

The Fine Arts Quartet was founded in Chicago in 1946. The original players, all then-current or one-time members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, were Leonard Sorkin (first violin), Joseph Stepansky (second violin), Sheppard Lehnhoff (viola), and George Sopkin (cello). The ensemble had nearly formed in 1940, with second violinist Ben Senescu, but World War II delayed establishment until 1946. The FAQ has been almost unique among American string quartets in having made appearances on such major U.S. television programs as The Today Show and The Ed Sullivan Show. It has also appeared on countless radio and public television broadcasts, both in the U.S. and Europe. From its founding through 1954, the FAQ played regularly on Sunday mornings for ABC radio network broadcasts. It began making occasional television appearances in the 1950s, and in 1958, it launched its annual European tours. In the late 1960s, the FAQ toured Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asia under the sponsorship of the U.S. State Department. From 1963 until 2018, the FAQ made the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee its base of operations.

Johannes Brahms

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Sting Quartet Op. 51
No. 1 In C Minor
No. 2 In A Minor

FINE
ARTS
QUARTET

Brahms was slow in writing his first two string quartets. We know from a letter from Joseph Joachim that a C minor quartet was in progress in 1865, but it may not have been the same work that would become Op. 51 No. 1 in 1873. Four years before publication, however, in 1869, we know for certain that the two quartets were complete enough to be played through. But the composer remained unsatisfied. Years passed. New practice runs then occurred in Munich, probably in June 1873, and Brahms ventured south of the city to the small lakeside town of Tutzing for a summer respite. There, with the Würmsee (as Lake Starnberg was then called) and the Bavarian Prealps as backdrop, he put the finishing touches on the two quartets.

He was 40 years old at the time of publication. Brahms regarded the string quartet as a particularly important genre. He reportedly destroyed some twenty string quartets before allowing the two Op. 51 quartets to be published.^[1] Explaining his progress to a publisher in 1869, Brahms wrote that as Mozart had taken "particular trouble" over the six "beautiful" Haydn Quartets, he intended to do his "very best to turn out one or two passably decent ones."^[1] According to his friend Max Kalbeck, Brahms insisted on hearing a secret performance of the Op. 51 quartets before they were published, after which he substantially revised them.

During Brahms's lifetime, the string quartet, like the symphony,

was a genre dominated by the compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven. Brahms had remarked of Beethoven in 1872, a year before composing his first quartets, "You can't have any idea what it's like always to hear such a giant marching behind you!" In choosing to write both the first of his quartets and the first of symphonies in the key of C minor, the key in which Beethoven composed some of his greatest and most characteristic works, Brahms may have been seeking to acknowledge as well as break free from Beethoven's daunting influence.

The influence of Schubert is also strong on these works, particularly on the quartet in C minor. Structurally and thematically, the first movement of the C minor quartet bears a strong resemblance to Schubert's Quartettsatz, D. 703, also in C minor.

The Fine Arts Quartet has been one of the longest-enduring major string quartets in the modern era, and despite numerous personnel changes over the years, its collective talent and style have remained consistent. The group is known for the diversity and breadth of its repertoire, which in addition to the traditional literature, encompasses contemporary pieces and rarely played older works. The quartet has appeared on television and radio broadcasts in the U.S. and Europe, has recorded over 200 works, and toured extensively.

Brahms Opus 51

Quartet In C Minor - Quartet In A Minor

The Fine Arts Quartet

Quartet In C Minor, Op. 51, No. 1

1. Allegro
2. Romanze: Poco Adagio
3. Allegretto Molto Moderato E Comodo; Un Poco Piu Animato
4. Allegro

Quartet In A Minor, Op. 51, No 2

5. Allegro Non Troppo
6. Andante Moderato
7. Quasi Menuetto, Moderato; Allegretto Vivace
8. Finale: Allegro Non Assai

Cello - George Sopkin Viola - Irving Ilmer

Violin - Abram Loft, Leonard Sorkin

Recording Info: Released by Concert-Disc 1961



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