

# PROGRAM INFORMATION

Sponsor: **Wisconsin Union Theater, University of Wisconsin**

Concert Date: **February 5, 2016**

Artist: **St. Lawrence String Quartet**

Geoff Nuttall, violin

Owen Dalby, violin

Lesley Robertson, viola

Christopher Costanza, cello

Program credits: The St. Lawrence String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists [www.davidroweartists.com](http://www.davidroweartists.com)

St. Lawrence String recordings can be heard on EMI Classics and ArtistShare ([www.artistshare.com](http://www.artistshare.com))

The St. Lawrence String Quartet is Ensemble-in-Residence at Stanford University

[www.slsq.com](http://www.slsq.com)

## PROGRAM

### Haydn Discovery

The “father” of the string quartet, Haydn is too often regarded as an opening act; pleasant music before the “meat” of the program. In **Haydn Discovery** Geoff Nuttall and his St. Lawrence String Quartet colleagues will reveal Haydn’s genius, first unpacking this masterpiece via “active listening”, then offering a full performance.

String Quartet in C major, Op. 76, No. 3 "Emperor"

Franz Josef Haydn  
1732-1809

Allegro

Poco adagio cantabile

Menuet. Allegro & Trio

Finale. Presto

\*intermission\*

Second Quartet (2014)

John Adams  
b. 1947

Allegro molto

Andantino-Energico

String Quartet in Eb-Major, Op. 33, No. 2 (Hob.III.38) "The Joke"

Franz Josef Haydn  
1732-1809

Allegro moderato

Scherzo. Allegro

Largo e sostenuto

Finale. Presto

# St. Lawrence String Quartet

<http://www.slsq.com>

**Geoff Nuttall**, violin

**Owen Dalby**, violin

**Lesley Robertson**, viola

**Christopher Costanza**, cello

**“A sound that has just about everything one wants from a quartet, most notably precision, warmth and an electricity that conveys the excitement of playing whatever is on their stands at the moment.”**

*– The New York Times*

Established in 1989, the St. Lawrence String Quartet has developed an undisputed reputation as a truly world class chamber ensemble. The quartet performs internationally and has served as Ensemble in Residence at Stanford University since 1998.

The St. Lawrence continues to build its reputation for imaginative and spontaneous music-making, through an energetic commitment to the great established quartet literature as well as the championing of new works by such composers as John Adams, Osvaldo Golijov, Ezequiel Vinao, and Jonathan Berger.

In late summer 2015, the quartet will tour Europe with the San Francisco Symphony, performing composer John Adams' "Absolute Jest" under the baton of conductor Michael Tilson Thomas for audiences the UK, Germany, Romania and Switzerland. Additionally in the fall, they will perform at Carnegie Hall in New York. During the summer season, SLSQ is proud to continue its long association with the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC.

The Quartet's residency at Stanford includes working with music students as well as extensive collaborations with other faculty and departments using music to explore myriad topics. Recent collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, School of Education, and the Law School. In addition to their appointment at Stanford, the SLSQ are visiting artists at the University of Toronto. The foursome's passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in their annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford.

Lesley Robertson and Geoff Nuttall are founding members of the group, and hail from Edmonton, Alberta, and London, Ontario, respectively. Christopher Costanza is from Utica, NY, and joined the group in 2003. Owen Dalby, from the San Francisco Bay area, joined in 2015. All four members of the quartet live and teach at Stanford University in California.

*April, 2015– please destroy any previously or undated versions.*

# Notes on the program

## **JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)**

*Quartet in C, Op. 76 No. 3 (Hob.III:77) ('Emperor') (1797)*

In 1796, the city of Vienna was under threat of invasion from Napoleon. French troops led by Napoleon were advancing from the Po valley into Styria. Other troops were advancing from the East and both were closing in on Vienna in a pincer-like move. Vienna was in a state of emergency and a civilian militia had been mobilized to protect the city. Following a state commission, Haydn, a strong nationalist, was commissioned to write national song for the cause. His beautiful, heartfelt *Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser* (God Preserve Franz the Emperor) was a bold challenge to the *Marseillaise* and was instantly adopted as the Austrian national anthem. In fact, so universal was the appeal of Haydn's melody that it was later to be used as the 'Brotherhood' anthem of Freemasonry, as the German national anthem *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles*, and even as the Protestant hymns *Praise the Lord! Ye heavens, adore him* and *Glorious things of Thee are spoken*.

The slow movement of the Op. 76 No. 3 String Quartet is a set of variations on this celebrated, dignified tune. Hence the quartet's nickname *Emperor*, or *Kaiser*. Each instrument in turn introduces the solemn melody, while the other three instruments weave an increasingly intricate web around it. But Haydn goes further. He structures the entire work around the slow movement, making it the focal point of the quartet. The melody finds its way into the first movement whose five-note theme derives from Haydn's patriotic song: G (Gott) – E (erhalte) – F (Franz) – D (den) – C (Kaiser). This cryptic message would have been recognized in Haydn's day as one of the many 'learned' effects he used in his late quartets, complementing such popular elements as the lively country dance he fashions out of the same notes over a viola and cello drone in the central development section. The intensity and dignity of the four slow movement variations is set into relief by a forthright minuet. The finale, an intense, powerful movement, then completes the strong architectural structure that Haydn has built.

— *Program notes* © 2015 Keith Horner. *Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca*

## **John Adams**

### **Second Quartet (2014)**

*This work was commissioned by Stanford Live, Carnegie Hall, the Juilliard School, the Library of Congress's Dina Koston and Roger Shapiro Fund for New Music, and Wigmore Hall with the support of André Hoffmann, president of the Fondation Hoffmann, a Swiss grant-making foundation.*

*The World Premiere was given by the St. Lawrence String Quartet at Bing Concert Hall, Stanford University on January 18, 2015.*

Both of John Adams' string quartets were composed with the St. Lawrence String Quartet in mind. But this latest work is actually the third he has composed for them. The original String Quartet (now likely to be known as the First Quartet) was written in 2008 and premiered January of 2009 at the Juilliard School, the work's principal commissioner. The St. Lawrence Quartet went on to perform that work many times throughout the world and made the first recording of it for Nonesuch Records.

Adams followed several years later with a grander idea: *Absolute Jest*, a 25-minute work for solo quartet and orchestra based on fragments from Beethoven, primarily from the Opus 131 and 135 string quartets. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to celebrate its centennial season, *Absolute Jest* was given its first performance in March of that year under that orchestra's music director, Michael Tilson Thomas with the St. Lawrence String Quartet performing the solo parts. The orchestra has twice toured with *Absolute Jest* and has also recorded it for a forthcoming CD release. Adams and the SLSQ have performed the work together in London, Toronto and with the New World Symphony in Florida.

The Second Quartet is thus the third piece to result from this exceptionally fruitful relationship between a composer and his favorite chamber group. Speaking of their working relationship, Adams says, "String quartet writing is one of the most difficult challenges a composer can take on. Unless one is an accomplished string player and writes in that medium all the time—and I don't know many these days who do—the demands of handling this extremely volatile and transparent instrumental medium can easily be humbling, if not downright humiliating. What I appreciate about my friends in the St. Lawrence is their willingness to let me literally 'improvise' on them as if they were a piano or a drum and I a crazy man beating away with only the roughest outlines of what I want. They will go the distance with me, allow me to try and fail, and they will indulge my seizures of doubt, frustration and indecision, all the while providing intuitions and frequently brilliant suggestions of their own. It is no surprise then for me to reveal that both the First Quartet and *Absolute Jest* went

through radical revision stages both before and after each piece's premiere. Quartet writing for me seems to be a matter of very long-term 'work in progress.'"

Although not a string player himself, Adams admits to a lifelong absorption in the literature, having discovered the Beethoven, Mozart and Bartók quartets as a teenager. While still a teenager he often played clarinet in the great quintets by Mozart and Brahms, and during that formative time he attended what he called "life-changing" performances by both the Juilliard and the Budapest Quartets.

The new quartet uses the same tropes as *Absolute Jest* in that it too is based on tiny fragments—"fractals," in the composer's words—from Beethoven. But the economy here is much stricter. The first movement, for example, is entirely based on two short phrases from the scherzo to the late Opus 110 piano sonata in Ab major. The transformations of harmony, cadential patterns and rhythmic profile that occur in this movement go way beyond the types of manipulations favored in *Absolute Jest*.

Like the First Quartet this new work is organized in two parts. The first movement has scherzo impetus, and moves at the fastest pace possible for the performers to play it. The familiar Beethoven cadences and half cadences reappear throughout the movement like a homing mechanism and each apparition is followed by a departure to an increasingly remote key and textural region.

The second part begins "Andantino" with a gentle melody that is drawn from the opening movement of the same Opus 111 piano sonata. Here the original Beethoven harmonic and melodic ideas go off in unexpected directions, almost as they were suggestions for a kind of compositional "free association."

The Andantino grows in range and complexity until it finally leads into the "Energico" final part of the piece, a treatment of one of the shortest of the Diabelli Variations. This particular variation of Beethoven's features a sequence of neighbor-key appoggiaturas, each a half step away from each main chord. Adams amplifies this chromatic relationship without intentionally distorting it. Like its original Beethoven model, the movement is characterized by emphatic gestures, frequent uses of "sforzando" and a busy but convivial mood of hyperactivity among the four instruments.

**FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN (1723-1809)**

*Quartet in E-flat, Op. 33 No. 2, 'The Joke' (Hob.III.38) (1781)*

In music, what goes around comes around. Towards the end of 1781, Haydn kick-started his own crowdfunding platform. There are to be six “entirely newly produced quartets,” he said in his pitch, “written in an entirely new special manner, for I have not composed any [quartets] for ten years.” In return for their pledges, backers (read ‘patrons’) would receive pre-publication manuscript copies and their names included in the list of subscribers in the printed edition. When published, the new quartets, combining accessibility with artistic excellence, immediately created a stir. Their popularity is reflected in the number of nicknames that have become attached to the collection (*‘Russian’*, or *‘Jungfernquartette’*). Another nickname, *‘Gli Scherzi’* (Italian for ‘joke’), reflects the fact that Haydn adopts the newer, more folk-like scherzo, in place of the older, more stately minuet. The slow movements of Op. 33 are generally deeper and more complex in texture. And elements of popular folk music find their way into the finales. Mozart, just launching a career as a freelance composer in Vienna when the quartets were first published in 1782, admired their compactness, their perfect balance of character, form and technique, and the way in which Haydn gives all four instruments equal importance. He painstakingly composed a set of six in emulation of Haydn’s Op. 33, with several of Haydn’s movements clearly used as direct models.

The opening movement of Haydn’s E-flat Quartet is built rigorously on the good-natured rhythmic figure of its first few bars. Very little in the movement has to do with anything other than this thematic material. In the Scherzo, Haydn’s focus moves from high culture to folk culture, to accessibility and innovation. In it, Haydn makes the first documented use of the wavy line in a score to indicate that typically Viennese *glissando* (slide), famous shortly afterwards from the waltzes of the Strauss family and others. The mood swings again in the highly sophisticated variations of the slow movement, where a transparent, eight-measure melody is shared among the instruments in every possible permutation. The E-flat Quartet is often called *‘The Joke’* because of the witty ‘false ending’ of its rondo finale. Here, in a touch of self-mockery perhaps, Haydn deconstructs the much-repeated theme, giving us the melody phrase by phrase, each separated by a measure of silence. Three more measures of silence and he now gives us the opening phrase again, *pianissimo* – and with it, a good chuckle.

— Program notes © 2015 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: [khnotes@sympatico.ca](mailto:khnotes@sympatico.ca)