Mozart’s Quartet in E-flat Major belongs to his famed “Haydn” quartets (namely being the third of these “children”), all six of which Mozart so affectionately dedicated to “his best friend” Joseph Haydn in 1785. Four years prior, in 1781, Haydn had just published his latest set of six quartets, Op. 33 (of which we played the “Joke” in our first season here at CCM), earning widespread acclaim from the chamber music community of the day. This publication essentially marks the establishment of the string quartet as a “household” composition form, and with it, Haydn created a vessel for the most profound and intricate sentiments of virtually all composers who followed in the footsteps of the classical tradition. Utilizing the sonata form and almost institutionalizing the four-movement structure, most famous composers followed these guidelines, bending them ever so slightly in their favor (with late Beethoven posing the most extreme departure until the end of the nineteenth century).

The years between the publication of those two string quartet cycles could not have been more significant for Mozart’s personal and musical development: he not only took a healthy step away from his father’s powerful influence by severing ties with their mutual employer—the Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg—he also married Constanze ‘Stanzerl’ Weber and became part of the circle of music lovers around Baron Gottfried von Swieten, the latter of which gave him thorough exposure to countless manuscripts of Bach and Händel. After earning considerable operatic success (1781’s Idomeneo in Munich and 1782’s Die Entführung aus dem Serail in Vienna) and his newly gained freedom, Mozart dedicated himself to composer-performer style concerts in Vienna and string quartet writing.
The Haydn quartets, an unmistakable reaction to Haydn’s Op. 33, display an astonishing variety in emotional range and “rule bending.” An obvious example is the “Dissonance” quartet (K. 465), which some of Mozart’s contemporaries thought simply error-ridden and sloppy. The tonal mysteriousness of the quartet in E-flat Major was surely groundbreaking in every respect: although the ambiguous opening, performed by all four players in unison, is familiar to us by now, it is still ever so shocking and effective, especially when opening a concert. The brief unison makes way for a tentative but friendly continuation of the search for a tonal center until we finally hear the opening theme in E-flat harmonized by all players. Still, throughout the movement no turn is completely secure and the possibility of veering off into frighteningly foreign keys (Novalis’ “chaos”) constantly shimmers “through the veil of order.” The “Andante con moto” is surely the emotional heart of the piece, displaying “ostentatious dissonances of [...] almost [...] antique flavor” (Reginald Barrett-Ayres), possibly deriving from and related to Mozart’s activities revolving around the Baroque masters with van Swieten.

While the third movement exhibits a hearty minuet with plenty of pedal points, it also boasts one of the very few fortissimo markings in Mozart’s chamber music, encompassing a touchingly melancholic and bittersweet Trio. The “Allegro vivace” is Mozart at his playful best, featuring sudden stops and fermatas included which surely brought tears of laughter to Haydn’s eyes as he turned to Leopold Mozart and uttered the famous words: “Before God, and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

- Notes by Jan Grüning
Symbolism has always played a role in art. The notion that one can represent ideas that put an individual work into greater context has always been attractive to artists of all forms, and composers are no exception. Because of their abstract nature, numbers are often an obvious choice, and the potential for incorporating them into music is limitless.

Composers also love to quote or reference one another, sometimes in obvious ways (such as Brahms’ last movement of the Piano Quartet in C Minor, which directly references the signature motive of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5), sometimes in more subtle ways that are noticeable to only a few—if any. These references play different roles and provide various context in each case, from the very specific to the most universal. At the same time, they share a kind of humility, proving that any given work seldom stands alone. They are ultimately connective links in a long tradition of discovery.

At first glance, the Lyric Suite (1926) would not immediately strike one as a piece with a particular emphasis on symbolism. There is one obvious quote from the opening motive of Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde, quite organically embedded in the last movement (“Largo Desolato”). The piece is officially dedicated to Berg’s friend and colleague Alexander Zemlinsky. It is no surprise, then, to find a quote from the latter’s Lyric Symphony in the “Adagio Appassionato.” Those who are familiar with Berg’s prior work will surely notice his own self-references, such as his continuous preoccupation with the tritone interval between B and F—a prevailing element in his String Quartet, Op. 3 (1910); also, the primary tonal relationship in Lyric Suite is the same as the opera Wozzeck (1922).

However, a closer look reveals further hidden symbolism: repeating number patterns, strange markings, apparent cryptic notations in the manuscript draft of the last movement, and emotionally descriptive
movement titles; all of this points to further meaning that ties them together. An important clue came in 1976 when musicologist Douglass Green deciphered the cryptic notations in the “Largo Desolato” as the German translation of a sonnet by Charles Baudelaire titled “De Profundis Clamavi,” suggesting perhaps the movement was intended to be set with an additional vocal part.

But the full scope of what Berg actually had in mind came to light the following year with the discovery of a secret additional score copy, fully annotated by the composer and given to a woman named Hanna Fuchs-Robettin. It’s a shame Theodor Adorno, Berg’s student and friend who wrote that “the Suite has the character of an accompaniment, as it were, to a course of events absent from it,” didn’t live to discover to what extent his observation was accurate. (We now know that he knew about Berg and Fuchs’ affair but was unaware of the annotated score.)

The newly discovered manuscript reveals a fully programmatic scheme to the Lyric Suite, outlining what seems to be meaningful moments, people, and intense emotions in Berg and Fuchs’ relationship. The score begins with the dedication “Für meine Hanna” and continues with a preface describing how her initials H.F. and his A.B. (which in German denote the pitches B - F and A - B flat) are embedded throughout, putting the aforementioned tritone interval in a new context. Furthermore, all movements and sections of movements are structured with her number 10 and his number 23.

Berg concludes the introduction with the words: “I have written these, and much that has other meanings, into this score for you (for whom, and only for whom—in spite of the official dedication on the following page—every note of this work was written). May it be a small monument to a great love.”

The score then outlines in great detail how their bond is woven into the piece. Notes, intervals, and motives refer to either one of them and to her children—one of whom was nicknamed “Dodo” and is depicted
in the “Andante amoroso” as the viola’s charming motive of C-C (Do-Do). Measure number distribution and metronome markings are multiplications of code numbers 10 and 23. The return of the Scherzo in the “Allegro misterioso – Trio estatico,” which is recapitulated in retrograde (a transformative version of the original 12-tone row of the “Scherzo,” read from right to left, meaning from the end backwards; like a tape running in reverse), is marked with the words “Forget it!”, giving this seemingly unpretentious 12-tone technique an intriguing programmatic twist. Wagner’s and Zemlinsky’s quotes are outlined and put in their tragic context, the movement titles now being understood within it as well. The last movement explicitly outlines the text of Baudelaire’s sonnet, and the notes in the score that correspond to each syllable are redrawn in red ink. The cellist’s indication to lower the C string to a B (German H) is circled, pointing out Hanna’s initial. These are just a handful of details outlined in a 90-page score, of which only a few are free of elaborate annotations, written out in small and diligent handwriting.

Does knowing all this change our perception of the piece? This is an interesting question, particularly in a composition where symbolism is not just a rare occasion but seemingly a main component of the work. The Lyric Suite enjoyed popularity among audiences and musicians from the very beginning. It’s very clear that the Suite speaks for itself, as does any other great work of art. Berg also never intended for this annotated score to become public, nor for the “Largo Desolato” to actually be performed with the voice part. This was a personal offering to a loved one and was independent of an already perfectly self-sufficient work. The words “dying away in love, yearning, and grief” annotating the disintegrating final notes of the piece certainly provide a fascinating insight to what was evidently a meaningful relationship in Berg’s life. However, it hardly adds anything to the profound tragedy experienced at the conclusion of the Lyric Suite by listeners, already from times when Hanna herself perhaps knew nothing yet about the programmatic nature of this phenomenal work.

- Notes by Gershon Gerchikov
Tchaikovsky wrote his first string quartet (Op. 11) in 1871. This period in Russian history is marked by rapid social and political changes that led to reorganization and new definition of cultural values.

At that time, Russia was passing through the inevitable process of modernization—social, political and cultural. There were attempts at reforms and the cultural life was turbulent. Naturally, modernization included the search for a new Russian identity, and it was art and literature that had to construct and describe it. It was the period when Tolstoy published *War and Peace*, which became the symbolic description of Russian people. There was also a conservative nationalist movement that insisted that Russia must go her own way, away from the West and towards orthodoxy.

Tchaikovsky has a very special place in this search for the new identity. He was born in Votkinsk, a small town in the Ural, where from early childhood he was exposed to the melodies and tunes of the deep country folk songs. This love for Russian traditional music and memories of childhood accompanied him his whole life and took a central part in his own compositions. A believing Christian, Tchaikovsky was also one of the first to revise and “purify” Russian Orthodox Church chant music.

However, unlike the other Russian nationalist composers, Tchaikovsky didn’t believe in breaking with the existing western tradition in order to build a new “authentic” one. A graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he believed in fundamental musical education and dedicated much of his time to music pedagogy. In a unique manner, he was able to combine the love and deep connection to his own roots with a more universal view.

Tchaikovsky’s first string quartet was an immediate success both in Russia and abroad. Even though the quartet is very classical in many
respects, it carries a distinct Russian flavor that speaks of the freedom and vastness of the countryside. To help express this incredible brightness and generosity, Tchaikovsky chooses the key of D Major, which maximizes the natural resonance of the instruments and allows frequent use of open strings, occasionally seeming to imitate folk instruments.

The first movement is written in sonata form. It opens with a choral-like first theme, simplistic texturally but quite intricate rhythmically—dividing the 9/8 bar to uneven units of 2-3-2-2 (instead of the regular 3-3-3). Right from the start, this asymmetrical rhythmic pattern creates an impression of music that is free-flowing, just short of improvisation. In the second theme, the quartet breaks down into individual voices that interplay with one another and exchange running passages, as we would expect from Mendelssohn or Schumann. Despite the strictness of the form, this movement never loses its captivating lyricism and sense of freedom, which come so easily to Tchaikovsky.

The “Andante cantabile” is the heart of the piece, and it’s largely responsible for the immediate sweeping success of the composition. It is based on a folk tune called “Vania sat on the couch, smoked his pipe” that Tchaikovsky allegedly heard from a carpenter two years earlier. Similarly to the rhythmic asymmetry in the first movement, the theme is written in uneven bars of 2/4 and 3/4, which again, gives the melody the free-flowing, spoken character of a folk song. There is something uniquely touching in the combination of the simplicity of the tune and the great refinement with which Tchaikovsky sets it for the string quartet. Following a performance of the movement in the presence of Leo Tolstoy in 1876, the composer wrote, “Perhaps I was never so flattered in my life nor was my pride as a composer so stirred as when Lev Tolstoy, sitting beside me listening to the Andante of my First Quartet, dissolved in tears.”

The third movement (“Scherzo”) opens with an energetic syncopated theme that resembles a joyous country dance. The open strings drone
in the cello part, transforming the otherwise elegant sound of the string quartet into an imitation of a country band. In the trio section, Tchaikovsky once again juxtaposes the duple and triple meters; this time, however, he creates a playful confusion: the two are played simultaneously, working against each other.

The last movement is a charming rondo-sonata that alternates folk-like tunes with brilliant virtuosic passages. The first theme is light and playful, and it is contrasted by the mock-serious lyrical second theme, first introduced by the viola. The quartet is concluded with a fiery coda that wishes to reaffirm time and again the final D major cadence, leading to a triumphant finish.

- Notes by Alexandra Kazovsky