles at other royal courts throughout Europe, including the aforementioned Prince Lobkowitz. Today's quartet is from a groundbreaking collection of six string quartets, Opus 33. (Depending on whom you ask, Opus 33 is considered already his second or third groundbreaking collection of six string quartets, after Opus 17 and Opus 20.) Opus 33 is known as the “Russian” quartets because Haydn

dedicated them to Catherine the Great and Grand Duke Paul of Russia. Many if not all of these quartets were first heard at the apartment of the Duke's wife in Vienna on Christmas Day, 1781.

How is it, you may ask, that one of the "Russian" quartets has come to be called "The Joke?" Avid concert-goers may have already noticed that many of Haydn's string quartets have nicknames. The truth is that virtually none of these names are attributed to Haydn himself, but rather have been attached to various works over the past two centuries since his death. Some quartets are named according to their historical circumstances, such as the "Russian," the "Prussian," and the "Lobkowitz" quartets. "The Razor" is a more obscure name. Other nicknames capture images evoked by the music itself, such as "The Donkey," "The Bird," or "The Frog," or natural conditions such as "Sunrise" or "Dream."

The nickname affixed to Op. 33 No. 2 seems superfluously redundant: we could be playing any string quartet by Haydn tonight and it would be chock-full of little musical jokes—some apparent at first hearing, some not. Haydn is masterful at taking advantage of the listener's expectations based on harmonic, rhythmic and structural conventions—and thwarting them. This quartet does have some special features, though, even for Haydn's high standards of delectable humor. Listen for the violinist's "tasteless" *glissandi* (an audible connection between pitches with the left hand) as prescribed by squiggly lines in the *Scherzo*, for example. Is Haydn encouraging his musicians to play less cleanly? Or is he poking fun at a practice that was starting to establish itself already? But for the best of chortles you'll have to stick around for the final movement. Just watch out. This joke might be on you....

—Paul Dwyer

## BIOGRAPHIES

The **Diderot String Quartet** is named after the 18th-century French philosopher and Boccherini enthusiast, Denis Diderot. It brings a fresh approach to works of the 18th and 19th centuries. Called “emotional, riveting, and ultimately cathartic” (*Wall Street Journal*), the quartet came together in 2012 after the members met at Oberlin Conservatory and The Juilliard School. The four musicians share a background in historical performance and a passion for the string quartet genre, and all of them find the thrill of exploring the quartet repertory on period instruments to be irresistible. Recent and upcoming engagements include Chamber Music Pittsburgh, Santa Fe Pro Musica, Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music (NE), Connecticut Early Music Festival, Friends of Chamber Music Vancouver and Early Music Vancouver, Music in the Somerset Hills (Bernardsville, NJ), Rockefeller University’s Tri-I Noon Recital Series, Carmel Bach Festival (CA), and The Crypt Sessions (NY). Diderot has also been featured at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Toledo Museum of Art, and the Morgan Library in New York. The quartet served as Quartet-in-Residence at Washington National Cathedral for five seasons and as guest faculty for Oberlin’s Baroque Performance Institute. It collaborates frequently with internationally acclaimed artists including David Breitman, Avi Stein, and Harry Bicket.

*diderotquartet.com*

Cellist **Paul Dwyer** was born in Munster, Indiana, but spent his childhood in Vienna and Munich. Dwyer returned to the American Midwest for college, studying at the Oberlin Conservatory (BM ’07) and the University of Michigan (MM ’08 and DMA ’12), where he received a Javits Fellowship and Presser Award. He spent a year in Amsterdam as a Fulbright Fellow studying new music with Frances-Marie Uitti and baroque cello with Anner Bylsma. In 2013, he completed additional graduate studies in the Historical Performance department of The Juilliard School. Paul is fortunate to have a rich musical life playing both historical and modern cello. He is a founding member of Diderot String Quartet and ACRONYM, and loves to play chamber music and collaborate with young composers. He is assistant principal cello of Lyric Opera of Chicago and teaches at Notre Dame University.

Violist **Kyle Miller** made his concerto debut in 2005 with the Reading (PA) Symphony Orchestra as “the dog” in P.D.Q. Bach’s Canine Cantata, *Wachet Arf!* Since that day, Kyle has gone on to study at the New England Conservatory and the Eastman School of Music, and earned masters degrees in both viola performance and historical performance at The Juilliard School. Also a member of ACRONYM, Four Nations Ensemble, and New York Baroque Incorporated, Kyle has appeared onstage with A Far Cry, Apollo’s Fire, Clarion, House of Time, Opera Lafayette, Quodlibet Ensemble, Tafelmusik, and Trinity Baroque Orchestra. Kyle has performed regularly at the Carmel Bach Festival and the Staunton Music Festival. In 2015, Kyle was selected to be an English Concert American Fellow. In 2017 and 2018, Kyle appeared on Broadway in a run of Claire van Kampen’s play, *Farinelli and the King*.

Violinist **Johanna Novom** appears internationally as a soloist, principal, chamber, and orchestral musician with ensembles such as ACRONYM, Tafelmusik, Trinity Wall Street Baroque Orchestra, Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Handel and Haydn Society, Clarion, TENET, and New York Baroque Incorporated. She held the position of associate concertmaster of Apollo’s Fire for ten years, and was recently principal of Washington National Cathedral Baroque Orchestra. A first prize winner of the ABS’ International Young Artists Competition, Johanna received her masters degree in Historical Performance from Oberlin Conservatory and was a 2010-11 fellowship member of the Yale Baroque Ensemble. Her discography includes recordings on Old Focus, Deutsche Grammophon, and AVIE labels, including the Grammy award-winning album *Songs of Orpheus* with Apollo’s Fire. Recent and upcoming festival engagements include the Carmel Bach Festival, Tanglewood, and the BBC Proms Festival.

Violinist **Adriane Post** is sought after as a leader, collaborator, and soloist in ensembles across the US. She is a founding member of ACRONYM and Diderot String Quartet, associate principal of Apollo’s Fire, soloist and collaborator with Four Nations Ensemble, and guest concertmaster with Seraphic Fire and NY Baroque Inc., among others. A tenured member of Handel and Haydn Society, Adriane performs regularly with Trinity Wall Street Baroque Orchestra. She has appeared with The English Concert and Harry Bicket, and as a guest with Les Délices, Chatham Baroque, and Tenet. Recent and upcoming festival appearances include Carnegie Hall, Caramoor, Tanglewood, Ravinia, and Carmel Bach Festival. Adriane received her BM from Oberlin Conservatory, where she first fell in love with the baroque violin. She received her MM from The Juilliard School’s Historical Performance program.

*Anna Lysack, Summerell Arts, annalysack@summerellarts.com*

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