

May & June 2021



The Moment is Supreme

Sasha Callahan and Megumi Stohs Lewis, violin
Alexander Vavilov, viola
Leo Eguchi, cello

In Response to the Madness (2019) for string quartet

Joel Thompson (b. 1988)

String Quartet No. 15 in G major, D. 887

Franz Schubert (1797—1827)

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Andante un poco moto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace – Trio: Allegretto
- IV. Allegro assai

To close our season, we chose two pieces that encourage us to explore and absorb each moment as it unfolds. Joel Thompson's *In Response to the Madness* and Schubert's extraordinary final string quartet in G Major share an interest—perhaps even an obsession—with how we experience the here and now. Strung together into a fluid whole, each moment transforms the music, and us, from caterpillar into chrysalis and then to butterfly, almost imperceptibly. Both Thompson and Schubert show a curiosity for how life unfurls, capturing moments and holding them suspended in our view for what could be an hour, a day, a lifetime.

In the composer's note to *In Response to the Madness*, Joel Thompson writes: "the method that I used to write the piece was reading the news before I sat down to compose, and then trying to directly translate my emotional response into the music itself". In his hands, this process leads to a visceral account of the times we are living through, as experienced by one single solitary human trying to make sense of it. There are moments of anguish and moments of great beauty, and even moments of peace that leave a sense of hope in the work we all have to do.

Schubert's G Major String Quartet occupies a sacred space in the hearts of most string players. The final string quartet Schubert wrote, it foreshadows the monumental cello quintet he would write a year later in scope, intensity, and beauty. From the opening measures of the piece, the security of the G Major tonality promised by the title is upended as the music vacillates between major and minor, and throughout the work Schubert denies the listener the sense that any moment is any one thing. There is always a sense of the changeability of the moment, that the clearest day can have a storm just around the corner... The music is simultaneously heavenly and of the earth, and it defies description, in a way. At once tumultuous and graceful, lyrical and terrifying, searching and resigned, playful and comforting, strong and fragile. It continues to be a marvel that at age 29 Schubert was able to reach such astonishing maturity as a composer and human before his untimely death at 31.

~ Sasha Callahan