

THALEA STRING QUARTET

Christopher Whitley, 1st violin Kumiko Sakamoto, 2nd violin
Lauren Spaulding, viola Titilayo Ayangade, cello

Program Notes

Joseph Bologne (1745-1799): *String Quartet No. 4 in C minor*, Op. 1, No. 4

Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, was born on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, the son of an enslaved woman of Senegalese origin and a French plantation owner.

From the age of eight, he was educated in France. When he was 17, he was made an officer of the king's guard and given the title "Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges." He first came to fame as the best fencer in France; he is only known to have lost one match. Little is known of his training as a violinist or composer. He made a sensational debut as a soloist with Le Concert des Amateurs in 1772, playing two violin concerti of his own composition. In 1773, he was named the conductor of the orchestra. Under his leadership, it became regarded as the finest orchestra in Paris and one of the finest in all Europe.

In 1781, Bologne became director of the newly formed orchestra Le Concert Olympique. Queen Marie Antoinette, an accomplished musician herself, frequently attended his concerts. Under his baton, the orchestra notably premiered Haydn's six "*Paris Symphonies*" in 1786 with the queen in attendance. Throughout this decade, Bologne composed string quartets, violin concertos, *symphonies concertantes*, and other works.

When the French Revolution broke out in 1789, Bologne joined the National Guard in Lille. In 1791 he was appointed the colonel of the newly created Légion Franche de Cavalerie des Américains (American Free Legion of Calvary), which was comprised mostly of men of color; it soon became known as the Légion Saint-Georges. Bologne served on the front lines, successfully driving back an attack by Austrian forces. Even though he was a war hero, his ties to the aristocracy made him the object of suspicion. He was jailed without a trial for nearly a year on false charges of misusing public funds.

After his release, having unsuccessfully attempted to return to his command, he is believed to have traveled to Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti). In 1797, after returning to Paris, he became director of a new orchestra, Le Cercle de l'Harmonie, which performed in the former residence of the Duke of Orléans. He died in 1799, at the age of 53.

The Beatles / arr. Alex Vittal (b.1984): *Abbey Road Suite*

Alex Vittal is a violist, arranger, and Executive Director of the Colorado-based Sphere Ensemble, which he brings to marginalized schools and communities, homeless shelters, juvenile detention centers, women's shelters, children's hospitals, and assisted

living and memory care facilities. He has diverse musical tastes, performing orchestral music as a member of the Steamboat Symphony Orchestra, traditional Argentine tango music with Orquesta Típica Natural Tango, Baroque music on period instruments with the Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado, and a wide variety of musical styles with Sphere Ensemble. Dedicated to social justice through music education, he spent seven years working with under-resourced elementary and middle school students as a Teaching Artist with El Sistema Colorado.

Abbey Road Suite is Vittal's amazing quartet rendering of the B-side of The Beatles' *Abbey Road* album. He writes:

"I was first exposed to The Beatles' *Abbey Road* in my later teenage years after I had begun learning the electric bass as a hobby to go alongside my main instrument, the viola, and it was a revelatory experience for me. I loved the entire album immediately, but the long form of the B-side in particular struck me as particularly brilliant on so many levels. The songs have such great movement and energy, explore so many emotions and musical styles, and have a fascinating structure. Listen for a recurrence of the opening theme of 'You Never Give Me Your Money' at the close of 'The End.' 'Her Majesty' was actually the first ever hidden track included on an album, and is a sort of silly coda to the whole set. Even more striking to me than the songs themselves are the bold and singular musical styles of each of the four Beatles. You can really hear their unique personalities throughout the entire B-side, from Paul's sensitivity and passion to John's bravado to George's virtuosity to Ringo's sense of humor.

In this arrangement, a true labor of love written and re-written countless times over seven years, I have sought to remain as true as possible to the original recording, including capturing individual personality quirks in the original recording. I believe that we collectively love The Beatles both because of the quality and originality of their songs, but even more so for their musical personalities and public personas. I hope this performance brings you closer to The Beatles and their peerless *Abbey Road*."

Daniel Bernard Roumain (b.1971): String Quartet No. 5 ("Rosa Parks"), "Klap Ur Handz"

An innovative composer, violinist, and band leader, Haitian American Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) mixes classical music with his own cultural references and musical imagination. He serves as Visiting Associate Professor of Composition at his alma mater, Vanderbilt University. He is also the Artist-in-Residence of the Seattle Theater Group and the Music Director of Seattle's More Music @ The Moore program for the third consecutive year.

DBR earned his doctorate in Music Composition from the University of Michigan and is currently Institute Professor and Professor of Practice at Arizona State University. An avid arts industry leader, he serves on the board of directors of the League of American Orchestras, Association of Performing Arts Presenters and Creative Capital, the advisory committee of the Sphinx Organization, and was co-chair of 2015 and 2016 APAP Conferences.

DBR says: "I was raised by immigrant parents from Haiti, who experienced American life both before, and after, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Their views were informed by life on a free island nation in Port-au-Prince, Haiti; life in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois; and life in the complex diversity of Pompano Beach, Florida. They identified with Malcolm and Martin, Maya and Rosa, and the great Haitian warriors, Makandal and Toussaint. Civil rights, for our household, was global, local, and part of the very fabric of our lives and culture. I created [the '*Rosa Parks*' Quartet] as a musical portrait of Rosa Parks' struggle, survival, and legacy . . . It's telling that this work may, in fact, be performed on stages that didn't allow the presence of so many, so often. I often refer to the stage as the last bastion of democracy, where all voices can and should be heard, where we are all equal, important, and necessary."

Each of DBR's five string quartets honors a figure in the American Civil Rights movement. His **Fifth String Quartet**, written in 2005, is dedicated to Rosa Parks. The three movements each use a highly specific compositional style to reflect on her life. The first movement is inspired by a direct quote from Parks herself. In reference to her defiant stance against bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama, she stated: "I knew someone had to take the first step and I made up my mind not to move." The longest of the three movements, it is characterized by a driving, insistent rhythm throughout, which evokes the dignified persistence of Parks herself. The second movement, titled "Klap Ur Handz," is based around the activity of clapping. In this work, the players have to clap, a feature DBR says was inspired by hip-hop rhythms but dates back to Cro-Magnon man. "There's something really communal about that," he says. The final movement, "Isorhythmiclationalistic," is much more solemn and introspective in nature. It makes use of long, drawn-out chords, striking silence, and sudden shifts in dynamics, to hauntingly beautiful and dramatic effect.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): *String Quartet No. 12 in F major*, Op. 96, "*American*"

Antonin Dvořák was the most prolific chamber music composer of the late 19th century. He wrote numerous excellent works in every standard form as well as for novel ensembles. His natural and seemingly effortless proclivity for chamber music resulted in a body of work that was unusual for a composer of the Romantic period, a time in which the exploration of large forces, extra-musical programs, and expansive, subjective forms had little to do with this intimate and formalized genre most associated with the Classical era. It was characteristic of his time for Dvořák to express his musical nationalism; strong elements of his native Bohemian (i.e., Czech or Slavonic) folk music appear in his music in the dance and narrative forms of the *furiant* and the *dumka*, respectively. But despite such general influences of form, rhythm, and mood, Dvořák's music has a freshness, clarity of texture, and bounty of dramatic lyricism that makes it original.

Dvořák's best-known works date from the 1890's during his three-year sojourn in America, where he served as director of the National Conservatory in New York. They include the New World Symphony and the "*American*" Quartet. Dvořák encountered American folk music in the form of Native-American drumming and African-American spirituals, the latter of which he regarded as profoundly original music that might serve as a basis for a national style. While he himself denied that he intentionally incorporated

any American elements, the "*American*" in particular bears the stamp of the time and place of its composition.

Ironically, Dvořák composed the "*American*" while on holiday in the predominantly Bohemian farming community of Spillville, Iowa. A spirit of relaxation and perhaps joyful homecoming inspired him to swiftly compose the quartet within a few weeks. Flowing, spacious, and bright, the music seems to reflect his disposition, if not, as some claim, the expanse of the American plains. The most pervasive aspect of the quartet supporting these qualities, as well as reflecting Dvořák's general preoccupation with folk idioms, is the use of the pentatonic or five-note scale, which is common in folk music around the world. Whatever influences or expressive intentions lay behind this choice, it imbues the quartet with a personality and a continuity that is distinctive and strongly evocative.

— Kai Christiansen