Brooklyn Rider: Healing Modes
Sunday, July 18, 2021 | 6:00 PM
The Breakers Lawn

Brooklyn Rider
Johnny Gandelsman, violin
Colin Jacobsen, violin
Nicholas Cords, viola
Michael Nicolas, cello

Thank you to our generous concert sponsor:
James H. and Marilyn J. Woloohojian Family Foundation – in loving memory
of James H. Woloohojian

KINAN AZMEH Dabke on Martense Street
CAROLINE SHAW Schisma
MANTANA ROBERTS borderlands...
BEETHOVEN String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132
I. Assai sostenuto – Allegro
II. Allegro ma non tanto
III. "Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der Lydischen
Tonart". Molto adagio – Andante
IV. Alla marcia, assai vivace (attacca)
V. Allegro appassionato

This program will conclude at approximately 7:15 PM.

PROGRAM NOTES
Program notes courtesy of Brooklyn Rider

Caroline Shaw: Schisma (2018)
Schisma is a reference to the phrase "in the cleft of the rock," which appears in
many scriptures including the Song of Solomon and Isaiah. In the Book of Exodus
(33:22), there is a beautiful line which reads: “I will put you in a cleft of the rock,
and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.” It is essentially a promise
of safety, of a makeshift refuge within a crack in something as hard and unforgiving
as mountain rock, until the danger has passed. It is a kind of nest, a home. I have
always felt that Beethoven’s Heiliger Dankgesang (third movement of Opus 132)
uses a nest-like architecture in a unique and profound way. The return of the
dance-like Neue Kraft fühlend section always feels like a warm homecoming, a place
of hope and shelter and deep comfort. The choice to title this piece with the
modern Greek word schisma (a translation of the Hebrew נקרת, or “cleft”) is a
reference to the islands in today’s Greece which have become harsh refugee camps
for Syrians seeking asylum from the war. It also points to the nature of war, of the
break between peoples, and of the search for hope and new growth within the
breaks and crevices.
—Caroline Shaw

Schisma commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by Madeline Island Chamber Music in
honor of Caroline Marshall.
First performance, June 29, 2018 - Madeline Island, Wisconsin

Mantana Roberts: borderlands... (2018)
borderlands... is built around historical data about the US-Mexico border crisis and
the problems that have ensued with the more recent archaic American immigration
policies. I decided to focus on a type healing that is about healing cultural rifts,
healing ideas of difference, healing through remembering history, healing by
highlighting the protection of rights that should be afforded to every human,
regardless of where they may come from. This used to be in the spirit of what it
means to be American (to me). What is going on right now is not American. It’s a
sham and a shame. We can do better....
—Matana Roberts

borderlands... commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by The Visiting Quartet Residency
Program at Arizona State University.
First performance, November 2, 2018 – Tempe, Arizona.

Beethoven: String Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132 (1825)
The power of music to heal body, mind and spirit was a belief held from the ancient
Greeks up through the ages. The topic is just as relevant today, where the synergy
between music and healing is being passionately explored in the field of modern
brain science (with some astounding findings). Whether the music itself is directly
restorative or if it serves as a powerful and guiding metaphor has been long
debated, but nevertheless, Beethoven’s inherent belief in music’s healing power is
well illustrated by a visit he paid in 1804 to his former student, pianist Dorothea von
Ertmann, following the death of her three-year-old son. Offering music, he prefaced
an hour-long improvisation with the sparsely chosen words: “We will now speak to
each other in tones.” Beethoven’s intimate friend Antonie Brentano also recalled
that “...he visited me often, almost daily, and then he plays spontaneously because
he has an urgent need to alleviate suffering, and he feels he is able to do so with his
heavenly sounds...” The Quartet in A minor, Opus 132 is the second in a series of
cinq quarts written at the request the Russian Prince Galitzin. These so-called late
quartets represent an exquisite culmination of Beethoven’s output as a composer.
Evidence of the deaf composer’s own suffering and search for higher meaning is
found scattered throughout his notebooks during his final years and Opus 132
powerfully embodies the musical essence of late Beethoven; an autobiographical world that wrestles with questions surrounding life, death, and spirituality.

A harbinger of music to come, an almost obsessive drive towards overarching motivic and thematic unity permeates this quartet. A pair of semitones separated by an expressive leap is introduced in the opening bars of the first movement, these tones (in a great multitude of pitch values, inversions, and durations) serving as fodder for all that follows across the five-movement structure. Even with the sweetness of the memorable second theme, the opening movement is generally characterized by a brooding and highly combustible tendency. In contrast, Beethoven often relied on pastoral settings across his output to explore a sense of repose and spiritual renewal, here reflected in the amiable second movement. Flowing over a gentle topography, the material is still informed here by the general motif, though with stormy tendencies much subdued. Notable is the hurdy-gurdy trio section on an A drone, filling the listener with the restorative powers of the fresh air.

In the early spring of 1825, Beethoven found himself in the throes of an infected bowel—far more serious an affliction in the day—pausing his ability to continue work on the quartet. This episode is reflected in the sublime center of this five-movement quartet, the Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lidischen Tonart (Song of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode). Beethoven at this time in his life often looked back in the musical tradition for inspiration and as a way to imagine the future. Borrowing from the ancient church modes with his use of the Lydian scale (F major with a raised 4th scale degree), Beethoven’s choice was most certainly not random; sixteenth century Italian theorist Gioseffe Zarlino observed that “the Lydian mode is a remedy for fatigue of the soul, and similarly for that of the body.”

Three serene and prayerful Lydian chorale prelude episodes, each occurrence increasingly intermingling the pure tones of the half note chorale with embellished prelude material, gradually create a sense of heavenly ascension across the movement. Modulating with the simple hinge of a C-sharp, two D major sections (Neue Kraft fühlen) break these reveries with joyous expressions of new strength and convalescence. My beloved chamber music coach while in school, Felix Galamir (then approaching 90) vividly demonstrated this by stepping from his chair one leg at a time and standing tall. In his case, he was not much taller standing than seated, but the point was nevertheless well received! But the Heiliger Dankgesang is not only a celebration of feeling new physical strength, but it is essentially an expression on the renewal of the soul. For Beethoven, the return of his physical health likely ran of secondary importance to a return of his creative powers. Touchingly written in the margin of a sketch for this movement is a note surely not meant for his doctor: “Thank you for giving me back the strength to enjoy life.”

Beethoven seems to scorn those of us moved to tears by the sublime conclusion of the third movement with the interjection a raucous march, bringing us back to earth with bold force. This very brief movement leads into a heroic violin recitativo recalling the choral finale of his ninth symphony (Op 125), catapulting us into the highly turbulent world of the finale. Searching in various guises for resolution amidst strains found across all of the preceding movements, the virtuosic writing shows Beethoven very much writing for the future; how foreign the interlocking rhythms and gnarly contrapuntal figurations must have felt at the time (they still do)! And at the end of this monumental musical journey, one which invites the listener to confront and transcend his/her own fragilities, the music is drawn to conclusion with an effervescence coda, almost Mozart-like in its exuberance. Here is Beethoven once again playing with our emotions; it’s either a joyful summation of our human ability to rise above life’s challenges or a rebuke for taking ourselves too seriously. Or perhaps both?

—Nicholas Cords

BROOKLYN RIDER

Hailed as “the future of chamber music” (Strings), Brooklyn Rider offers eclectic repertoire in gripping performances that continue to attract legions of fans and draw rave reviews from classical, world, and rock critics alike. In fall 2018, Brooklyn Rider released Dreamers on Sony Music Masterworks with Mexican jazz vocalist Magos Herrera followed by a tour to support the album. They also recently debuted their Healing Modes project which presents Beethoven’s Opus 132 alongside new commissions by Reena Esmail, Gabriela Lena Frank, Matana Roberts, and Caroline Shaw.

Brooklyn Rider celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2015 with the groundbreaking multi-disciplinary project Brooklyn Rider Almanac, for which it recorded and toured 15 commissioned works, each inspired by a different artistic muse. Last season, Brooklyn Rider released an album with Anne Sofie von Otter entitled So Many Things on Naïve Records and together they toured material from the album and more, including stops at Carnegie Hall and the Opernhaus Zurich.

Other recent projects include a tour with choreographer Brian Brooks and former New York City Ballet prima ballerina Wendy Whelan, performing Some of a Thousand Words, and collaborations with banjoist Béla Fleck, jazz saxophonist Joshua Redman and Irish fiddle master Martin Hayes.

Exclusive Management:
Opus 3 Artists
348 West 57th Street
Suite 282
New York, NY 10019
www.opus3artists.com