



FORMOSA
QUARTET

JASMINE LIN, violin
CHE-YEN CHEN, viola

WAYNE LEE, violin
DEBORAH PAE, cello



The **FORMOSA QUARTET** is “one of the very best quartets of their generation” (David Soyer, cellist of the Guarneri Quartet). Winners of the First Prize and the Amadeus Prize at the London International String Quartet Competition in 2006, the Formosa’s debut recording on the EMI label was hailed as “spellbinding” (*Strad Magazine*) and “remarkably fine” (*Gramophone*). Formed in 2002 when the four founding members came together for a concert tour of Taiwan, the quartet has given critically acclaimed performances at the Ravinia Festival, the Library of Congress, the Da Camera Society of Los Angeles, Rice University, the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center, and Wigmore Hall in London.

The Formosa Quartet is deeply committed to championing Taiwanese music and promoting the arts in the land of its heritage, and their active commissioning has contributed significantly to the 21st century’s string quartet literature. In 2016, they premiered Lei Liang’s *Song Recollections*. Based on music indigenous to aboriginal tribes of Taiwan, the piece is the result of two-year commissioning project which looks ahead to a new disc of music inspired by Hungarian and Taiwanese folk traditions. Other commissions include Shih-Hui Chen’s *Returning Souls: Four Pieces on Three Formosan Amis Legends* and *Fantasia on the Theme of Plum Blossom*, Dana Wilson’s *Hungarian Folk Songs*, and Wei-Chieh Lin’s *Pasibutbut*.

The members of the Formosa Quartet – Jasmine Lin, Wayne Lee, Che-Yen Chen, and Deborah Pae – have degrees from the Juilliard School, Curtis Institute of Music, and New England Conservatory, and have been top prizewinners in prestigious competitions such as the Paganini, Primrose, Fischhoff, Naumburg, and Tertis competitions. Each summer, they serve as faculty quartet-in-residence at the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, as well as at their very own Formosa Chamber Music Festival in Hualien, Taiwan. The Formosa Quartet forms an octet with violins Joseph Curtin (2001) and Andrea Guarneri (1662), an Enrico Catenari viola (1680), and a Vincenzo Postiglione cello (1885) on generous loan from the Arts and Letters Foundation.

PRESS

"The players projected a securely integrated ensemble with a vivid sonority that had just enough edge to command attention. First violinist Jasmine Lin was the primary source of this vibrant sound, and when she took hold of a soaring phrase, the pulse of the whole room raced. Violinist Wayne Lee of the bright sound and nimble phrasing eloquently matched Lin, and violist Che-Yen Chen's muscular approach easily demolished the stereotype of the self-effacing violist... Pae's resonant cello solos in both the Liang and Wilson works displayed a sophisticated technique that easily adapted to the seasoned Formosa Quartet."

-Ken Herman, *San Diego Story*

"Bold and intense, like shots of pure espresso...the performances go beyond the beautiful and into the territory of unexpectedly thrilling."

-MUSO Magazine

"They deliver almost technically awless performances, taking particular care to ensure that textures are as crystal-clear as possible throughout each work. This approach is particularly effective in the Mozart K. 387, which is given a marvellously elegant performance full of youthful freshness and exuberance in the outer movements with a naturally warm lyricism in the Andante Cantabile. It also illuminates the rhythmic complexities of the Scherzo of Debussy's Quartet presented here with spellbinding virtuosity."

-BBC Music Magazine

"They also convey with seasoned skill the drama, poetry and lyricism of Schubert's *Quartettsatz* and inject Wolf's *Italian Serenade* not only with breathtaking vitality and athleticism but also with a true joie de vivre."

-Strad Magazine





2016-17 PROGRAM OFFERINGS

ALLEGED DANCES

Beethoven: String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132
John Adams: *John's Book of Alleged Dances*

John Adams's *Book of Alleged Dances* – an exhilarating collection of rhythmic vignettes ranging from bluegrass to Renaissance, blaring to intimate, “very” to “barely” – is offered here in an exciting pairing with one of the ultimate achievements of Western civilization. Among his very last, Beethoven's *Opus 132* was written in the midst of failing health and recovery from a month-long illness. Indeed, the piece at times almost seems to look over at life from the other side. The *Heiliger Dankgesang*, a “Holy song of thanks” in the Lydian church mode, touches a deep chord of humanity and communion with the divinity. Through a gamut of pain, optimism, struggle, and renewal, the music – as in much late Beethoven – dances to an otherworldly timeless beat.

KIND OF BLUE

Dvořák: String Quartet in F major, “*American*”
Gershwin (arr. Formosa Quartet): *Summertime*
Debussy: String Quartet
Grappelli (arr. Jasmine Lin): *4 Grappelli Jazz Tunes*

Hints of blues and spirituals sound in Dvořák's America-birthed quartet of 1893, while latent jazz seeds brew in Debussy's watershed string quartet of the same year, composed when his harmonic inventions were about to join the genetics of jazz. The pentatonic scale, prevalent in both composers, adds a splash of Asian to the fusion – incidentally completing the program's reflection of Formosa Quartet's dual identity. The two slow movements vocalize the bittersweet heartache of “blue,” with French-inspired Gershwin interspersing a lighter blue in between. Topping it all off is Formosa's own arrangement of four sizzling tunes by French jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli.

(BRITTEN)BRITTEN

Lei Liang: *Song Recollections* (FQ commission)
Beethoven: String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3
Purcell-Britten: *Chacony*
Britten: String Quartet No. 2 in C Major

Hauntingly lyrical and intensely dramatic, Benjamin Britten's *Second String Quartet* was written for the 250th anniversary of Henry Purcell's death in 1945 and came on the heels of his opera *Peter Grimes*, which made Britten famous the world over. The first three-quarters of the program is the *Second Quartet* in macrocosm, beginning with Lei Liang's nostalgic *Song Recollections*, a piece written for the Formosa Quartet in 2016. The optimistic rising seventh intervals in Beethoven's *D Major Quartet* echo the obsessive rising tenths in the Britten, and both pieces contain tarantellas, a whirling dance sparked (legend has it) by a tarantula bite. The epic final movement of the Britten was modeled after Purcell's solemn *Chacony*, a fitting tribute to one of Britain's most revered composers by a brilliant prodigy three centuries later.

"Liang has taken the raw material of human song and natural substance and made something sublime, often breathtaking."
- San Diego Union-Tribune

PIANO QUINTETS

Wolf: *Italian Serenade*
Brahms: *Piano Quintet*
Friedrich Gernsheim: *Piano Quintet No. 2*

Although ensconced in the Romantic tradition, the Gernsheim *Piano Quintet No. 2* offers a unique sound world, perhaps containing more spontaneity of gesture and harmony than many of its contemporary works. Its language, born of a line of German composers, evokes a vastness, a landscape of tall open spaces, that at times seems to transcend its country of origin. The Brahms *Piano Quintet* hardly needs introduction; yet in its old familiar presence one cannot help but be amazed by the truth of its un-aging effect on us. Ask any string quartet player or pianist, and they will likely tell you that the piece is among their top ve most-performed. But one never tires of it, so sincere is its sensibility, and every single time one reaches the end of the *Andante un poco adagio*, one is forcibly struck by its beauty. The human heart is what ultimately connects us to one another, and in Brahms beats one of the most extraordinary hearts in music.

This program celebrates the release of Reiko Uchida and the Formosa Quartet's recording of Gernsheim and Brahms Quintets on Delos Records.



Photography by Sam Zauscher

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