

68th Concert Series 2021-22



is pleased to present

The Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin

Austin Hartman, violin

Mark Holloway, viola

Brandon Vamos, cello

and

Orion Weiss, piano

Saturday, April 30, 2022. 8:00 pm

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

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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.

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Program

String Quartet No. 1 in G Major

Allegro

Andante moderato

Florence B. Price

(1887-1953)

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92

Allegro sostenuto

Adagio

Allegro

Sergei Prokofiev

(1891-1953)

Intermission

Quintet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 81

Allegro ma non tanto

Andante con moto

Scherzo (Furiant) molto vivace

Finale. Allegro

Antonín Dvořák

(1841-1904)

Piano by Steinway

Next concert

Saturday, September 17, 2022 at 8:00 pm. Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

The Emerson String Quartet, in their final season

Program: Mendelssohn's String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 12; Brahms's String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 67; George Walker's "Lyric" for String Quartet; Dvořák's String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105

Program notes

String Quartet No. 1 in G Major

Florence B. Price

The early 20th century African-American composer Florence Beatrice Price spent her professional career in Chicago where, because of her extraordinary musical talent and her family's affluence, she was able, despite her race and gender, to study at the Chicago Musical College and the American Conservatory. Later, she enrolled at the New England Conservatory in Boston, where she majored in organ and piano. After graduating with two degrees, Price worked as a college professor, a church organist, and a theater accompanist. Today she is best remembered as the first African-American woman to have had a symphony performed by a major American orchestra; in 1933 the Chicago Symphony Orchestra played her groundbreaking *Symphony in E minor*, which had been the first prize winner of the 1932 Rodman Wanamaker Music Contest. In 1934, that orchestra also premiered her *Piano Concerto*. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, music groups sponsored by the Works Projects Administration (WPA) in Illinois and Michigan performed many of Price's longer works.

Price wrote more than 300 musical compositions. Some have been lost and others remain unpublished, but her piano and vocal music still are being heard in concert halls. Contralto Marian Anderson brought her historic 1939 Lincoln Memorial concert to its conclusion with Price's "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord." Since then, Price's art songs and spiritual settings have been favorites of artists who specialize in African-American concert music.

Price composed two string quartets. As she was raised with two musical traditions, that of African-American music and that of European classical origins, it is not surprising that the music of her **String Quartet No. 1 in G Major**, composed in 1929, makes use of both of them with comfort and authority. One source states that this quartet was not performed from the time of Price's death in 1953 until its revival in 2015.

The themes in this two-movement work meld the late romantic classical tradition (showing in particular the influence of Dvořák) with the spirit of spirituals, hymns, and American folk songs. The first movement, *Allegro*, in sonata form, is filled with the sort of chromatic lines that were associated with late European romanticism. There are frequent key changes; the musical themes and shorter ideas flow quickly from one to the next. The second theme, introduced by the viola, is gently lilting and waltz-like. A vigorous coda concludes the movement.

The second (and final) movement, *Andante moderato*, quite often is performed as an independent piece; it is very charming. Formally and harmonically it, too, shows the influence of Dvořák and other late Romantic composers, but the beautiful melodies (in particular the warm, wistful principal theme), the rhythms, and the mood prominently display Price's affinity to the African-American spiritual tradition. A somewhat quicker middle section, *Allegretto*, begins with free improvisations on the principal theme; as it develops, the theme is heard with a pizzicato accompaniment and in a minor key. The final improvisatory section sounds much like a folk dance. The last section brings back the minor key main theme infused with rhythmic elements suggestive of spirituals.

The Pacifica Quartet recently has added this work to its repertoire. Cellist Brandon Vamos explains its attraction to the quartet members: "It's easy to hear right off the bat, and it's beautiful. There are moments where we are surprised by the harmonic language. And we found that it's a really great way to open a program. It brings the audience in right away, and works really well for us."

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92

Sergei Prokofiev

Prokofiev, a Russian composer who lived and worked in the West as well as in the then Soviet Union, was born in a remote Ukrainian village where his agronomist father worked as manager

of a large estate and his mother gave him his first music lessons. He studied at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg and developed into a brilliant pianist. After the Russian Revolution, he visited America and then settled in Paris, where he was an influential figure until his return to Russia in 1933.

Prokofiev composed only two string quartets. The first was commissioned in 1930 by the Library of Congress in Washington and had its first performance there in 1931. Quartet No. 2 dates from 1941 and was written under entirely different circumstances. Prokofiev, together with many other important Soviet artists, was evacuated to the Northern Caucasus when the Soviet government feared Moscow would be attacked by the Germans in World War II. There, in the city of Nalchik, Prokofiev was attracted to the folk music of the region's little known Kabardinian and Balkar people, and decided to incorporate it in a new string quartet. He finished the composition in November 1941; it was premiered back in Moscow on September 5, 1942.

Prokofiev said that this work "is a combination of virtually untouched folk material and the most classic of classical forms, the string quartet." At many points in the score the sounds of folk instruments are imitated and quartal harmonies used. Soviet critics were happy that Prokofiev used the music of the Kabardino-Balkaria region but still criticized him for using "barbaric harmonies" and over-emphasizing the primitive nature of the folk music.

The sonata-form first movement, *Allegro sostenuto*, is based on three strongly rhythmic themes and a Kabardinian dance melody, "Ujstarikov." The first theme is very dynamic; it captures the childlike character of the folk music and its belligerent character. The second theme comes from a song called "Sosruko." The last of the three is the most lyrical. The development section includes all the variations in temperament Prokofiev has introduced, sometimes harsh, sometimes gentle, with a host of sonorities and effects.

The second movement, *Adagio*, a quiet, atmospheric nocturne, contrasts a song inspired by the melody entitled "Uj hatsatsa" with, in the middle section, a Kabardinian dance, "Islambey." The two parts of the exposition are reversed in the recapitulation. In its middle section, the tempo accelerates to *Poco più animato* and becomes a light serenade, using figures imitative of native Kabardinian dance rhythms and instruments. The opening music then returns, fading away into silence at the end.

The final *Allegro* is a rondo-sonata that begins with a popular vigorous mountain dance melody "Getigezhev ogurbi" followed by a mysteriously lyrical melody and a low-pitched rhythmic one. A dramatic cello cadenza ushers in a brief slower episode, *Andante molto*, but the dance-like *Allegro* returns, allowing the quartet to end gaily, but abruptly.

Quintet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 81

Antonín Dvořák

Dvořák's father was a village innkeeper and butcher who hoped to pass his trade on to his son, but the young man turned instead toward music, studying the violin and organ. At sixteen, he left home for further musical education in Prague. Five years later he joined the Orchestra of the National Theater, playing the viola. Soon he began testing his creative powers with extended compositions in classical forms.

Chamber music had an important place in Dvořák's life. Many of his earliest works were quartets and quintets, modeled on those of Beethoven and Schubert, that he played with his friends and colleagues while developing his craft. He had attempted a piano quintet in G Major much earlier, in 1872; it (Op. 5) was his first work ever to be performed, but it was very different from this later one, in that it was clumsy in construction as well as being much too long and drawn out. This quintet, started as an attempt to revise the earlier work, evolved into an entirely new one, and was submitted for publication.

Dvořák wrote most of this mature, masterful **Piano Quintet** in 1887 at his favorite place, his

house on the edge of the forest land of Vysoká. The quintet received its premiere on January 6, 1888 at a concert of the Umělecká Beseda (Artistic Society). With those of Brahms (Op. 34, 1864) and Schumann (Op. 44, 1842), this quintet forms a trilogy of quintet masterpieces. One of the finest works of Dvořák's fruitful years, its delightful music flows with joyous inspiration, brilliantly written for the instruments. It is gratifying for players and listeners alike.

In the quintet Dvořák successfully joins Czech nationalism and the Austro-German tradition. He based the first expansive sonata-form movement, *Allegro ma non tanto*, on two beautiful, expressive, Czech-flavored themes that contrast but are related musically in such a way that elements from them gracefully intertwine as the music develops. The cello introduces the stately principal theme over a murmuring piano accompaniment, establishing the lyricism of the movement. The viola introduces the second theme. The movement alternates between fast and slow sections, major and minor tonalities, and elicits a wide range of emotions with shifts of mood varying from melancholy to buoyant optimism, anxiety to serenity. It closes dramatically with the initial theme further enlivened by emphatic octaves from the piano.

The lyrical second movement, *Andante con moto*, is a dumka, modeled after the Czech folksong in style and form, characteristically full of nostalgic brooding. Dvořák often used the dumka, which is generally slow and melancholic, but sometimes he introduced sudden changes of mood, as in this movement's *Vivace* section. About his inspiration in nationalistic folk music, he said, "The music of the people is like a rare and lovely flower growing among encroaching weeds; it will command attention and creep into the books of composers." The movement follows rondo form, with the piano introducing the principal nostalgic theme. Although it opens with a minor key melody, following the model of Slavic rapid mood change it soon gives way to a cheerful theme.

Dvořák called the third movement *Scherzo (Furiant) molto vivace*; Furiant is the name of the quick Bohemian folk dance to which it bears a distant resemblance. In the beginning of this ternary form movement, the spirit of the furiant is more in evidence than is the dance's characteristic rhythm of displaced accents. It starts with a lively dance and a contrapuntal subject for viola and piano, but in the middle section it becomes more refined, taking on the flavor of a gentle waltz. The movement ends with an *Allegro* finale in which elegantly contrapuntal passages barely slow the rise of the composer's high spirits. The folkdance returns at the jubilant close.

The light-hearted and spirited *Finale*, in an expansive sonata form with three themes, sparkles with melodic vitality and lively rhythms. A striking fugato led by the second violin is constructed from the first theme during the development. In the coda, a chorale-like section marked *tranquillo* features the main theme of the movement, this time with lengthened notes played *pianissimo*. Although it seems that Dvořák might close quietly in a dreamlike manner, the contrasting slower pace only serves to emphasize the exuberance of that main theme; a quickening *accelerando* brings the quintet to a jubilant finish with an irrepressible burst of energy.

--- Notes provided by Susan Halpern



About the Artists

For the past twenty-six years, the **Pacifica Quartet** has received international recognition for its virtuosity, exuberant performances, and often daring repertory choices. Named quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica previously was quartet-in residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and also served as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago. The group has received numerous Grammy Awards for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance; the latest of these was in 2021 for their album "Contemporary Voices."

The Pacifica Quartet has been the preeminent interpreter of string quartet cycles, portraying each composer's evolution, often over the course of just a few days. Having given highly acclaimed performances of the complete Carter cycle in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Houston; the Mendelssohn cycle in Napa (Australia), New York, and Pittsburgh; and the Beethoven cycle in New York, Denver, St. Paul, Chico, Napa, and at Tokyo's Suntory Hall, the Quartet presented the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago, New York, and at London's Wigmore Hall.

An ardent advocate of contemporary music, the Pacifica Quartet commissions and performs many new works including those by Keeril Makan, Julia Wolfe, and Shulamit Ran, the latter in partnership with the *Music Accord* consortium, Wigmore Hall, and Suntory Hall. The work – entitled *Glitter, Doom, Shards, Memory* – had its New York debut as part of the Chamber Music Society at Lincoln Center series.

In 2008 the Quartet released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter's quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. Cedille Records released the group's four-CD recording of the entire Shostakovich cycle, paired with other contemporary Soviet works, to rave reviews. Other recent recording projects include Leo Ornstein's rarely-heard piano quintet with Marc-Andre Hamelin, the Brahms piano quintet with legendary pianist Menahem Pressler, and the Brahms and Mozart clarinet quintets with the New York Philharmonic's principal clarinetist, Anthony McGill.

Pianist Orion Weiss is one of the most sought-after soloists in his generation of young American musicians. After making his Cleveland Orchestra debut in February 1999 with a performance of Lizst's Piano Concerto No. 1, the following month, with less than 24 hours' notice, he stepped in to replace Andre Watts for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Baltimore Symphony. In 2010 he was named *Young Artist of the Year* by the Classical Recording Artist Foundation. In recent seasons he has performed at the Lucerne Festival, the Denver Friends of Chamber Music, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center's Fortas Series, the 92nd Street Y, and the Broad Stage, and at the Aspen, Bard, and Grand Teton summer festivals.

Weiss also is well known for his affinity and enthusiasm for chamber music. In addition to appearing regularly with the Pacifica Quartet, as he is tonight, he has performed with the Ariel and Parker Quartets; with violinists Augustin Hadelich, William Hagen, Benjamin Beilman, James Ehnes, and Arnaud Susman; the pianists Shai Wosner and Michael Brown; and the cellist Julie Abner. As a recitalist and chamber musician he has appeared across the U.S. at venues and festivals, including Lincoln Center, the Ravinia Festival, Sheldon Concert Hall, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, Chamber Music Northwest, and Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival. In 2005 he toured Israel with the Israel Philharmonic conducted by Itzhak Perlman. From 2002-2004 he was a member of the Chamber Music Society Two of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In 2004 he graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax.

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