



## Zorá String Quartet

### Oberon's Grove

#### Zorá String Quartet @ The Morgan Library



Wednesday April 4th, 2018 - The **Zorá String Quartet** (above, in a photo by Matt Dine from today's performance) in a noontime concert at The Morgan Library. I first heard this talented ensemble at Merkin Hall in January 2017. In the interim, there has been a personnel change: violinist Hsuan-Hao Hsu has joined the quartet.

I have been thinking for a while now that **Anton Webern's *Langsamer Satz*** (1905) is my favorite work for string quartet, and after today's performance of it by the Zorá, I'm sure of it. Each time I have found the music very touching, but **today's sublime performance literally moved me to tears. How beautifully the Zorá Quartet shaped this music today.** One of the most appealing aspects of the piece is the generous distribution of featured phrases among the four voices. Thus, early on, we could **experience and welcome the artistry** of the quartet's newest member, Hsuan-Hao Hsu: his tone is glowing, his expressiveness deep. The violist Pablo Muñoz Salido shone in another theme, played over a plucking accompaniment, whilst the tonal glamour of cellist Zizai Ning's playing matched her appearance: her elegant posture set off by a bewitching deep-purple frock and bejeweled shoes. Singing over all, violinist Dechopol Kowintaweewat's satiny tone and control of dynamic contrasts constantly reached the heart. For such music, and such playing, unbounded gratitude.

**Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 15 in A-minor, Op. 132***, dates from the first months of 1825 when the composer, who had begun work on the piece late in 1824, was stricken with an intestinal inflammation which caused him great pain. This period of illness, and his recovery from it, are mirrored in the music of the opus 132. **The Zorá's performance today was marked by technical assurance, clarity of individual voices, and a strong sense of dynamic refinement.** The opening *Assai sostenuto, Allegro*, brings mood changes which the players explore with **expressive finesse and opulent tone.** Again, each instrument has opportunities to speak to us. Sitting close, we greatly enjoyed observing the subtle communication between the players as the music moved forward to a low buzzing motif and a big finish.

The unison start of the *Allegro ma non tanto* seems to signal a cautious happiness as the composer's health begins to improve. The structure is conversational, with the pair of violins and the viola/cello duo exchanging ideas. A violin duet ensues, the music becoming dance-like. Richly sustained notes from the cello give the music a touch of gravity.

The chorale-like start of the *Molto adagio* is just plain heavenly, with the Zorá sound lovingly integrated. An engaging and slightly darker interlude, with trills, displays the ensemble's rhythmic surety, whilst the second violin sounds forth with transfixing beauty. Brightness returns, with gleaming sound from the first violin before the two violins swirl into the high range together.

In response to enthusiastic applause from the audience, the Zorá offered as an encore an arrangement of a theme from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. This was beautifully played, and it felt like a benediction.

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