# Pacifica Quartet







## THE PROGRAM

#### PACIFICA QUARTET

Simin Ganatra violin Sibbi Bernhardsson violin Masumi Per Rostad viola Brandon Vamos cello

#### Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6 ("La Malinconia")

Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro con brio Adagio, ma non troppo Scherzo: Allegro La Malinconia: Adagio; Allegretto quasi allegro

#### String Quartet No. 3, Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory

Shulamit Ran

I. That which happened
II. Menace
III. "If I must perish—do not let my paintings die" (Felix Nussbaum)
IV. Shards, Memory

Commissioned in partnership between the Music Accord consortium, of which Hancher is a member, Wigmore Hall (London, UK), and Suntory Hall (Tokyo, Japan).

#### Intermission

### Quartet in F Minor, Op. 80

Felix Mendelssohn

Allegro vivace assai Allegro assai Adagio Finale: Allegro molto

Pacifica Quartet is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc. melkap.com pacificaquartet.com Recordings: Cedille Records, Naxos

## THE ARTISTS



ecognized for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and oftendaring repertory choices, over the past two decades the **Pacifica Quartet** has gained international stature as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Pacifica tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's major concert halls. Named the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica was also the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012)—a position that has otherwise been held only by the Guarneri Quartet—and received the 2009 Grammy Award for "Best Chamber Music Performance."

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002, the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and the appointment to Lincoln Center's CMS Two, and in 2006 was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber ensemble so honored in the Grant's long history. Also in 2006, the Quartet was featured on the cover of *Gramophone* and heralded as one of "five new quartets you should know about," the only American quartet to make the list. And in 2009, the Quartet was named "Ensemble of the Year" by *Musical America*.

During the 2014-15 season, the Pacifica will record and perform the Brahms piano quintet with the legendary pianist Menahem Pressler, and will participate in weeklong residencies at the University of Iowa and at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. In addition, the Quartet will return twice to Europe for four weeks of performances.

The Pacifica Quartet has carved a niche for itself as the preeminent interpreter of string quartet cycles, harnessing the group's singular focus and incredible

stamina to portray each composer's evolution, often over the course of just a few days. Having given highly acclaimed performances of the complete Carter cycle in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Houston; the Mendelssohn cycle in Napa, Australia, New York, and Pittsburgh; and the Beethoven cycle in New York, Denver, St. Paul, Chicago, Napa, and Tokyo (in an unprecedented presentation of five concerts in three days at Suntory Hall), the Quartet presented the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago and New York during the 2010–11 season and in Montréal and at London's Wigmore Hall in the 2011–12 season. The Quartet has been widely praised for these cycles, with critics calling the concerts "brilliant," "astonishing," "gripping," and "breathtaking."

An ardent advocate of contemporary music, the Pacifica Quartet commissions and performs many new works, including those by Keeril Makan, in partnership with the Celebrity Series of Boston and the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, during the 2012–13 season, and Shulamit Ran, in partnership with the Music Accord consortium, London's Wigmore Hall, and Tokyo's Suntory Hall, during the 2014–15 seasons. The work, entitled *Glitter*, Doom, Shards, Memory, had its New York debut as part of the Chamber Music Society at Lincoln Center series.

In 2008, the Quartet released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter's quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. Cedille Records recently released the third of four volumes comprising the entire Shostakovich cycle, along with other contemporary Soviet works, to rave reviews: "The playing is nothing short of phenomenal" (Daily Telegraph, London). Recent projects include recording Leo Ornstein's rarely-heard piano quintet with Marc-André Hamelin, with an accompanying tour, and the Brahms and Mozart clarinet quintets with the Metropolitan Opera's principal clarinetist Anthony McGill.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Bloomington, Indiana, where they serve as quartet-in-residence and full-time faculty members at the Jacobs School of Music. Prior to their appointment, the Quartet was on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana from 2003 to 2012. The Pacifica Quartet also serves as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago.

The Pacifica Quartet is endorsed by D'Addario and proudly uses their strings.

### PROGRAM NOTES

by Arthur Canter, 2015

"The reactions music evokes are not feelings, but they are the images, memories of feelings."

Paul Hindemith, A Composer's World, 1952

#### **Introductory Notes**

In agreeing to prepare the notes for tonight's program, I was confronted with the fact that while I knew the Beethoven and the Mendelssohn works I could not see nor listen to the music of the new Shulamit Ran quartet. Ordinarily, if a new work imposes such an impasse, it is simply a matter of leaving space for notes by the composer or an agent, and restricting my entry to a biographical sketch. However, when I investigated the new-to-me composer, Shulamit Ran, and what was known about her recently commissioned quartet, I was struck by the unique character of this particular combination of works for a program chosen by the Pacifica Quartet to present to lowa City.

All three quartets contain music that bears upon the feelings evoked by melancholy or the aftermath of tragic events. The last two works in the program, however, go beyond this communality in serving to remind us that the fate of artists and their products are often determined by external forces produced by societal developments such as those produced by Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Researching Ms. Ran's quartet, about its birth and its nature, has also re-awakened some personal memories that were first evoked years ago when as a U.S. Army soldier in Austria, I had toured the notorious Mauthausen Concentration Camp only weeks after its liberation. Also, the art exhibit basis of Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory brings to my mind the intense feelings I had when I first viewed the Nazi Drawings, the set of prints by our own Maurizio Lasansky, exhibited locally years ago. Thus, I would be remiss if I failed to draw attention to the interrelatedness of the contents of this program and express my gratitude to the Pacifica Quartet that has made it possible.

### Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6 ("La Malinconia")

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

eethoven had the reputation of being quick to antagonize and quick to be antagonized. He was driven to express his individuality and be recognized while chafing at his dependence upon royal patronage. His symphonies, concertos, and piano sonatas were monumental achievements. Many of them had been composed despite his increasing deafness which became complete at the peak of his career. Given his history of trials and tribulations in his personal relationships, his episodic poor health, quasi-alcohol abuse, suicidal impulses, financial setbacks, legal battles for the custody of his nephew, and the privations created by the then-existing war surrounding Vienna, one would have to marvel at Beethoven's capacity to survive as well as he did, let alone achieve greatness.

Beethoven turned to the string quartet in his late twenties. By this time the string quartet and other small ensemble chamber music had been played and discussed chiefly by well-cultivated amateurs in the salons of the aristocracy and upper middle class of Western Europe. Professional musicians of the court

orchestras and the composers themselves, most of whom played one or more stringed instruments, would perform on these occasions. In the Vienna of the 1780s and 1790s, quartet parties, attended chiefly by the musicians who performed quartets themselves, were frequently held at the residences of well-known professional musicians as well as those of the aristocratic "amateurs."

After the death of Mozart, Haydn was unchallenged as the supreme master of the quartet. He usually composed his quartets in groups of six. (Mozart had written six quartets dedicated to Haydn.) Thus, in 1798, when Beethoven felt ready to demonstrate that he could beat the old master at his own game and explore new ideas for structuring the string quartet, he began to work on a set of six string quartets. This was the most ambitious single project of his early Vienna period.

Beethoven, who was never satisfied, constantly sought to revise and overhaul his works and was known to labor over each of these new opus 18 quartets. It took him two years to complete the set of six, finally publishing them in two installments in 1801 as opus 18, dedicated to one of his patrons, the young Prince Franz Joseph Lobkowitz.

The B-flat Major Quartet, while published as the sixth of the opus 18 set was actually completed as the fifth. It is thought to have been published as No. 6 because of the length of the introduction and structural character of its final movement, the so-called  $L\alpha$   $Malinconi\alpha$  (melancholy). It was apparent from his sketchbooks that Beethoven had been troubled about what to include and what to ignore in this quartet. Whether planned that way or not, this four-movement quartet, with its extreme contrasts, and the powerful impact of its last movement, serves well as the finale of the entire opus 18 set of six quartets.

The opening movement, *Allegro con brio*, full of exuberance and joy, is almost breathless in its declaration that this is something to listen to. The music, seemingly tossed about by different pairs of the instruments, is straightforward, simple, and symmetrical with sharp accents here and there.

The sharply contrasting second movement, Adagio, ma non troppo, is a slow variegated piece that moves from the nature of a courtly, sober dance to a strung-out aria that, in its wistfulness, may bring to mind Mozart's operas. The music is threaded through with eerie, mystical elements expressed by the different voices of the instruments, all adding to the calming effect of the music.

The short Scherzo: Allegro that follows thrusts the listener into a sudden burst of energy and jazz-like rhythms that clash with the expectations produced by the preceding Adagio. The music proceeds merrily in a helter-skelter manner until its trio section unexpectedly introduces a virtuosic display by the violin. However, this lasts only for a brief moment as the disjointed character of the opening section returns and ends the Scherzo rather abruptly.

With little pause, the fourth and last movement, La Malinconia: Adagio; Allegretto quasi allegro; Prestissimo, is introduced with music that Beethoven had instructed: "this piece must be treated with the greatest delicacy." What we hear first is slow music framed in harmonics that range from very soft to loud that momentarily sound mournful, even anguished, with brief grief-laden angry outbursts. After a pause, the music abruptly jumps into a joyful German country dance that is interrupted several times by reminders of La Malinconia and finally gives way to a mad dash of notes to end the quartet with a statement of power.

#### String Quartet No. 3, Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory

Shulamit Ran (b. 1949)

hulamit Ran, born in Tel Aviv, Israel, is an Israeli-American composer who, at age 14, moved from Israel to New York as a scholarship student at the Mannes College of Music. As a child, Jewish cantoral music, played on the radio by her father, had a great impact on Shulamit, and at the age of seven she was setting Hebrew poetry to music. At the age of nine, she began studying composition with some of Israel's top composers, including Alexander Boskovich and Paul Ben-Haim, and, within a few years, her works were already being performed by professional musicians and orchestras. After moving to New York as the recipient of scholarships from both the Mannes College of Music in New York and the American Israel Cultural Foundation, she continued her composition and piano studies with Norman Dello Joio and Ralph Shapey. While in the United States she also studied piano with Nadia Reisenberg and Dorothy Taubman and sharpened her compositional studies with Elliott Carter.

In 1973, at the age of 26, Ran joined the faculty of the University of Chicago, where she is now the Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Music. She became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, thus fulfilling the goals set for her by her late colleague and friend Ralph Shapey, who had urged her to follow his path of music education as an important mentor.

Ran's Symphony (1990) won her the Pulitzer Prize. In this regard, she was the second woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music, the first being Ellen Taaffe Zwilich in 1983. She has performed as a pianist in Israel, Europe, and the United States, and her many compositions, including orchestral, chamber, vocal, and instrumental works, have been performed worldwide by a wide array of orchestras and chamber groups.

In her own words, Shulamit Ran writes:

"Composing a work for Pacifica Quartet, whose music-making I have come to know intimately and admire hugely as resident artists at the University of Chicago, has proven to be a uniquely moving undertaking for me, creatively and spiritually. Historically the string quartet genre has tended to inspire what is generally thought of as music of an abstract nature; and yet in our early communications about this project, the Quartet suggested that my composition might, in some manner, refer to the visual arts as a point of germination—an idea that seemed quite natural given Pacifica's residency also at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. The period the Quartet members expressed special interest in was that of the first half of the twentieth century, perhaps between the two world wars.

"In a remarkable coincidence, these initial communications took place while I was in residence at the American Academy in Rome, where daily conversations across disciplines abound. It was Rome fellow and art conservationist Albert Albano who steered me to the art of Felix Nussbaum (1904–1944), a German-Jewish painter who, like so many others, perished in the Holocaust at a young age, and who—knowing the fate that had awaited him—nonetheless created some powerful, deeply moving art that spoke to the life that was unraveling around him.

"I also found out that in 2006–2007 the Met had a major exhibit devoted to art by German artists of the period of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933). This exhibit had the striking title of Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s. Nussbaum would have been a bit too young to have been included in this exhibit. His most noteworthy art was created in the last very few years of his short life. The exhibit's provocative title, however, suggested to me the idea of Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory as a way of framing a possible musical composition that would be an homage to the life and art of this artist and so many others like him during that era. Knowing that their days were numbered, yet intent on leaving a mark, a legacy, a memory, their art is triumph of the human spirit over annihilation.

"The individual titles of the quartet's four movements give an indication of some of the emotional strands this work explores.

"I. That which happened (das was geschah) is how the poet Paul Celan referred to the Shoah—the Holocaust. These simple words served for me, in the first movement, as a metaphor for the way in which an 'ordinary' life, with its daily flow and its sense of sweet normalcy, was shockingly, inhumanely, inexplicably shattered.

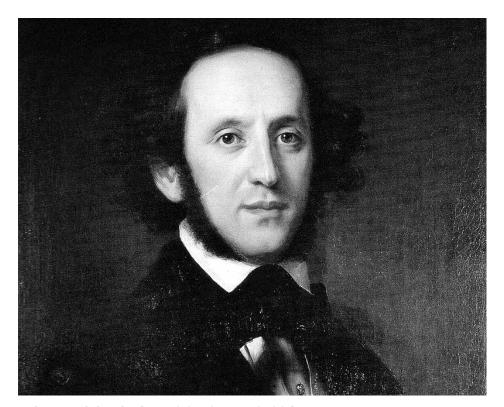
"II. Menαce is a shorter movement, mimicking a scherzo. It is also machine-like, incessant, with an occasional, recurring, waltz-like little tune—perhaps the chilling grimace we recognize from the executioner's guillotine mask. Like the death machine it alludes to, it gathers momentum as it goes, and is unstoppable.

"III. 'If I must perish—do not let my paintings die'; these words are by Felix Nussbaum who, knowing what was ahead, nonetheless continued painting till his death in Auschwitz in 1944. If the heart of the first movement is the shuddering interruption of life as we know it, the third movement tries to capture something of what I can only imagine to be the conflicting states of mind that would have made it possible, and essential, to continue to live and practice one's art—bearing witness to the events. Creating must have been, for Nussbaum and for so many others, a way of maintaining sanity, both a struggle and a catharsis—an act of defiance and salvation all at the same time.

"IV. Shards, Memory is a direct reference to my quartet's title. Only shards are left. And memory. The memory is of things large and small, of unspeakable tragedy, but also of the song and the dance, the smile, the hopes. All things human. As we remember, in the face of death's silence, we restore dignity to those who are gone."

Felix Nussbaum, The Damned (Detail), 1944





**Felix Mendelssohn** [Mendelssohn-Bartholdy] (1809–1847) Portrait by Eduard Magnus (Detail), 1846

ew composers have achieved as much success and recognition during their lifetime as did Mendelssohn. His father was a prominent banker and his grandfather a noted Jewish philosopher. In 1811, the Mendelssohn family fled Hamburg for Berlin to escape the Napoleonic oppression. In fear of anti-Semitic views, the father had his children baptized in 1816 and added Bartholdy to the family name. In the new apparently "safe" environment, the Mendelssohns were able to enjoy the luxuries of an upper-class family. Their home quickly became the most important salon in Berlin with weekly theatrical performances, literary readings, and regular Sunday musicales. It was in this setting that the young Felix, at age eight, was already studying composition. As a pupil of Carl Friedrich Zelter, he received a thorough grounding in basic compositional techniques and was made particularly aware of Handel, J.S. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Hummel. By the time he was 11, having already assimilated the late Baroque and Classical styles, he freely synthesized them to give vent to his own creative expression, and over his short career he composed a large number of works of different styles. His premature death at age 38 brought all this to a halt. As with Mozart, had Mendelssohn, the composer, lived into his senior years, who knows what he may have accomplished. In the years following his death, however, we find that Mendelssohn's impact and role in the history of music have been subjects of much controversy.

Called a "Romantic Classicist," a "Classically-minded Romanticist," and an "elegiac artist," Mendelssohn's music was popularly received in his homeland, Germany, as well as abroad. The composer's repeated tours of England made him the toast of the English music-loving public and the favorite of Queen Victoria. He was considered by the British to be the leading composer of the day. Yet, in the face of all this recognition and adulation, or because of it, he was subjected to rather bitter criticism by G.B. Shaw on the heels of attacks

by adherents of the "new school" of the future, being formed by Wagner, Liszt, and their disciples. Some critics berated him for writing beautiful music that was said to be devoid of deep emotion.

Despite having been converted to the Protestant faith when he was a child, Mendelssohn still had to face challenges in being accepted as a true member of this faith in his native Germany. The attacks by Wagner went beyond an uncritical analysis of Mendelssohn's style or aesthetic deficiencies. They began to turn into anti-Semitic diatribes as most clearly revealed in the 1850 essay Judaism in Music, first published by Wagner under a pseudonym after Mendelssohn's death. Thus, during the latter part of his career, Mendelssohn faced subtle, if not open, criticism of his works and challenges to their integrity based simply on his native religious origin.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, following the composer's death, the compositions by Mendelssohn, as if by an insidious force, were beginning to be re-evaluated in negative terms by some critics and musicologists. By the beginning of the twentieth century, except for a few symphonies, the Octet, the E-Minor Violin Concerto, and A Midsummer Night's Dream, performances of Mendelssohn's music in the concert halls suffered a sharp decline. The final blow to the acceptance of Mendelssohn's works in his homeland came when he was declared "persona non grata" by the Nazi regime which banned any and all performances of his music in Germany. Since the end of the Nazi regime, there has been a positive re-evaluation of Mendelssohn's music and artistic integrity, now based on more detailed musicological studies, biographical data, letters, and manuscripts.

#### Quartet No. 6 in F Minor, Op. 80

#### **Introductory Remarks**

In order to appreciate the nature of this F-minor quartet that is so strikingly different from other works by Mendelssohn, we have to consider several factors about the composer's personal history and nature. Foremost is the deep and close relationship he had with his older sister Fanny, who was probably equally as talented in music as he. In keeping with the times, Felix would agree only to her publishing her songs and other "parlor" pieces but heavily depended on her opinions of his own compositions. Then there are two other factors that this annotator believes need to be considered:

For one thing, Mendelssohn was a highly accomplished graphic artist and watercolor painter. His landscape and cityscape drawings and paintings reflect a good deal of the characteristics of his musical compositions: all coherently presented with exquisite form, color, and chiaroscuro.

For another was the personal view he developed over time about expressing emotions by words. This is partly revealed in a letter of 1842 to a family friend in which he wrote: "the same word never means the same thing to different people. Only melody can say the same thing, can arouse the same feelings in one person as another, a feeling which may not be expressed, however, by the same words." (In this respect, it is interesting to note his shift from writing songs with texts to "songs without words"—for piano—and his early failures with opera and continual inability to find suitable libretti.)

arly in May 1847, Felix Mendelssohn, exhausted after having completed his oratorio Elijah and attending to its performances, decided to take a much needed rest and renewal in Switzerland. Meanwhile, on May 13, his sister Fanny Hensel, in Berlin after composing one of her lieder, began a rehearsal of Felix's Die erste Walpurgisnacht in preparation for a Sunday musicale two days later. The next day, May 14, during rehearsing the opening chorus, she suffered a stroke, was hospitalized, and died several hours later. A memorial service was held on May 18. That same day, Felix who had just returned to Frankfurt, Germany, first learned of her death from a relative. The news so shocked him that he collapsed. He was too devastated to go to Berlin to attend the memorial and sought refuge within his own family. By end of the month he left for Baden-Baden where the Hensel family joined him. He could not work except to draw, but after a few weeks rest, he was able to finish the two Motets on Protestant liturgy that he had previously started. Two days later, the families left for the Interlaken and mountain areas of Switzerland where for the next two months, joined by his brother-in-law and other members of both families, Felix roamed the area, sublimating his grief in drawings and watercolors of such scenes as the famous Rheinfall known for its churning cataracts, views of a cathedral in Lucerne, covered bridges, and glassy lakes. Finally, on July 9, he wrote to a family friend that he desired to return to the routine of composing music, "to drift and turn like a worm instead of just brooding." He began drafting a scherzo of a string quartet in F minor, the key traditionally chosen to express deep depression and the laments of funereal events. It is interesting to note that up to this point Mendelssohn had not written a quartet for almost ten years.

What is likely to be most striking about the F-Minor Quartet, to a listener familiar with the music of Mendelssohn, is its chaotic nature with respect to its form and the absence of lyricism except for the third movement. On first hearing, it can be a jarring experience.

The first movement, Allegro vivace assai, opens in a flood of agitated turmoil expressed by tremolo followed by a brief contrasting, more somber theme, only to return to its trembling disconnected manner. The movement develops in this discontinuous choppy manner, maintaining its sense of anguish and ends with a forceful declaration of despair by all four instruments in unison.

The second movement, Allegro assai, in the form of a three-part scherzo, opens as if in the middle of a strange-sounding violin dance that is hammered by syncopated harsh-sounds from the lower three voices. The brief trio section has the viola and cello rising above the violins in carrying out this bizarre syncopated dance before returning to its opening mode. The whole movement has a "spooky" quality.

The slow third movement, *Adagi*o, in its unexpected shift to a lighter key (A major), returns us to the familiar Mendelssohn with a peaceful lyrical song, a mixture of sorrow and joy, that resembles the type of songs written by Fanny. This movement is often taken as the composer's farewell to his sister.

The finale, Allegro molto, returns to the character of the first two movements with its dissonance. The tremolos and syncopations are energetically played in a virtuosic fashion by the different instruments. Despite the darkness of the overall mood, the movement ends in an upbeat fashion.

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