

64th Concert Series 2017-2018



The Modigliani Quartet

Amaury Coeytaux, violin

Loïc Rio, violin

Laurent Marfaing, viola

François Kieffer, cello

Saturday, November 18, 2017

Ossining High School, Ossining, New York



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Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization that brings to Westchester audiences world-renowned ensembles and distinguished younger musicians chosen from among the finest artists in today's diverse world of chamber music. Through our Partnership in Education program in public schools, and free admission to our six-concert season for those 18 years of age and under, we give young people throughout the county enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music, building audiences of the future.

We need additional helping hands to carry out our mission. Do consider joining the volunteers listed above. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can discuss several specific areas in which assistance is needed.

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Program

String Quartet in D Major, K. 575

Allegretto

Andante

Menuetto: Allegro

Allegretto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Quartet No. 1 in E minor, Op. 112

Allegro

Molto Allegro quasi presto

Molto adagio

Allegro non troppo

Camille Saint-Saëns

(1835-1921)

Intermission

String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80

Allegro vivace assai

Allegro assai

Adagio

Allegretto molto

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

The Modigliani Quartet appears by arrangement with Arts Management Group, Inc.,
150 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

The Modigliani Quartet has recorded for the Mirare label since 2008.

Next Concert

Saturday, April 14, 2018, 8:00 pm at Ossining High School, Ossining, New York

Edward Arron, cello, “and friends”

Program: Beethoven: Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 2 (“Ghost”);

Ravel: Sonata for Violin and Cello (1920-22); Dvořák: Piano Trio in F minor, Op. 65.

Program notes

String Quartet in D Major, K. 575

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart, unlike earlier composers, was not employed by the church or court but worked as a free artist. Initially his popularity as composer, performer, and teacher produced sufficient income for him through commissions, but his quick rise to fame was followed by a decline. By 1788 his commissions were greatly reduced, and his financial situation had become precarious. His pupil, Prince Lichnowsky (later an intimate of Beethoven), had become almost the only member of the Viennese nobility who continued to take an active interest in Mozart and understand his greatness. In 1789 Lichnowsky took Mozart to Berlin to meet the Prussian king, Frederick William II, a devoted music lover and amateur cellist. The King paid Mozart a moderate fee for a private concert at court, and commissioned six string quartets for himself and six piano sonatas for his daughter, Princess Friederike. Mozart composed this quartet in June, a sonata for the Princess in July, and two more quartets in early 1790. However, he never completed the commission.

In this quartet, Mozart's writing has richness and body. He took great pains to make the royal cellist an active participant. Since Frederick William was no ordinary courtly dilettante but rather was very talented, Mozart provided elegant melodic material for him throughout. Every movement includes prominent cello solos with the instrument at the top of its range; in order to accommodate these, Mozart gave similar solos to the other quartet members, varying the line and texture to avoid repetitiveness.

The work is a mature masterpiece, like Mozart's last symphonies, showing new strength. Its character is optimistic and playful. The *Allegro* first movement features an old style of "singing" theme animated by appoggiaturas and rapid rhythmic figures. Because the second principal theme has such similarity to the first, Mozart adds variety by introducing a completely new theme in the short development section.

The second, compact movement, *Andante*, is slow but only relatively so. Its melody has similarities to the song *Das Veilchen*, K. 476, Mozart's only setting of a Goethe poem. Here, development is very important. The third movement, *Menuetto*, includes strong *sforzati*, a kind of loud accenting similar to those Beethoven later used. In its contrasting central Trio section, the cello has a prominent lyrical melody. In the last movement, *Allegretto*, the cello articulates the main theme, a recurring subject derived from the subject of the first movement. Counterpoint soon complements these, and the process repeats with different combinations of instruments. In addition, Mozart inverts the theme and establishes a Rondo with variations.

— notes provided by Susan Halpern

Quartet No. 1 in E minor, Op. 112

Camille Saint-Saëns

Saint-Saëns was a child prodigy, with perfect pitch and a fantastic memory. He learned the piano and organ, and played the music of Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart in recitals. He composed nice waltzes and gallops by the age of five, and wrote his first symphony at sixteen. His first famous opera was *Samson and Dalila* (1877). He wrote several other operas, too, but they were less well-known outside of France. He always was surprised that the greater public gave him such high praise, yet constantly wanted to hear *Samson and Dalila* and ignored his other work. Over the course of his lifetime he composed more than 300 pieces, including thirteen operas, and he was the first major composer to write specifically for the cinema. He toured frequently, conducting his oratorios and premiering his piano concertos all over Europe, Latin America, and the United States, sometimes accompanied by his servant, Gabriel, and his pet dogs.

Saint Saëns also was the author of eleven books on music, poetry, archeology, and astronomy. After the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, he helped found the Société Nationale de Musique expressly to support new work by French composers, but resigned in 1876, worried about the group's developing strong commitment to Wagner's methods.

In **Quartet No. 1**, a powerful and original work composed in 1899 at the relatively old age of sixty-four, Saint-Saëns successfully combined both Classical and Romantic styles; its harmonic language, rhythmic ideas, and melodies are often akin to those of a composer of the early romantic period. It was composed while Saint-Saëns was on a trip to Argentina and the Canary Islands, where it was premiered and received with tremendous acclaim. Although at the time he already had written more than 25 chamber works, this was his first without organ or piano; he dedicated it to the violin virtuoso Eugène Ysaÿe.

In this quartet, Saint-Saëns has created music of charm and grace, with emotional depth and a mastery of counterpoint in which the rendering of delicate proportions remains paramount. A slow, somewhat melancholy introduction opens the first movement, a vigorous *Allegro*. A single note played by the first violin is the first sound heard; a muted chord from the other instruments follows. A spirited, lyrical melody ensues, and then contrasting ideas are introduced, including a lovely, elegiac cello theme that heralds a mood change.

The very fast second movement, an unusual Scherzo, *Molto allegro quasi presto*, is pervaded rhythmically and formally with the spirit of Schumann. It begins with a syncopated folk-like melody in the minor. Repeated at the same tempo but with shorter notes, the music all of a sudden seems to be going twice as fast. Other ideas appear; some of them are complicated variations on the theme, played with great driving speed before Saint-Saëns introduces a powerful but brief four-voiced fugue. He appends a slow, lyrical coda near the end before briefly returning to an initial theme, then concluding by fading into a whisper.

An intense, reflective slow movement, *Molto adagio*, has a wistful, long-lined embellished melodic line introduced by the first violin, quite probably composed with his dedicatee, Ysaÿe, in mind. The violin dominates the movement until a more turbulent staccato central section provides a contrast. The main themes return to close the movement.

The finale, *Allegro non troppo*, recalls the feeling of the second movement but without its intensity, although varied rhythms do create a sense of restlessness. Complex figures, themes, and rhythms from previous movements are used again as various sections of different character alternate, before the work ends exuberantly with a furious acceleration in a brisk, virtuosic coda.

— notes provided by Susan Halpern; introduction by Garrison Keillor

String Quartet in F minor, Op. 80

Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn, too, was an extraordinary child prodigy, a composer whose first public performance occurred when he was nine. In his early works, there was miraculously nothing childlike. His genius was nurtured by his banker father, whose Sunday musicales in Berlin were not to be missed by any touring musician. There always was chamber music and almost every time there was something the young composer had written. In his privileged home workshop, the young man developed his skills and polished his craft; at the age of sixteen he wrote his nearly perfect **String Octet**, and at seventeen, the **Midsummer Night's Dream Overture**.

In contrast to them, the **Quartet in F minor** is a late, mature work, written in Switzerland in the very last year of the composer's life, and not published until February 1850. There still is some dispute as to its inspiration. One camp feels it probably was inspired by the death of Mendelssohn's beloved sister, Fanny, and sees it as an impassioned, agitated lament. Others believe it to be a reaction to the vehemence of Beethoven's Opus 95.

In the first movement, *Allegro vivace assai*, Beethoven's influence is readily apparent. The tenseness of the second movement, *Allegro assai*, comes from the emotional cantabile of the first violin accompanied by the churning accompaniment of the other instruments. The *Adagio* is calm, but still seen by some as filled with grief. The beginning of the final movement, *Allegretto molto*, is syncopated; then it grows to a great state of agitation, with all four instruments seemingly attempting to break the bonds that hold them. The movement ends with continued assertiveness and drama.

— notes provided by Susan Halpern

About the Artists

Formed in 2003, the Paris-based **Modigliani Quartet** is a regular guest of the world's major venues such as London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie Hall, the Philharmonie de Paris, Amsterdam's Het Concertgebouw, Berlin's Konzerthaus, Cologne's Philharmonie, Geneva's Victoria Hall, Brussels' Bozar, Vienna's Musikverein and Konzerthaus, Salzburg's Mozarteum, Munich's Prinzregententheater and Herkulesaal, Barcelona's Auditori, Tokyo's Oji Hall, Luxemburg's Philharmonie, Zurich's Tonhalle, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, and many festivals around the world.

During the 2017-18 season the quartet will tour the United States, Japan, Korea, and throughout Europe. They will return to Wigmore Hall for several concerts, to Carnegie Hall, Paris' Philharmonie, Vienna's Konzerthaus, and Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, among many other venues. At the beginning of 2017 the Modigliani was the first string quartet to perform in the big Hall of the amazing, newly-opened Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg.

In 2014, the quartet became Artistic Directors of the Recontres Musicales d'Évian, a festival on Lake Geneva in the French Alps first created in 1976 by Antoine Ribaud and then made famous through its former artistic director, the legendary cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Now, after a hiatus of thirteen years, the joint efforts of the Evian Resort and the Modigliani have brought such immense success that it has returned to being one of Europe's major summer music festivals.

The quartet has recorded for the Mirare label since 2008, releasing seven award-winning CDs all of which have received great critical acclaim. Their latest recording, released just this fall, is of the three Schumann string quartets in his Opus 41.

Thanks to the generosity and support of private sponsors, the Modigliani Quartet plays on four outstanding Italian instruments: Amaury Coeytaux plays a 1773 violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, Loïc Rio plays a 1780 violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini, Laurent Marfaing plays a 1660 viola by Luigi Mariani, and François Kieffer plays a 1706 cello by Matteo Goffriller (former "Warburg").

The Modigliani Quartet also is very thankful for the help of the SPEDIDAM.

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