

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

ORION QUARTET

PETER WILEY, *cello*

Sunday, February 17 – 3 PM

Benjamin Franklin Hall, American Philosophical Society

PROGRAM

String Quartet in G Major, D. 887

Franz Schubert

Born: January 31, 1797, in Vienna, Austria

Died: November 19, 1828, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1826

Duration: 48 minutes

Schubert wrote his final string quartet during a period of 10 days in 1826 around the same time that Beethoven finished his own late essays in the genre. Schubert, a long-time admirer of Beethoven, became a bereft torch bearer at Beethoven's funeral in 1827, just one and a half years before Schubert's own death in 1828. The Quartet in G Major, stands alongside the famous D Minor Quartet (*Death and the Maiden*) as proof that Schubert was well on his way to writing large-scale works in all genres. Symphonic in organization and structure, it achieves a depth of sound that often belies the presence of only four musicians. In its scope and difficulty, it typifies Schubert's later works.

String Quintet in C Major, D. 956

Franz Schubert

Composed: 1828

Duration: 50 minutes

The work of Schubert constantly reminds us of the astounding power of melody, and in this, his final instrumental work, the composer penned some of his most ravishing melodies. The Quintet was probably written in September 1828. Schubert heard a private rehearsal of the work in October, a month before he died. Today, it is hard to believe that one of the greatest of all chamber works remained unheard in public until 1850, 22 years after the composer's death—and that it remained unpublished for three more years. In choosing the instrumentation for his Quintet, Schubert did not follow the path of Mozart and Beethoven, both of whom added a second viola to the normal string quartet. Schubert decided, rather, to add a second cello, which changes the sound of the instrumental group in a striking way, adding a darker, perhaps more grave sound to the ensemble. Exactly why Schubert chose to add the second cello is not known. Maybe it had to do with the particular string players who congregated at the house of his brother Ferdinand. Perhaps he simply wanted the richer, more profound sound for this music, which, as one writer has said, glows with "almost painful beauty." The work is in four movements, and in each of them, the composer pairs the instrumental forces in such a way as to make them sound constantly new, a considerable achievement, given the Quintet's length.