

65th Concert Series 2018-2019



FRIENDS *of* MUSIC

is pleased to present

The Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky, violin

Sergei Bresler, violin

Ori Kam, viola

Kyril Zlotnikov, cello

Saturday, April 13, 2019

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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Who We Are

Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization now celebrating its 65th season of showcasing, right here in Westchester, artists chosen from among the finest in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, our Partners in Education program in the public schools and free student admission to our concerts give young people enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music.

In order to help sustain what one of our artists called this “legendary series,” we need people who can join the volunteers listed above, either as Board members or equally valued off-Board committee members. Specifics we are looking for include, but are not limited to, people with networking, editorial, business development, and/or fund-raising skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the range together.

Acknowledgments

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Program

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino doucement espressif

Très modéré – En animant peu à peu - Très mouvementé et avec passion

String Quartet No. 5

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Allegro

Adagio molto

Scherzo: Alla bulgarese

Andante

Finale: Allegro vivace – Presto

Intermission

String Quartet in F Major

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Allegro moderato - très doux

Assez vif – très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

The Jerusalem Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists -
www.davidroweartists.com

The Jerusalem Quartet records for Harmonia Mundi. www.jerusalemstringquartet.com

Next concert

Saturday, May 4, 2019, 8:00 pm at **Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York**
Trio Solisti

Program: Schubert: Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. D897; Schubert: Piano Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 99, D898; Brahms: Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major, Op. 87

Program notes

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

Claude Debussy

Debussy finished his only String Quartet in February 1893; he then traveled to Ghent to visit the playwright Maeterlinck, whose *Pelléas et Mélisande* he wanted to adapt as an opera. He stopped in Brussels to show some of his works to the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe and in December in Paris, the Ysaÿe Quartet, to whom the quartet is inscribed, debuted this masterpiece.

The music puzzled everyone: the audience and the critics, both conservative and those in the vanguard. Perhaps the trouble was that Debussy had arrived at too advanced a solution to a problem not yet known to ordinary listeners. He was grappling with how to reconcile classical forms of chamber music, to which a high degree of independence among movements exists, with his own use of cyclical forms in which musical ideas are carried forward from one movement to the next. Even the master of cyclical form, César Franck, found Debussy's quartet too nervous, "all pins and needles," he said.

Debussy makes great formal advances in this work. He bases all four movements on a single theme plainly stated at the outset, then reuses fragments of melody in successive movements to give unity to the whole. Although this idea is a simple one, its execution is not, because it places an enormous burden on the creative imagination. That initial theme, both original and striking, is one which the listener can retain and follow as it is transformed and displaced, dismembered and re-assembled, tracing it through changes of tempo and of mood. At the end, the listener feels the unitary power Debussy has created. Yet the composer's ideas are brief, often taking up only one or two measures; he relies more on allusive connections than on repetitions. He also adapts procedures from other sources, especially from Wagner and the Russians, whose music he heard during his travels. He casts four movements in forms not very different from those past masters', but dresses his new ideas in warm colors and rich harmonies. His writing is intricate and elegant.

The British music critic Paul Griffiths opines that Debussy's quartet influenced the future of the string quartet by "indicating that new sounds could be achieved by forgetting the old conversational mode" by using flexible speeds with many tempo changes within a section. Debussy also achieves a wide variety of texture by joining instruments together in different ways in a search for "fluidity, for constant alteration."

The first movement, *Animé et très décidé*, is firmly declarative, by turns vigorously rhythmic and gracefully lyrical. The main theme and the principal harmonic setting are based on the Phrygian mode. There are many changes of tempo, some unusually swift, as well as frequent rhythmic and modal recastings of the theme. Then comes a playful scherzo, *Assez vif et bien rythmé*, in which a motif from the opening theme, speeded up, is restated repeatedly with virtuosic pizzicatos. The germinal theme almost disappears from the slow, somewhat funereal third movement, *Andantino doucement expressif*, but frequent subtle hints of its elements remain. (As Griffiths notes, this movement is less innovative and more conventionally Romantic than the others.) The repeated motif reappears in the finale's slow introduction, *Très modéré*, and dominates its concluding portion, *Très mouvementé et avec passion*, which accelerates to the quartet's end.

String Quartet No. 5

Béla Bartók

Béla Bartók produced a series of six string quartets over the course of 30 years. Despite their unorthodoxies, they continue and extend the Classical quartet tradition. They trace Bartók's developing attitude toward the unity of multi-movement compositions and inter-movements relationships in terms of themes and motifs.

Bartók dedicated Quartet No. 5 to Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who had endowed a branch of the Library of Congress, which had commissioned the work. Written between August 6 and September 6, 1934, it premiered on April 8, 1935, at the Library, performed by the Kolisch Quartet.

Like Quartet No. 4, written six years earlier, No. 5 has a five-movement form in a symmetrical arrangement: the first and fifth movements share materials; the second and fourth also are thematically and structurally related. The third movement stands alone as the “kernel” (Bartók’s word) of the work, its heart, with all the other movements “arranged in layers around it.” All the movements derive from a variation of a single basic motif even though the derivation is not always apparent. This symmetry of movements flanking the “kernel” makes the music move through a curve that many music historians have called an “arch.”

The vibrant *Allegro* first movement and the *Finale*, both sonata-like movements, bind the quartet together with a cyclic device: the fugue in the last movement is a development of the opening theme of the quartet. The first movement is based on a multiplicity of sharply differentiated themes: one a rhythmic figure hammered out in octaves and another interwoven in an intricate imitative counterpoint. When the ideas have been developed at some length, they are recapitulated in reverse order and melodically inverted, giving the movement the shape of a small arch at one end of the large arch that makes up the whole quartet. In this movement two structural sections are joined by a transition that takes on almost thematic importance, something that Bartók pointed out in his descriptive analysis for listeners. He went on to note that “key centers in the seven segments of the movement form the ascending whole tone scale.”

The second and fourth movements are parallel in shape. The second is a slow nocturne built with an introduction, *Adagio molto*, followed by a main section that has three parts - *Andante*, *Adagio*, and *Largo* – that are followed by a brief coda. The fourth, *Andante*, has a flavor of “night music.” Each has an ABA structure, with almost everything in the second movement duplicated in varied form in the fourth. Both begin hesitantly with fragmentary themes which then are followed by “folk-like” principal subjects and nocturnal melodies in their central parts. The lyrical theme Bartók uses in the second movement reappears in the fourth movement, but in a more ornamented and expanded version.

At the center of the quartet is the ingratiating *Scherzo: Alla bulgarese* (“in the Bulgarian manner”), a complicated web of rhythm and sound. Bartók first had encountered the kind of uneven rhythms he uses here in 1912 in the course of his research on the folk music of Bulgarians living within the borders of Hungary. The music is written in measures of nine beats. In conventional scores these would be divided into three groups of three; however, perhaps to offset the symmetries elsewhere in the quartet, Bartók here uses an uneven group of 4 + 2 + 3 beats. This uneven distribution, with occasional silent beats and a sense of syncopation, embody Bulgarian folk music but to American ears sometimes seems to suggest jazz. In a central trio section the measure is expanded to ten beats of a constantly repeated, rapidly rushing figure introduced by the first violin while the other instruments repeat a simple melody.

The *Finale* uses many elements derived from the first movement but with dance-like abandon. After an introduction, *Allegro vivace*, the music increases in tempo to *Presto*, which continues to the end. Rigorously canonic, the lines closely follow each other at a distance of not more than a measure. The work pushes forward with enormous energy through dense contrapuntal sections that even include an exciting fugue; they relax only for a few *Allegretto* interludes, one (according to Bartók) “capricious,” and the other, a variant, “indifferent.” In the capricious one, the second violin articulates a little melodic subject, accompanied by pizzicato chords sounding “deliciously out of tune.” The “indifferent” variant is peculiar; critics have hypothesized that it is an autobiographical touch, as here Bartók introduces a hurdy-gurdy tune, a melody taken from one of the movement’s other episodes. Another interesting quality is the use of silence, a dramatic feature used several times that provides intensity through its contrast. Throughout the rest of the movement, many melodies are imitated in inversion. The music accelerates and then hurls to an abrupt end.

Throughout the quartet, Bartók pushes the players’ skills to their limit. Going far beyond the conventional, he demands unusual multiple stops, unorthodox fingerings, several types of pizzicato and glissando, and a battery of special effects. Yet the importance of the work is not the ingenuity of his writing or the novelty of his style, but the strength, distinctions, and persuasion with which the work is infused.

String Quartet in F Major

Maurice Ravel

Son of a distinguished engineer and inventor, Maurice Ravel was born on the French side of the border between France and Spain while his father was working on railroad construction projects in Spain. Soon afterward, the family returned to Paris, where Ravel began his musical studies at age seven. At age 18 he began to write music; by age 20 he was a published composer. At age 27, still a student at the Conservatory in Paris where he was enrolled in Gabriel Fauré's composition class, he submitted the first movement of this quartet for the Conservatory's annual composition prize only to have it dismissed by the faculty committee as too labored. Although the movement was the most conservative of the quartet's eventual four, it still had Ravel's great rhythmic and harmonic freedom, quite beyond the understanding of the reactionary committee which then was responsible for his dismissal from the Conservatory. Only Fauré understood the young composer, who later dedicated the quartet to him. Ravel completed the quartet in 1903, when he was 28; it first was performed in 1904.

Ravel, an intellectual, allied himself with a group of young Parisians called the Apaches, self-declared outcasts made up of artists, poets, and musicians who strove to follow in the footsteps of Rimbaud, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Chopin, Whistler, Valery, Debussy and others as well as to emulate Russian and Asian art. Many Parisian critics were much more perceptive than the Conservatory faculty; the public also immediately recognized Ravel as an important new composer, admiring his exhibition of new quartet textures in this early work. Debussy initially supported Ravel and approved highly of this composition, but after the quartets of the two were inevitably compared and too many critics contended that Ravel borrowed from and patterned his quartet on Debussy's work, the latter distanced himself from the former, who commented "It's probably better for us, after all, to be on frigid terms for illogical reasons." Similarities between the two quartets do exist. Both contain cells of themes, both embrace cyclicity, both use pizzicato to create color in the second movements, and both use mutes in the third movements.

Ravel's quartet, in F Major, integrates several of the influences the Apaches revered while developing its own musical style. In it, Ravel brings Debussy's impressionistic use of varying tone colors together with both the Classicist's transparent textures and tightly controlled structural organization and his own Eastern unusual tonal effects.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato – très doux*, quite classical in construction, is based on the traditional sonata form, with two contrasting themes, both rich and warm, that become lyrically transformed and developed, and are then recalled. The musical material of the first theme reappears in cyclical fashion later in the quartet, tightly interwoven with the subject matter of the succeeding movements. The first violin and viola together introduce the second theme, playing in unison but two octaves apart, creating an unusual tone color. Second comes a brilliant scherzo, *Assez vif – très rythmé*, with a colorful pizzicato opening that Ravel used to create something that has been likened to the sound of a Javanese gamelan or the sound of bells. Here Ravel uses cross rhythms, as the outer instruments, the first violin and the cello, play in $\frac{3}{4}$ meter while the inner parts, the second violin and viola, play in $\frac{6}{8}$ meter. A contrasting broad section makes up the center, and a short recapitulation of the first section brings the movement to an end. The next movement, *Très lent*, very slow, free, and rhapsodic, has frequently changing tempos and, in cyclic fashion, contains the first theme of the first movement within the new theme. Here again the tone colors are imaginative and diverse. The spirited finale, *Viv et agité*, alternates vigorous drive with calm repose. Historians have suggested that its five-beat rhythm may have Russian inspiration. In any case, it has an unstable feel. Here again the theme of the first movement returns, alternating with lyrical themes and the angry opening motif.

- notes provided by Susan Halpern

About the Artists

Since its 1996 debut, the **Jerusalem Quartet** has become a regular guest on the world's great concert stages. From its home base in Israel, the ensemble has appeared frequently throughout Europe in venues such as London's Wigmore Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Munich Herkulessaal, and Theatre des Champs-Élysées. It also has made regular bi-annual tours of the United States; we are delighted to have the group join us during the latest of those tours.

The ensemble opened this season with a new Yiddish program that included the Israeli soprano Hila Baggio performing a collection of Yiddish cabaret songs from Warsaw in the 1920s; instrumental works by Schulhoff and Korngold rounded out the program. The Bartók being played tonight is a preview of their appearance next month at Wigmore Hall, when they will present all six of his quartets.

The Jerusalem Quartet records exclusively for Harmonia Mundi. Their recordings, particularly the albums featuring Haydn's string quartets and Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," have been honored with numerous awards, such as the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award for chamber music. In 2018, the quartet released two albums, one of Dvorak's String Quintet Op. 97 and Sextet Op. 48, and one of the string quartets of Debussy and Ravel. This spring they will release a unique album that explores Jewish music in Central Europe between the wars.

First violinist **Alexander Pavlovsky** is a graduate of the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, where he now is a faculty member, in classes by Prof. Matvei Lieberman, and of the Young Musicians Group of the Jerusalem Music Centre founded by Isaac Stern. In 2009 he was appointed Artistic Director of the Zeist Chamber Music Festival and Masterclasses in the Netherlands. He plays a J.F.Pressenda violin dating from 1824, lent by the Jerusalem Pressenda Syndicate.

Second violinist **Sergei Bresler** was born in Ukraine in 1978, emigrating to Israel in 1991 to continue his studies with Prof. Lieberman. He has performed as a soloist with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Young Philharmonic Orchestra, and Ludwigsburg Symphony Orchestra. He plays a 1770 Lorenzo Storioni violin lent by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, donated to the Foundation by Isaac Stern.

Violist **Ori Kam** was born in La Jolla, CA, growing up in both the United States and Israel. He made his debut at the age of 16 with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Zubin Mehta. He has been the winner of several awards and prizes, and the recipient of scholarships from the America-Israel Culture Foundation. Before joining the Jerusalem Quartet, he was a member of the Berlin Philharmonic; he now is on the faculty of the Geneva University of Music. He plays a viola made in 2009 by Hiroshi Iizuka.

Cellist **Kyril Zlotnikov**, a founding member of the Jerusalem Quartet, was born in Minsk, Belarus, to a family of professional musicians, and began his musical studies there. He continued them in Israel with Prof. Uzi Wiesel and Hillel Zori, completing them at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. He is a regular guest at major chamber music festivals; since 2009 he has been a principal cellist and a teacher of the cello group at the "West-Eastern Divan Orchestra" under Maestro Daniel Barenboim. He plays a 1710 Giovanni Battista Ruggieri cello generously loaned to him from a private collection.



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