Modigliani Quartet to Open Our Spring Season – in Briarcliff

The Seattle Times has called them “the fab four.” The German critic Harald Eggbrecht has called them “one of the best quartets in the world.” Friends of Music Concerts audiences agree. That’s why the Modigliani Quartet, performing at Briarcliff High School on April 18, will be making its third appearance on our series. The group’s program will include Mozart’s String Quartet in D minor, K. 421; Debussy’s String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10; and Ernst von Dohnanyi’s String Quartet No. 3 in A minor, Op. 3.

Formed in 2003 by four friends who met when they were studying at the Conservatoire National Superior de Musique de Paris, the Modigliani attracted international attention the following year when it won the Fritz Philips String Quartet Competition in Eindhoven, following up by winning First Prize at the Vittorio Rimbotti Competition in Florence in 2005 and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York City in 2006. The ensemble has gone on to play in major musical venues such as Wigmore Hall in London, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Brussels’ Bozar, Vienna’s Musikverein and Konzerthaus, Salzburg’s Mozarteum, and Paris’ Théâtre des Champs Elysées. Across the pond it has performed at Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress, the Marlboro Festival, and at venues in Toronto, Houston, Philadelphia, and Seattle, among others.

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In 2014 the Quartet became artistic directors of the Rencontres Musicales d’Evian, a summer festival on Lake Geneva in the French Alps made famous by cellist Mstislaw Rostropovich. Of its performance on the most recent of its five CD’s, Eggbrecht wrote: “It is a real treat to hear with what panache, what witty playfulness, what youthful energy the quartet plays, yet never yielding to casualness. The balance of the four voices, the delicacy of sounds is always impressive….It sounds effortless, sovereign and enormously supple.”

Notes
April 2015 Vol. 16, No. 2
Announcing Our 2015-2016 Season
Our 62nd season will open on September 26, 2015 with the 15th appearance on our series of the incomparable Emerson String Quartet. With the Welsh cellist Paul Watkins, who joined the group in 2013, the quartet remains at the top of the chamber music world.

On October 24, 2015, the Montrose Trio will make its debut both in Westchester and on our series. Former members of the Tokyo String Quartet, violinist Martin Beaver and cellist Clive Greensmith, chose the Canadian pianist Jon Kimura Parker to form this exciting new ensemble.

November 7, 2015 brings to our stage one of the major pianists in the world, the Israeli-American Yefim Bronfman, in his first Westchester recital. His unique program will include two works by Robert Schumann and three piano sonatas by Sergei Prokofiev.

April 16, 2016 marks the return of musicians from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, who will perform string sextets by Richard Strauss, Dvořák, and Brahms.

On April 30, 2016, we will welcome the sixth recipient of our Performance Award, the young Chinese pianist Yun-Chin Zhou, winner of the 2013 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. His program will include works by Haydn, Liszt, Ravel, and Rachmaninoff, as well as six songs by Charles Trenet transcribed for piano by Alexis Weissenberg.

Our season will close on May 14, 2016, with the return to our series of the exuberant Pacifica Quartet, which was quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from 2009-2012.

All concerts are held on Saturday evenings at 8:00 pm in the Kusel Auditorium at Sleepy Hollow High School. Subscriptions for the six-concert series are $120.00 for adults; persons ages 18 and under are admitted free of charge.
American Brass Quintet Comes to Sleepy Hollow

Celebrated for its peerless leadership in the world of brass, the American Brass Quintet will perform on **Saturday, May 2, 2015**, returning our spring series to the Kusel Auditorium at Sleepy Hollow High School. Its program will include Elizabethan consort music by various composers of that day, five chansons by the 16th century composer Josquin de Prés and works by the 20th century composers Osvaldo Lacerda and Witold Lutoslawski, and pieces by current composers David Snow and Eric Ewazen.

The quintet’s performances have been called “positively breathtaking” (*New York Times*) and “a tour de force in brass chamber music...that is unparalleled in the world today” (*Oberlin College Conservatory*). In Australia, delighted critics have said that the quintet is “doing for brass what the Italians did for pasta.”

Formed in 1960, the American Brass Quintet has been ensemble in residence at the Aspen Music Festival since 1970 and at The Juilliard School since 1987. In 2013 the group was the recipient of Chamber Music America’s highest honor, the Richard J. Bogonolny National Service Award for significant and lasting contributions to the field. Its rich history includes performances in Asia, Australia, Central and South America, Europe, the Middle East, and all 50 of the United States; a discography of nearly 60 recordings; and the premieres of more than 150 contemporary brass works.

ABQ commissions by Robert Beaser, William Bolcom, Elliot Carter, Eric Ewazen, Anthony Plog, Huang Ruo, David Sampson, Gunther Schuller, William Schumann, Joan Tower, and Charles Whittenberg, among many others, are considered significant contributions to contemporary chamber music and the foundation of the modern brass quintet repertoire. Its Emerging Composer Commissioning program has brought forth brass quintets by Gordon Beefman, Jay Greenberg, Trevor Gureckis, and Shafer Mahoney. Among the quintet’s recordings are 11 CDs for Summit Records since 1992, including “State of the Art – the ABQ at 50” that features some of the recent works written for them.

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FOM Board: Music Lovers All

When you meet our Board members at concerts, you’ll realize that, although they all are music lovers, by and large they are not musicians, at least not professionally. They might have taken lessons in their childhoods, they might still play “at” an instrument, they might sing in a chorus, they might attend lots of concerts in addition to ours, but their day jobs have been all over the map. There have been physics professors, computer scientists, math teachers, advertising executives, writers and/or editors, chemists, nurses, insurance executives, and yes, a piano teacher. They all, however, have been subscribers to Friends of Music Concerts, or have gone to a couple of concerts and wanted to do more. They have become quite collegial in their efforts, putting their best feet forward for the organization, expanding their horizons by doing tasks that need to be done, lending any expertise they might have. They are the reasons we now are in our 61st season.

If you would like to help take us into the 62nd season and beyond, we would welcome your interest and would like to explore it with you. Just speak to any Board member at the next concert you attend, or contact me at 914-271-2465. I look forward to speaking with you. –Betsy Shaw Weiner, President
Juilliard Baroque and Bach End Our 61st Season

This outstanding ensemble, an outgrowth of Juilliard’s relatively new Historical Performance department, will make its second appearance on our Sleepy Hollow stage on Saturday, May 16, 2015. Its program will be devoted solely to work by Johann Sebastian Bach: namely, his Concerto for oboe, violin, strings, and continuo in F Major, BWV 1053R, and the Musikalisches Opfer (A Musical Offering), BWV 1079. Instruments will include violins, viola, cello, double bass, flute, oboe, bassoon, and harpsichord.

Established in 2009, Juilliard Baroque brings together nine of the world’s most respected and accomplished period instrument specialists. Its members are virtuoso performers, award-winning recitalists, Grammy-nominated recording artists, soloists, and/or principals with every major international early music ensemble. Juilliard Baroque performs in a number of guises, from intimate chamber music concerts with a handful of performers to larger scale works that require orchestral forces.

Juilliard Baroque’s debut season included performances in New York and Madrid. Of its performance of the “Brandenburg” Concertos, Allan Kozinn of The New York Times wrote: “Its traversal was an explosion of energy, with consistently brisk tempos (even, comparatively speaking, in the slow movements), sharply articulated rhythms, and textures that combined an appealing period-instrument grittiness with the kind of transparency that brings every strand of Bach’s counterpoint into focus.” Juilliard Baroque made its debut at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in April 2012, when it played Bach’s Musikalisches Opfer.

Directions to Briarcliff High School for Modigliani Quartet on April 18th

Briarcliff High School is at 444 Pleasantville Road, just east of the Taconic Parkway and west of the Saw Mill Parkway.

Via the Taconic north or south: exit at Pleasantville Road. If exiting from the north, turn left; if exiting from the south, turn right onto Pleasantville Road. At the second traffic light, turn right into the school grounds. Turn left into the first parking lot, which is closest to the auditorium and is where handicapped parking will be located. There’s plenty of parking elsewhere near the school auditorium, whose entrance is the first one on the left in the high school complex.

From Sleepy Hollow and other points along the Hudson: take Route 117, turn north onto the Taconic Parkway, proceed as above.

Via the Saw Mill Parkway:

From the south, exit at Manville Road, bear right at stop sign to first traffic light; turn left onto Pleasantville Road, turn left at next traffic light onto school grounds, proceed as above.

From the north, exit at Bedford Road; turn right at stop sign, right at next stop sign, left on Pleasantville Road to second traffic light, turn left into school driveway, proceed as above.
Among the dominant figures in Hungarian music during the first half of the 20th century, pianist, composer, and conductor Ernst von Dohnányi still is regarded as the most versatile musician to emerge from that country since Franz Liszt. Born in Bratislava in 1877, he first took piano and violin lessons from his father and then learned rudiments of music theory from a local church organist who was a family friend. By the time he entered the Budapest Academy in 1894 for further instruction in piano and composition, he already had composed a Mass, a string sextet, three string quartets, and several songs and piano pieces. In 1895 Brahms himself organized the Vienna premiere of Dohnányi’s Piano Quintet in C minor, Op. 1, and in 1899 his Piano Concerto, Op. 5 won the Bösendorfer Prize for piano composition. In the meantime, in 1898 he made his performing debut in London under the baton of Hans Richter; his astounding skills at the keyboard earned him wide recognition throughout the musical establishment.

Having received his diploma from the Royal Academy and briefly continued his piano studies, he concertized extensively in Europe and the United States over the next decade. After a stint as professor of piano at the Berlin Hochschule (1905 to 1915), he returned to Budapest as director of the Royal Academy, hoping to reverse the tendency of Hungarian musical talent to seek green pastures elsewhere in Europe. In committing himself to the cause of then lesser-known Hungarian composers such as Bartók and Kodály, he changed the landscape of Hungarian music forever. These years were busy indeed: in addition to his own activities as a composer and as a professor of piano at the Budapest Academy, Dohnányi maintained a hectic performance schedule including more than 100 annual appearances in Budapest alone.

During the 1920s, having been ousted from the academy in 1919 by the new fascist regime, Dohnányi conducted the Budapest Philharmonic, was guest lecturer and conductor at American universities, and served as director of piano and composition at the renamed Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest. From 1931 he was music director of Hungarian Radio, and from 1934 again conducted the Budapest Philharmonic. However, when the Second World War erupted, Dohnányi resigned from the Academy rather than conform to its anti-Semitic demands. He also refused to dismiss members of the Budapest orchestra on racial or religious grounds, and eventually disbanded the Philharmonic to avoid such action. Nonetheless, after 1945 his influence under the prewar regime was held strongly against him by the Russians, and he left as a political exile, his music being banned in Hungary for more than ten years. He taught in Argentina and in 1949 accepted a position as composer-in-residence at Florida State College in Tallahassee, becoming a United States citizen in 1955. He continued to perform and conduct on a limited basis until his death in New York City in 1960.

Although his reputation as one of the century’s greatest pianists is secure, Dohnányi’s fame as a composer has lessened. He forged a Brahmsian style that reflected little interest in the folk music that inspired Bartók and Kodály. While his output includes entries in virtually every genre (including three operas and five symphonies), it is his masterful chamber music, particularly the three string quartets and two piano quintets, which remains vital to the repertoire.

The Modigliani Quartet has chosen his String Quartet No. 3 in A minor as the closing work in their program on April 18, 2015, in the Briarcliff High School auditorium.
This past October 18, the Friends of Music Concerts audience heard a splendid recital by two talented, appealing young people: the Ukrainian violinist Aleksey Semenenko and Inna Firsova, his piano collaborator. Semenenko, on the cusp of what promises to be a brilliant career, was the fifth winner of Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Audition Competition to receive a Performance Award from Friends of Music Concerts. How did these awards originate?

Some time ago the well-known music entrepreneur Bob Sherman suggested to FOM that YCA would be a good source of new but first-rate artists for our series. Over many years FOM already had presented many of YCA’s illustrious alumni* who had become stars in the classical music world, but we had never engaged any while they were still with YCA in their careers’ early stages.

Young Concert Artists was founded in 1961 by Susan Wadsworth who, with tireless passion, still guides it in its mission to help gifted young, mostly unknown musicians launch their careers. In its infancy Ms. Wadsworth selected the artists, but growing demand led YCA to start an audition process that now attracts candidates from all over the world. Each year in February YCA invites schools, conservatories, private teachers, alumni, and other professionals to recommend promising students (soloists and ensembles) to audition. In the United States, candidates who live within 200 miles of New York City must appear in person for the preliminary round, which is held there in September. Musicians in the U.S. who live further away and can’t appear may submit CDs. A jury narrows the field for the semi-finals, which are held in New York. That round also includes the winners of YCA’s European auditions; in 2015 these will be held in Leipzig, Germany. The winners of the semi-final round move on to the finals, which take place in New York City and which are open to the public. In one invariably exciting day filled with difficult choices a large jury of eminent musicians selects a total of three to six winners in several categories.

In January 2009 several members of FOM’s Board of Directors attended the YCA finals at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan. From morning to late afternoon jurors and audience heard performances by wonderful instrumentalists and singers from all over the world. The Friends of Music attendees observed that among the prizes given to winners were Performance Awards from concert presenters from around the USA. Giving one of the winners a place on our own concert series seemed the proverbial “no-brainer.” After much discussion we chose from among the winners that day a very young (19), exceptionally poised and polished violinist named Ray Chen and engaged him for a future season. In the period between then and his FOM debut Chen validated our judgment by winning, among other prizes, the Queen Elizabeth competition. Our audience’s enthusiastic response to his concert on April 30, 2011 was further confirmation that we had made a wise decision. A year later we chose a winner from the 2010 YCA finals, and have done so every year since.

In addition to Chen we have presented pianist Charlie Albright (2012), violinist Benjamin Beilman with pianist Yekwon Sun Woo (2013), violinist Paul Huang with pianist Jessica Osborne (spring 2014) and Semenenko with Firsova (autumn 2014). Next season we will present Yun-chin Zhou, an exciting pianist; our 2016/2017 season will feature cellist Edgar Moreau with a pianist to be named.

Engaging artists early in their careers is not new for FOM.

Aleksey Semenenko, right, and Inna Firsova

continued next page
2015 Spring Concerts

AT BRIARCLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

Modigliani Quartet
April 18, 2015 - 8pm

AT SLEEPY HOLLOW HIGH SCHOOL

American Brass Quintet
May 2, 2015 - 8pm

Juilliard Baroque
May 16, 2015 - 8pm

Young Artists, continued from page 5

Among others, The Ying Quartet played for us when they were still at The Eastman School and were being managed by their father; they became a favorite with FOM audiences. Our gratifying affiliation with YCA enables us to simultaneously fulfill two core elements of our mission: To present the finest chamber music to our audiences and to offer emerging artists the opportunity for a high level professional engagement. We feel it is one of the best things we do and would like your opinions. Please let us have your thoughts about this endeavor.

– David R. Kornreich