



Elena Olivo

23|24 SEASON

 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

APOLLON MUSAGÈTE QUARTET

PAWEŁ ZALEJSKI, violin

BARTOSZ ZACHŁOD, violin

PIOTR SZUMIEŁ, viola

PIOTR SKWERES, cello

SUN, FEB 11, 2:00 pm

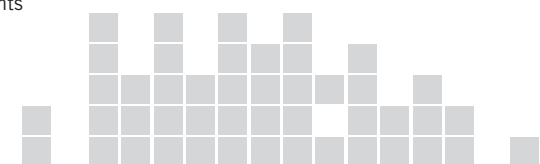
Hodgson Concert Hall

Discography: OEHMSCLASSICS
Management: ARTS MANAGEMENT GROUP, INC., 130 West 57th St.,
New York, NY 10019

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PROGRAM

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Quartet in D Minor, Op. 34 [33:00]

- I. Allegro
- II. Alla polka: Allegretto scherzando
- III. Adagio
- IV. Finale: Poco allegro

GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858-1924)

Crisantemi [5:00]

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2 [33:00]

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante moderato
- III. Quasi Minuetto, moderato
- IV. Finale: Allegro non assai

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2024

String Quartet No.9 in D minor, Op.34

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Dvořák composed fourteen string quartets between 1862 and 1895. The enormous popularity of the twelfth, the so-called “American” Quartet, Op. 96, has virtually eclipsed the others. That makes the opportunity to hear this mid-career work all the more special.

When he won the Austrian State Stipend in 1877, Dvořák was 36. It was his fourth try at the award, bestowed by a Viennese commission to gifted musicians in the Bohemian, Moravian, and Hungarian parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Beginning in 1875, Johannes Brahms served on the commission. He was quick to spot the enormous talent evident in the scores submitted by Dvořák. Brahms was instrumental in securing the award for the young Bohemian composer.

Dvořák completed a new quartet in a period of barely two weeks in December 1877. He left the manuscript with Brahms’s Viennese housekeeper in January, along with a letter that reveals humility and awe, along with gratitude for Brahms’s support.

And now I venture to address another respectful request to you, highly revered Master. Permit me that I might offer you, out of gratitude and deepest respect for your incomparable creations, the dedication of my D-minor quartet. It would indeed do me but the greatest honor, and I would be the happiest of men. . . .

Brahms replied that the dedication would be an honor. The two composers finally met in December, 1878, by which point Brahms had recommended this quartet and another Dvořák composition to his own publisher, Fritz Simrock. “The best that a musician must have, Dvořák has, and is also in these pieces,” Brahms wrote. Within a year, Simrock had published nine of Dvořák’s works, an endorsement that did much to boost his growing reputation.

The D minor quartet is classical in structure. Some writers have detected a Schubertian influence in it. This listener hears several Brahmsian themes, particularly in the first movement. The thick texture and almost orchestral density of the writing also remind one of Brahms’s chamber music. In any case, Dvořák’s D minor quartet is a seminal work in his transition to full mastery. The urgency of the writing, through to the decisive unison close, bespeak a musician with a strong sense of direction and dramatic thrust.

The second movement is more markedly Czech. This quartet is the first one in which he employs the dances of his homeland in lieu of a scherzo. First is a polka in B-flat major with pizzicato used to great effect, then a *sousedská* [“neighbor’s dance”] in E-flat. The latter, in slow triple time, is a relative of the waltz and the Austrian *Ländler*. Dvořák’s metric switch (the polka is in duple time) has precedent in Schumann’s chamber music. Dvořák’s use of Czech dances may be borrowed from his countrymen Smetana and Fibich.

For his Adagio, Dvořák modulates to D major. Despite the muted strings, frequent double-stopping recalls the

dense textures of the first movement, often expanding the harmony to six parts. The major mode does not preclude the slow movement's melancholic air. Here, the extended lines and leisurely pace that ideas unfold *do* seem to derive more from Schubert. Allusions to one of the first movement themes at the end of the Adagio lend subtle unity to the music.

The quartet closes with a vigorous, agitated *Poco allegro* that requires virtuosic playing from each member of the quartet as well as superb ensemble. The music returns to the urgency of the first movement. Even a brief flirtation with major mode does not relieve the tension. A passionate coda drives the tempo even faster to end in a fortissimo fury of D minor.

Crisantemi

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Any opera fans in the audience? For those of you who know Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893), the music from *Crisantemi* occurs in the opera's final act: as the curtain rises, when Des Grieux and Manon are dragging across the desert, exhausted; then later, when he addresses her from outside the bars of her prison window. *Crisantemi* predates the opera by several years, however, dating from 1890. This jewel for string quartet (later transcribed for string orchestra) is one of several examples of musical material originally for instruments that Puccini recycled for use in his operas. "Puccini always knew how to insert the recycled passages at the most suitable place," Michele Girardi has written, "so that when reheard in the new context they do not jar stylistically with their surroundings."

If that observation is true, then it is because the music was so appropriate

in its original guise. *Crisantemi* is a threnody: a funeral oration in music. Puccini composed in memory of Amedeo di Savoia, duke of Aosta, who died 18 January, 1890. Less than three weeks after the duke's death, on 6 February, Puccini reported to his father that the new piece:

. . . was performed with great success by Campanari at the Conservatory and at Brescia. I wrote it in one night on the death of Amadeo [sic] di Savoia.

Most of Puccini's surviving chamber music—and there is precious little—consists of exercises he composed at Milan's Conservatorio. This one had a more benign fate, although it is clouded with the death that prompted its composition. Puccini's melancholy mode is well-suited to the idea of a threnody, and the atmosphere is unchanged, perhaps even enhanced, by his transcription for string orchestra. In the opera, both of *Crisantemi's* themes are associated with Manon's physical deterioration. This type of motivic connection with death would remain consistent throughout Puccini's career.

String Quartet in A minor, Opus 51 No. 2

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Johannes Brahms left no excess baggage behind when he died in April 1897. Unlike Beethoven, who hoarded all his musical sketches and conversation notebooks, Brahms preserved no record of his creative and thought processes. If a composition did not satisfy him after revision, he destroyed it. Occasionally he reworked one composition into another; the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15, for example, was originally intended to be a symphony. But Brahms took the legacy of Beethoven very

seriously, and it is not without reason that the Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68, was hailed as "the Beethoven Tenth" when it was premiered in 1876. The composer had waited until the age of 43 to contribute to the symphonic canon.

He held the genre of the string quartet in much the same reverence, for many of the same reasons. Brahms's reluctance to publish any quartets until these is a tacit acknowledgment of his heritage: not only Beethoven, but also Haydn, Mozart, and Schubert in the realm of the string quartet. Cumulatively, the body of literature left by these four titans was a formidable psychological obstacle to the young Brahms.

We know this because Brahms revealed to a friend that he had composed, and subsequently destroyed, more than *twenty* string quartets in his youth. None of these early efforts met the exceptionally high standards he set for himself. He had brought the first of the lost quartets to Robert Schumann, who had enthusiastically approved the work and encouraged his protégé to publish. In spite of Schumann's endorsement, Brahms withdrew the work and the music is lost, presumably burnt by the composer. The loss to musical posterity of that quartet and its successors is incalculable: at once tantalizing to the imagination and tragic to the music lover. That makes the surviving three quartets—the two of Opus 51, and Opus 67 in B-flat—all the more precious.

Brahms worked on the Opus 51 quartets intermittently between 1865 and 1873, completing them during the summer of 1873. He dedicated them to his friend Dr. Theodor Billroth, an accomplished amateur violist who enjoyed playing chamber music. Of the two quartets, the A minor is less

aggressive and more intimate, yet it is governed by discipline and airtight compositional technique. Brahms's biographer Malcolm MacDonald refers to "the remorseless logic of [its] construction, the derivation of so much from basic motifs."

The dominant motif in the first movement consists of the three pitches F, A, and E, which occur in the first violin's opening gesture (in the order A-F-A-E). F-A-E is an acronym for the phrase *Frei aber einsam* [Free but lonely], the motto of violinist Joseph Joachim. (Brahms would use a similar musical motif in his Third Symphony, whose opening gesture F-A-F denotes his own motto, *Frei aber froh* [Free but happy].) Joachim's F-A-E recurs throughout the *Allegro non troppo* in various guises. The overall scope of the movement is broad because of an extended exposition and recapitulation. The development is actually fairly brief, but the first movement still clocks in at about fourteen minutes.

This quartet is unusual in its singular focus on the home tonality. All four movements are in A major or A minor. In the A major slow movement, a *minore* passage has a quasi-Hungarian flavor with first violin and cello in a canon while the inner voices thrum away in agitated tremolo. Elsewhere, Brahms distributes his melodies and accompaniments with judicious balance among the four players.

The *Quasi Minuetto, moderato* is distinguished by open fifths and sixths in the cello part. Its rustic bagpipe drone underpins the gentle musings of the upper strings. The trio section switches to a skittish *Allegretto vivace* in duple meter, with a sly six-bar interpolation of the Minuetto in its midst. The return to the Minuetto

is at once seamless and surprising. Brahms's recurrent attraction to Hungarian flavor manifests itself in the Roma-like finale, which lurches forward slightly off balance. Contrasts abound, in cross-rhythms, modulations,

and switches from forceful gestures to lyrical sweep and back again. Dense textures never compromise the variety or the persuasiveness of Brahms's rhetoric.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

APOLLON MUSAGÈTE QUARTET

Winner of first prize and several other awards at the International Music Competition of the ARD in 2008, Apollon Musagète Quartet has rapidly become an established feature of the European musical scene, captivating public and press alike. The quartet studied with Johannes Meissl at the European Chamber Music Academy and was inspired by the musicians of the Alban Berg Quartet at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.

The quartet was nominated ECHO Rising Stars 2010, followed by highly successful performances at prestigious European venues. It was also named BBC New Generation Artist in 2012, leading to extensive touring in the UK and a number of recordings for the BBC. In 2014 the musicians received the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award.

Recent engagements have taken the quartet to the Auditori Barcelona, Konzerthaus and Philharmonie Berlin, Edinburgh International Festival, the Chopin and his Europe Festival in Warsaw, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Wigmore Hall London, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall New York, Louvre Paris, Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele and to the Tonhalle Zurich.

Apollon Musagète Quartet collaborates with renowned chamber musicians such as Martin Fröst, Nils Mönkemeyer, István Várdai and Jörg Widmann. They appeared in several symphonic series with BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Dresden Philharmonic and Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice.

They welcome collaborations that integrate chamber music into other performing art forms and were part of projects such as a staged concert by the Berlin based performance group Nico and the Navigators, a ballet production at the National Theatre in Nuremberg and a world tour with the pop singer Tori Amos. Their own compositions *Multitude for String Quartet* and *A Multitude of Shades*, both published by the Viennese publisher Doblinger, are often included in the quartet's concert repertoire.

Since the debut CD by Oehms Classics in 2010 followed by recordings for the labels such as Decca Classics and Deutsche Grammophon, their discography has

grown extensively. In 2018 a disc containing quartets by Andrzej Panufnik was released by the Fryderyk-Chopin-Institute and subsequently the latest recording with works by Karol Szymanowski and Roman Palester by Universal Poland.

Piotr Skweres plays an ex-André Navarra cello by Gennaro Gagliano dated 1741. The instrument has kindly been provided by Merito String Instruments Trust Vienna. Furthermore, the quartet thanks the Thomastik Infeld for the generous support and the enterprise Stoffwerk for the exclusive and custom-made concert clothes.

