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P R E S E N T S

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Jerusalem Quartet

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2024

7:30 PM ET

ROBISON HALL, MAHANEY ARTS CENTER



Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky, Violin

Sergei Bresler, Violin

Ori Kam, Viola

Kyril Zlotnikov, Cello

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 50,

No. 1/Hob.III:44 (“Prussian”)

Franz Josef Haydn

(1732–1809)

Allegro

Adagio

Menuetto. Poco allegretto – Trio

Finale. Vivace

String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133

Dmitri Shostakovich

Moderato-Allegretto

(1906–1975)

Allegretto-Adagio-Moderato-Allegretto

∞ *Intermission* ∞

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 106

Antonin Dvořák

Allegro Moderato

(1841–1904)

Adagio ma non troppo

Molto vivace

Finale (Andante sostenuto–Allegro con fuoco)



*This performance is made possible with generous support
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Program Notes

HAYDN Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 50, No. 1/ Hob.III:44

(“Prussian”)

Note by Laura Keller, courtesy of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

The string quartet genre underwent a remarkable evolution in the 1780s in the hands of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Haydn kicked off the decade with his Op. 33 set of six quartets, saying they were written in “a new, quite special way.” Not only did they show a deeper control over the musical materials and a fresh sense of playfulness, but they were also some of his first works published under a new contract with his employer, Nikolaus Esterházy. Haydn knew the Op. 33 quartets would be some of his first works to be officially distributed (his previous scores had circulated widely in bootleg copies, and he was eager to finally make some money), so he carefully devised them to be some of his most path-breaking, appealing, exciting works.

Mozart, recently moved to Vienna and quickly establishing himself, was so impacted by Haydn’s Op. 33 quartets that he wrote his own set of six and dedicated them to his “best friend” Haydn. Haydn heard them in early 1785 and told Mozart’s father, “Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name.”

The six Op. 50 quartets were the next set of quartets that Haydn wrote after Mozart's extraordinary tribute. Raising the bar yet again, the Op. 50 quartets are more for connoisseurs and less rousing crowd-pleasers than the Op. 33 set had been. Haydn was probably less concerned with popular publication, having had many successes in that area by that point, and more with his reputation and legacy as a master composer.

The autograph manuscripts (written in Haydn's hand) of the Op. 50 quartets were thought to be lost until they turned up in Australia almost two centuries after they were composed. Their story remains mysterious. Haydn probably retained ownership of the complete set until his death, when Nikolaus Esterházy II, his employer, bought his music library. They then somehow made their way to London and passed into the hands of Muzio Clementi. In 1851, almost twenty years after Clementi's death, Nos. 3–6 turned up at a London auction and were purchased by an English colonel and musician who was moving to New Zealand and bought them as an investment for the trip. After the man's death, ownership of the manuscripts transferred to his granddaughter, who lived on a New Zealand sheep station, and then to her half-sister, who took them to Australia. In 1982, the owner brought them to a Melbourne concert celebrating the 250th anniversary of Haydn's birth and showed them to English musicologist Christopher Hogwood. The woman (who wished to remain anonymous) had been storing them under her bed. After they were authenticated and their true worth revealed, she moved them to a safe deposit box. In 1995, they sold at auction for \$1.04 million to German book dealer Hans Schneider. At the time, a Sotheby's spokeswoman

described them as “the largest group [of Haydn quartet manuscripts] not already in a major library or institution.” Manuscript copies of the first two quartets in the set were never found.

SHOSTAKOVICH String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133

Note courtesy of Boosey & Hawkes, the score's publisher

Shostakovich dedicated his 12th quartet to his friend Dmitri Tsyganov who was the first violinist of the Beethoven Quartet. When Tsyganov asked him what the piece was like, the composer replied “It’s a symphony, a symphony!” Certainly, this is a grand work, written in the full flood of his last creative period when he was dogged by ill-health and endless stays in hospital but was still discovering ever more ways forward for his music.

One of more remarkable of those ways was Shostakovich’s prominent use of 12-note rows. By this time, quite a few younger Soviet composers were writing 12-note music, some in the expressive Schoenberg tradition, others in the more constructivist post-Darmstadt serial manner. Shostakovich knew what they were doing, but like Benjamin Britten at approximately the same period, he adopts a different approach, treating the chromaticism of 12-note music as a way of creating discrete points of arrival and departure, like symbols or signs to help us grasp the structure of the music.

There are only two movements in this quartet. After the restless harmonic and melodic exploration of the first movement, there follows a gigantic structure nearly 20 minutes in length and, as Shostakovich's remark to Tsyganov suggested, almost orchestral in effect. It begins as a tumultuous scherzo, the music seemingly swept along by a whirlwind. At its center point, the winds die away and a poignant and tender funeral march appears, playing with the notes D and E-flat (Es in German notation), suggesting the composer's own initials DS. While he was writing this quartet Shostakovich confessed to a friend that every time he wrote a new piece, he was haunted by fears that he would not live to complete it. He was indeed very sick by this stage in his life and it was perfectly true that each new piece could have been his last.

Bit by bit, this funeral march is attacked by other kinds of music. Memories return of the first movement and then the whirlwind begins again, but this time shot through with major key inflections where earlier the music had been in the minor. This gives the drive towards the end a stirring feel of power and triumph against the odds.

Dvořák String Quartet No. 13 in G Major, Op. 106

Note courtesy of Hyperion Records

In the spring of 1891, Dvořák received an invitation from Jeannette Thurber to take up the directorship of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, which she had founded some six years earlier. Although he was hesitant about

uprooting himself, Dvořák allowed himself to be persuaded, and he arrived in New York with his family in the autumn of the following year. The period he spent in the U.S. was something of a mixed blessing: in both New York and Chicago Dvořák was able to conduct his music with first-class orchestras, and at the Conservatory he had some promising students; but at the same time his homesickness was deep-rooted, and it was only temporarily assuaged by a return to Bohemia for a well-earned holiday in 1894. By the summer of the following year, it was clearly time to bid a permanent farewell to the New World.

Since the early months of 1895, Dvořák had composed little other than the first hundred bars or so of a string quartet in A-flat major, but on his return to Prague he found his creative juices flowing once again, and he managed rapidly not only to complete the string quartet he had begun in America, but also to compose a companion piece in G major. The opus numbers of the two works do not reflect their true chronology: it was only after he had composed the String Quartet in G Major, Op. 106 that Dvořák took up the threads of the A-flat work, Op 105. On the autograph score of the G Major quartet, with an obvious sense of relief, he wrote the comment, “the first composition after my second return from America,” and on 23 December 1895 he told his close friend Alois Göbl:

“We are all, thanks be to God, well and rejoice to be able, after three years, to spend a happy and joyous Christmas in Bohemia! How different it was for us last year in America, when we were far away in foreign parts and separated from all

our children and friends! But God has been pleased to grant us this happy moment, and so we all feel inexpressibly glad.

I am now working very hard. I work so easily and everything goes ahead so well that I could not wish it better. I have just finished a new G major quartet and am now finishing a second in A-flat major.”

The premiere of the G major quartet was given in Prague on October 9, 1896 by the Bohemian Quartet.

There is little in Dvořák’s G Major quartet that betrays evidence of his recent cultural experiences in America. Only a short passage in the scherzo reverts to the type of pentatonic melody inspired by the Native American music he had heard in the preceding years, and which he had exploited almost to excess in such works as the “American” string quartet (Op 96), and the Sonatina for violin and piano (Op 100). For the rest, the quartet is imbued not only with a mellow warmth that seems to reflect the composer’s happiness at finding himself once more in familiar surroundings, but also—in its slow movement—a strong vein of melancholy.

The quartet’s opening subject, with its yearning ascending melodic intervals and its rustling trills followed by a cascade of violin arpeggios, is succeeded by a quiet “rocking” motif given out by the two lower instruments. The latter idea soon returns in a more forceful form, providing a strong affirmation of the home key, before an expressive theme in a gently swaying triplet motion is

heard in a succession of distant keys. This new theme will make an unexpected reappearance during the closing stages of the finale.

For his development section, Dvořák mines all three ideas presented during the quartet's opening pages before the recapitulation sets in, with the second violin presenting a new countersubject to the main theme. Notably absent from the recapitulation is the rocking second theme, though it eventually returns during the final moments to round the piece off in rousing style. Meanwhile, the swaying third theme has been subtly, and quite beautifully, re-scored for the viola beneath a whispering accompaniment from the violins, and with pizzicato cello chords completing the texture.

The slow movement wavers constantly between major and minor, and between serenity and tension. Behind it lies the notion of the double variation form cultivated so assiduously by Haydn, in which two closely related themes—one in the major, the other in the minor—are varied alternately. The introductory bars seem to sum up the progress of the piece as a whole: beginning in the minor, they foreshadow the main theme's initial phrase before they culminate in a forceful major chord. The theme itself eventually gives way to a more flowing, but melancholy, variant in the minor. The music's short-lived climax is reached with a grandiose statement of the opening theme in C major—an idea Dvořák may have borrowed from the similar moment in the slow movement of Smetana's famous string quartet "From My Life". Dvořák had played the viola in the private first performance of Smetana's work in 1878.

The energetic B minor scherzo, with its discombobulated, percussive parts for the two lower players, provides the quartet's most overtly Slavonic movement. Its second half features a more lyrical interlude in A flat major, in the shape of a smooth pentatonic melody given out by the violins, before the music returns to the atmosphere of its beginning. In the slower trio section, we seem to hear the distant sound of horns.

The descending shape of the finale's lively main theme is anticipated in a short slow introduction that returns in more expansive form during the later course of the piece. On its reappearance, the slow passage is followed by an echo of the swaying third theme from the opening movement—soon to be joined by the fleeting violin arpeggios from the quartet's beginning. From this point onwards, these two ideas are increasingly absorbed into the fabric of the finale's material.



Ensemble Biography

Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky, Violin

Sergei Bresler, Violin

Ori Kam, Viola

Kyril Zlotnikov, Violoncello

“Passion, precision, warmth, a gold blend: these are the trademarks of this excellent Israeli string quartet.”

Such was the *Times*' (London) impression of the Jerusalem Quartet. Since the ensemble's founding in 1993 and subsequent 1995 debut, the four Israeli musicians have embarked on a journey of growth and maturation. Their breadth of repertoire and stunning depth of expression have firmly established their unique place in the string quartet tradition. The ensemble has found its core in a warm, full, human sound and an egalitarian balance between high and low voices. This approach allows the quartet to maintain a healthy relationship between individual expression and a transparent and respectful presentation of the composer's work. It is also the drive and motivation for their continuing refinement of its interpretations of the classical repertoire as well as exploration of new epochs.

The Jerusalem Quartet is a regular and beloved guest on the world's great concert stages. The 2024/25 season will mark the Quartet's 30th anniversary. To

celebrate this milestone, the Quartet will put a spotlight on the cycle of Shostakovich's 15 quartets, which they will present in 10 cities worldwide including St. Paul, Cleveland, and Portland (Oregon), London, Zurich, Amsterdam, Cologne, and Sao Paulo. Additional highlights this season include performances in Houston, Miami, Boston, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Iowa City, Cincinnati, and Monterrey, Mexico, among other North American cities, and a return to the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Theatre Champs-Élysées in Paris, and London's Wigmore Hall.

The Jerusalem Quartet's numerous recordings have garnered many awards and accolades including the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award for chamber music. After releasing 16 albums for the Harmonia Mundi label starting in 2005, the quartet now records exclusively for the BIS label. The quartet's inaugural release for BIS, in December 2024, will include Shostakovich quartets Nos. 2, 7, and 10. Previous releases for Harmonia Mundi include a unique album exploring Jewish music in Central Europe between the wars, including a collection of Yiddish Cabaret songs from Warsaw in the 1920s, featuring Israeli Soprano Hila Baggio. In 2020, the Jerusalem Quartet released the second (and last) album of their complete Bartók cycle.

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

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We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.

We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.