Felix Broede

UGA presents.
24|25 SEASON

THE JERUSALEM QUARTET

ALEXANDER PAVLOVSKY, violin
SERGEI BRESLER, violin
ORI KAM, viola
KYRIL ZLOTNIKOV, cello

FRI, MAY 2, 7:30 pm
Hodgson Concert Hall

Supported by
JOAN FISCHER

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The Jerusalem Quartet records for BIS Records
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PROGRAM

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN (1732-1809)
String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 50, "Prussian," No. 1 [23:00]

I. Allegro
II. Adagio
III. Menuetto. Poco allegretto — Trio
IV. Finale. Vivace

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)
String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133 [26:00]

I. Moderato-Allegretto
II. Allegretto-Adagio-Moderato-Allegretto

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67 [35:00]

I. Vivace
II. Andante
III. Agitato. Allegretto non troppo
IV. Poco allegretto con variazioni

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2025

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 50, "Prussian," No. 1
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

In 1781, Joseph Haydn composed a group of six quartets that the Viennese house of Artaria published as his Opus 33. He famously wrote to a wealthy patron that these quartets had been "written in a new and special way." They had indeed, and are still regarded as a significant milestone in Haydn's ongoing mastery of the quartet medium. Young Wolfgang Mozart — relatively new to Vienna and then only 25 years old — was so impressed with these works that he returned to quartets himself. Over the next couple of years he composed six new quartets that he dedicated to the older master. Known today as the "Haydn" Quartets, they are prime examples of Haydn's influence on Mozart in the 1780s. That influence was mutual, as evidenced in Haydn's next set of quartets, published in 1787 as Opus 50.

Haydn was still employed by Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, who kept his *Kapellmeister* very busy, particularly with the rehearsal and direction of operas. In calendar 1787, Haydn led a whopping 96 performances of 14 different operas. Somehow, he also managed to complete the six quartets we know as Opus 50. Apparently two of them had already been written when he received a letter from Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm, an avid patron of the arts and an accomplished cellist. The king praised some symphonies that Haydn had sent to him, written for the Parisian *Concert spirituel* the previous year; we know them as the six "Paris" Symphonies. Haydn correctly deduced that the king would be interested in any new works Haydn might write. After he finished the remaining four quartets, he authorized the Viennese publishing house of Artaria to issue the set with a dedication to Friedrich Wilhelm. Unlike Mozart, who later dedicated three quartets to the Prussian monarch, Haydn made no effort to highlight the cello part.

The cello does, however, introduce the first movement of this B-flat major quartet, with a drum-like beat of pulsing quarter notes: a pedal point on the home key of B-flat. The upper three instruments respond with a gesture in bar 3, echoed once at a different pitch level, then broken into triplets that are a variant on the melodic snippet. Those three elements: the repeated notes, the initial motivic gesture, and the triplets, provide the material for the entire movement. Haydn's second theme is similar to his first, but is now restated in a different key. His ingenious development section reworks this minimal material with skill and grace.

His second movement is a *siciliana* in E-flat major that consists of a theme and three variations. The theme opens with a leisurely arpeggio outlining an E-flat major chord. The first variation features second violin with the melody, while the first violin adds a countermelody. Variation II is in the parallel minor of E-flat minor: a singularly difficult key for string instruments. First violin resumes the melody, with the lower voices in subtly syncopated accompaniment. Variation III is sedate but joyous, returning to E-flat major and making much of the cello, a quiet but active complement to the violin's theme. A delicious coda embraces all four players and provides understated drama to a satisfying close.

Marked Poco allegretto, the third movement minuet cleverly inverts the violin part in the cello. Haydn's central Trio section tiptoes through some surprising chromaticism, contrasting the detached violin line — itself an inversion of the slow movement opening motive — with the lightly stated chordal replies of the full ensemble. The second half of the trio introduces accents and sequential entrances, creating a hocket effect (a bit like musical hiccups). It is immensely clever and entertaining.

The finale is another monothematic sonata form — meaning that its second theme is derived from the first — with elements of rondo. Haydn is at his wittiest in this lively madcap movement. It is great fun to watch the players as they play ping-pong with his dance-like motives. A violin cadenza introduces a fugato that shows off Haydn's contrapuntal skill, weaving seamlessly back to the final statement of the dance theme. There is yet another joke at the end: a grand pause of two bars that *sounds* like the end — but it isn't. Fair warning: Don't be too quick to applaud until you are quite certain that Haydn has had his last word, and that the players have finished!

String Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Dmitri Shostakovich and Ludwig van Beethoven both composed string quartets throughout their respective careers. Like his 19th century predecessor, Shostakovich returned to the quartet medium again and again, leaving some of his most profound musical utterances for his final years. Four of his last 15 compositions were quartets; all of them are considered to be among his most intense compositions. He composed his 9th and 10th quartets in 1964. An eleventh followed in 1966, and the twelfth in 1968. There were to be three more before his death in 1975. With a legacy of 15 quartets, Shostakovich rivals Béla Bartók among 20th century composers in the musical magnitude of his chamber music accomplishment.

Curiously enough, Shostakovich waited until 1938, when he was 31, to compose his first Quartet, Op. 49. Quartets became more important to him late in life. While they may not have been the purest expression of the proletarian ideal, they consistently drew significant and serious music from him. Such import is immediately apparent in the 12th Quartet, decidedly his most powerful such work since the darkly autobiographical 8th Quartet, Op. 110 (1960).

The 12th quartet is an exploration of the inherent conflict between atonal and tonal music. Resolution of that conflict provides the work with its initial argument and forward momentum. Shostakovich wastes no time in setting forth his thesis in the opening measures, where the cello states all twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. Analysts eager to link him with serialism pounced on this figure when the quartet appeared, overlooking the fact that Shostakovich resolved his opening chromaticism almost immediately into D-flat major, the stated tonality of the quartet. Diatonicism and chromaticism highlight one another. Still, one cannot altogether ignore that he chose to introduce the work so deliberately with chromaticism. Norman Kay has observed:

> The presence [of the 12 tones] is nevertheless indicative of a general widening of vocabulary, a motivic poise and sophistication which would have been inconceivable in the works written ten years earlier.... [This quartet] has stretched tonality to breaking point and provided the clearest example of the composer straining at the gates of total chromaticism.

Fully half the Shostakovich quartets are played without pause between movements. Technically this one does not fall into that category. It is divided into two discrete movements. However, the lengthy second movement — approximately 20 minutes, as opposed to about 7 minutes for the *Moderato* — merges scherzo, development and recapitulation all into one giant arch form. The second movement also includes some techniques unusual for Shostakovich, including a pizzicato violin solo and a rare use of *sul ponticello* (bowing near the bridge). A series of trills works its way down to a rapid motif in the cello. Meter shifts between 5/4, 3/4, 4/4 and 3/2 throw swirling chromatic runs into relief.

Shostakovich biographer Dmitri Sollertinsky considers the 12th Quartet to be "he ultimate examination of the performers' interpretative powers, in that it confronts them with a resourcefulness, a range of expression and imaginative coloring, unmatched elsewhere in the [quartet] series."

String Quartet No. 3 in B-flat Major, Op. 67
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

In many respects Johannes Brahms was the quintessential chamber music composer. He wrote a considerable amount of chamber music — many more works than have survived — and the 24 he published are virtually all staples of the repertoire. But no chamber genre humbled him more than the string quartet. Perhaps because of Beethoven's stupendous achievement in the realm of the string quartet (paralleling, and perhaps exceeding, his monumental contribution as a symphonist), Brahms was hesitant to publish quartets of his own.

When he finally succeeded in meeting his own standards with the Op. 51 quartets, he was already 40 and one of the most famous composers in Europe. Those first two quartets show the long labor that Brahms put into them. Though superbly crafted — as was all his mature music — they have never been easy for audiences to listen to. With the B-flat quartet, however, Brahms relaxed a bit. Perhaps more secure in his command of the medium, he left us a piece that overflows with good spirits, sly winks, and rhythmic practical jokes.

During the summer of 1875 Brahms spent his holiday at Ziegelhausen, near Heidelberg. There he worked on the Piano Quartet Op. 60, the Duets Op. 66, and the B-flat string quartet. Writing to Franz Wullner, he called "all of them useless trifles, to avoid facing the serious countenance of a symphony." Brahms was always his own most stringent critic, and while Op. 67 is distinctly lighter in tone than the other Brahms quartets, it has much to offer.

The opening *Vivace* is a hunting movement, often compared to Mozart's "Hunt" quartet, K.458. Here, horn calls masquerade as string parts. Brahms alternates 6/8 meter with 2/4, occasionally superimposing the two. Such rhythmic ambiguity keeps us on our toes, walking a line somewhere between hemiola and the Czech *furiant*. The atmosphere is teasing

and relaxed, with silences and lopsided syncopations playing a key part in the music.

Brahms's slow movement is a tripartite song form with a Mendelssohnian flavor. Balanced and symmetrical, it places strong emphasis on the melodic line. During an improvisatory middle section he slips in two bars of 5/4 meter, but they are so skillfully camouflaged by the violin's quasi-cadenza episode that we hardly notice any irregularity: just another one of Brahms's sophisticated jests! First violin cedes the leadership to the viola in the the third movement. The other strings all have mutes, lending a sighing quality. Their syncopated accompaniment further highlights the viola. The title of this movement, *Agitato: Presto non troppo*, reveals something of its ambivalent character, for this plaintive, dark music is hardly a scherzo. Brahms inverts the texture for the Trio, starting out sans viola for eight measures. Both sections reiterate the tantalizing indecision between duple and triple meter that characterizes the opening movement.

No less a musician than Britain's Donald Francis Tovey called the concluding variation set "kittenish." As in the first movement, modulations and unusual rhythmic tricks give the variations character. Also, each instrument has a chance to shine, with viola dominating the first two, first violin gradually assuming more prominence in the next two, then cello taking the lead in variations 5 and 6. From the 7th variation on, themes introduced in the first movement are recalled, along with the seesaw hemiola that defined the first movement. The effect is cyclic, lending thematic and spiritual unity to the work. We are reminded that this most profound of composers had a lighter side, and that it's all right for us to smile, or maybe even giggle a little, within the confines of the concert hall.

Felix Broede

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JERUSALEM QUARTET

"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 marks 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, Ore., 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 Théâtre des Champs-Elysées 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.

www.jerusalem-quartet.com