

68th Concert Series 2021-22



is pleased to present

The Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky, violin

Sergei Bresler, violin

Ori Kam, violin

Kyril Zlotnikov, cello

Saturday, April 23, 2022. 8:00 pm
Ossining High School, Ossining, 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 68th 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 would welcome 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 marketing, writing/publishing production, and/or fund development skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the range together.

Acknowledgments

We are proud to be a grantee of ArtsWestchester with funding made possible by Westchester County government with the support of County Executive George Latimer, the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA), the Rea Foundation, and the Bergen Foundation. Additional support has been received from many friends of Friends of Music, including subscribers and other ticket holders listed in this program.* If you, too, can contribute in this way, please send your gifts to Friends of Music Concerts, Inc., P.O. Box 675, Millwood, NY 10546.

Program

Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2

Allegro assai appassionato

Scherzo (Allegro di molto)

Andante

Presto agitato

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

Langsamer Satz

Anton von Webern

(1883-1945)

Intermission

String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11

Moderato e semplice

Andante cantabile

Scherzo. Allegro non tanto e con fuoco

Finale. Allegro giusto

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(1840-1893)

The Jerusalem Quartet appears by arrangement with David Roe Artists. www.davidrowartists.com

The Jerusalem Quartet records for Harmonia Mundi

www.jerusalemstringquartet.com

Next concert

Saturday, April 30, 2022, 8:00 pm at **Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York**

The Pacifica Quartet with Orion Weiss, piano.

Program: Florence Price's String Quartet No. 1 in G Major; Prokofiev's String Quartet No. 2 in F Major; Dvořák's Piano Quintet in A minor.

Program notes

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2

Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn was a musical prodigy who as a little boy wrote very mature compositions. The young composer's grandfather was Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment who was immortalized in Lessing's 1783 play *Nathan the Wise*, and his father was a wealthy banker. When his family learned that the boy was a genius, they spared nothing to nurture his artistic maturity. Musicales were held on alternate Sunday mornings in the Mendelssohn house in Berlin and often were attended by important touring performers who were passing through the Prussian capital. There always was chamber music, sometime an orchestra, occasionally even an opera. The guests frequently performed and, almost every time, young Felix had composed a work to be included in the program.

In 1837 and 1838 Mendelssohn composed three string quartets that were published in 1839 as a set, Op. 44, dedicated to His Royal Highness Charles John, the Crown Prince of Sweden. By this time, of course, he no longer was a child prodigy but was a mature artist of great distinction, admired throughout Europe for his gifts as a composer, conductor, and pianist. In March 1837 he was married and a month later, at the start of an extended honeymoon many months long, he began work on the quartets. These quartets have been termed "neoclassical" because they show no experimental or particularly unconventional features.

Mendelssohn began this quartet in April. Although it was issued as the third in the set, on June 18th it became the first of the three to be completed. It was performed in public for the first time on November 19, 1837 (and was repeated three weeks later) by Ferdinand David's quartet. Some years later, Mendelssohn wrote his Violin Concerto for David and a group of his colleagues from the Gewandhaus ("Drapers' Hall") Orchestra.

The first movement, *Allegro assai appassionato*, is a feverishly hot-blooded treatment of two fluent melodies. The extension and development of those musical ideas and the full-textured writing for just the few instruments define the style as what Mendelssohn called "symphonic," even in his chamber music. Mendelssohn immediately states the main theme, one that Arthur Cohn identifies as being Classicist because of the way it outlines the components of the home key's tonic triad, a practice much used by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. The music is turbulent, agitated, and concentrated. Next comes a *Scherzo (Allegro di molto)*, one of Mendelssohn's archetypal, colorful, light-footed elfin dances. The contrasting *Andante* that follows could be described as a not-all-that-slow slow movement; the first violin sings a long, lyrical melody, a song without words. The finale, *Presto agitato*, is a tumultuous passionate drama in much the same spirit as the first movement. Full of energy and vitality, it includes the use of counterpoint.

Langsamer Satz

Anton von Webern

Anton Webern was a composer whose importance and worth could not be measured by the small number of his brief compositions. It would take only about four hours to play his complete oeuvre, because his musical expression is so condensed, his craft so precise, and his ideas so pure in conception. Yet his works affected the composers of Europe and America during the twenty-five years after the Second World War more than did any other single influence.

Webern's first music teacher was his mother, an amateur pianist. He had a classical education and then studied music history and theory at the University of Vienna, where he earned a doctorate in musicology in 1906. He studied composition with Arnold Schoenberg from 1904 to 1908. Shortly thereafter Webern, his fellow pupil Alban Berg, and their teacher already were acknowledged as a new second Viennese school, historical successors of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, whose careers had been interlocked there more than a century earlier. Webern earned his living as a conductor until the arrival of the Nazis in Austria put an end to most of his professional work. An accidental shooting by an American soldier ended his life prematurely.

Most of Webern's mature works are tiny musical microcosms, miniatures in duration but very highly condensed. **Langsamer Satz**, around ten minutes in duration, is a slow movement for string quartet, written in June 1905 in Vienna, while Webern was studying with Schoenberg. It is the longest work Webern ever completed. He composed this work of his young adulthood at a time when he was very much in love with his cousin Wilhelmine, who later became his wife. Since it is a very early work, it is uncharacteristically exuberant as well as unusually intimate and tender, reflecting Wagner's influence more than many of Webern's later works. It is written in ternary form; its melodic themes are rooted in post-Brahmsian romanticism, and are tonal. It features sophisticated motivic interpolations, especially in the inversion of the initial theme, which can be seen as a precursor of one of twelve-tone music's basic processes. It was not performed publicly until 1962, when it premiered at a Webern festival in Seattle, where it was performed by the University of Washington String Quartet.

String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11

Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky

As a young man, Tchaikovsky seemed destined for an undistinguished career as a low-level bureaucrat; he did not start to study music seriously until he was twenty-one years old. Two years later, Nicolai Rubinstein helped find him some beginning pupils so he could devote his full-time attention to music. By 1866 he was trained well enough to join the faculty of the new conservatory that Rubinstein started in Moscow. Soon he was also working on large-scale compositions, such as his first symphony, an opera, a piano sonata, and the first version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

After taking a very expensive trip to western Europe in 1870, Tchaikovsky decided to

try to earn money by giving a concert of his own music, as Rubinstein had suggested. He engaged some locally popular singers to perform several short works; instrumental music, he decided, would be represented by a string quartet that he would write specifically for this occasion, since he could not afford an orchestra.

He immediately went to work on **String Quartet No. 1 in D Major**, completing it in February 1871. At the March 28th concert, it was performed in public for the first time by four of the composer's colleagues on the Moscow Conservatory faculty. The entire concert was a public relations triumph, because it was attended by Ivan Turgenev, who was considered one of the greatest Russian writers although he had lived abroad during much of his adult life. Although he arrived too late to hear the quartet, it was said that he had come because of Tchaikovsky's high reputation in the West.

However, the quartet did acquire the admiration of another famous literary figure in Leo Tolstoy, who sat beside the composer at a concert performance given in 1877. "Probably never in my life as a musician," Tchaikovsky reported, "have I felt so flattered and so proud of my work as when Tolstoy, sitting beside me and listening to the *Andante*, burst into tears." Ironically, the composer was to learn later that the great Tolstoy was thought to have terrible taste in music.

Nonetheless, interest in this quartet long has centered on that almost too popular slow movement, which now exists in hundreds and hundreds of versions. Its main theme is a Russian or Ukrainian folk song that Tchaikovsky first had heard being sung during the summer of 1869 by a workman at the country estate of a relative. The original words are said to have begun, "Vanya is sitting and smoking." In some versions, he is said to be drinking. Whatever the activity, it was hardly as highly charged with emotion as was Tchaikovsky's version of it. Later his benefactress Nadzhada van Meek, with whom he carried on a sexually charged though strictly epistolary intimacy, wrote that it affected her as a glass of strong drink might and, when she played it on the piano, "at the end, this music sent a shiver through me from head to foot."

Elsewhere in the quartet, Tchaikovsky was striving to write in the spirit of his idols, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schumann: the romantic Classicists and the classical Romantics. The first movement, *Moderato e semplice*, runs its course with two themes whose pulses are so flexible that one quickly loses track of meter and rhythm or of where the beats fall that would be conventionally considered to be the strong and the weak one. Both themes are developed with power and skill and then brought back again in recapitulation.

The second movement is the previously mentioned *Andante cantabile*. Its contrasting second theme with the pizzicato accompaniment is one of Tchaikovsky's greatest inventions. Next comes a lively *Scherzo, Allegro non tanto e con fuoco*, with a contrasting central section. The quartet closes with a grand *Finale. Allegro giusto*, which is a classical rondo-sonata combination using original tunes in folk character as it makes its way to the grand closing coda, *Allegro vivace*.

--- Notes provided by Susan Halpern

About the Artists

“Passion, precision, warmth, a gold blend: these are the trademarks of this excellent Israeli string quartet,” said *The New York Times* of the Jerusalem Quartet. We and our audience agreed. We therefore are pleased to welcome them back for their second appearance on our series.

Since the ensemble’s founding in 1993 and subsequent 1996 debut, the Jerusalem Quartet has developed a wide repertoire of both traditionally classical and newer works and has been a regular and beloved guest on the world’s great concert stages. With regular bi-annual visits to North America, the Quartet has performed in cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington, and Cleveland, as well as at the Ravinia Festival. In Europe they have made regular appearances in London’s Wigmore Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Munich Herdulessaal, and Theatre des Champs-Élysées, together with special guest performances throughout the continent.

The Jerusalem Quartet’s recordings for the label Harmonia Mundi have been honored with numerous awards, such as the Diapason d’Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award for chamber music. In 2012 the Quartet released a unique album exploring Jewish music in Central Europe between the wars and its far-reaching influence. The recording featured the Quartet with Israeli soprano Hila Baggio performing a collection of Yiddish cabaret songs from 1920s Warsaw, arranged by composer Leonid Desyatnikov, as well as works by Schulhoff and Korngold. The second installment of their Bartok quartet recording was released in 2020.

During the 2021-22 season, the Quartet will repeat its tremendously successful 2018-19 collaboration by reuniting with Pinchas Zuckerman and Amanda Forsyth for a limited number of sextet concerts. In spring 2022 the Quartet’s Yiddish Cabaret program will make its North American debut with a performance at the Vancouver Recital Society. Additional highlights of the season include a Beethoven cycle at Wigmore Hall and a return to the Quartet Biennales in Paris, Amsterdam, and London.



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