SAN FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES

presents...

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Alexander Pavlovsky | Violin
Sergei Bresler | Violin
Ori Kam | Viola
Kyril Zlotnikov | Cello

Thursday, November 7, 2024 | 7:30pm

Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall
San Francisco Conservatory of Music

HAYDN **Quartet in B-flat Major, Op 50, No. 1 "Prussian"**
Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto. Poco allegretto - Trio
Finale. Vivace

SHOSTAKOVICH **Quartet No. 12 in D-Flat Major, Opus 133**
Moderato-Allegretto
Allegretto-Adagio-Moderato-Allegretto

INTERMISSION

DVOŘÁK **String Quartet in G Major, Opus 106**
Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
Finale (Andante sostenuto-Allegro con fuoco)

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of Bruce and Carolyn Lowenthal.

The **Jerusalem Quartet** is represented by David Rowe Artists
24 Bessom Street, Suite 4, Marblehead, MA 01945 davidroweartists.com

The Jerusalem Quartet records for Harmonia Mundi jerusalem-quartet.com

ENSEMBLE PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents The Jerusalem Quartet for the second time. The ensemble made its first appearance in May 2022.

"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, OR; 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.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Opus 50, No. 1

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
(1732–1809)

During the 1780s, Haydn took a break from writing string quartets—between 1781 and 1787, he wrote only one. This was otherwise a fertile period for the composer (it saw the completion of 15 symphonies, including the entire set of *"Paris" Symphonies*), but he was content to let the quartet form rest for a while. When Haydn returned to it in the summer of 1787 with the six quartets that make up his Opus 50, he was writing with unusual concentration. He had become interested in these years in building his opening sonata-form movements not on the two separate theme-groups of classical form but instead on one principal theme. He would spin secondary material out of some subordinate feature of the theme—a tiny motif or a rhythmic pattern—and the entire sonata-form structure would grow out of that one seminal theme. It makes for a very concentrated—and imaginative—kind of music-making.

The six string quartets of Opus 50 are sometimes known as the *"Prussian" Quartets* because Haydn dedicated the set to King Friedrich Wilhelm II, the cello-playing monarch in Berlin (this is the same king for whom Mozart is supposed to have written his *"King of Prussia" Quartets*). This first quartet of Haydn's set, in B-flat major, is quite attractive music. The opening of the *Allegro* can seem deceptively simple: over the cello's steady pulse of quarters (a pulse that will recur throughout much of the movement), the first violin lays out a simple rising-and-falling shape that Haydn's stresses should be *dolce*. It hardly seems noteworthy, but this is the seminal shape of the movement, and instantly Haydn transforms it into a shower of triplets, and when the "second" subject arrives, it too is a variation of this shape, even though it has been transformed into something much more lyric. After an active development—much of it in energetic triplets—the movement closes quietly. The slow movement is in variation form, based on the first violin's long opening melody. As the variations unfold, the music becomes more ornate, but the central theme remains clear, even in the second variation, which moves into the unusual key of E-flat minor.

Haydn returns to the home key of B-flat major for the minuet; noteworthy here is the writing for cello, as it takes up the first violin's opening line. The trio seems to pick up the same phrases as the minuet, but now with needle-sharp violin attacks, and Haydn creates a nice effect by syncopating the two violin parts as the trio proceeds.

The real glory of this quartet, however, is

the finale, which is as good-natured a piece as Haydn ever wrote (and that is saying something). It is quite concentrated: the violin's agreeable opening melody—eight bars long—seems to promise a rondo, but this movement is in sonata form. There are many wonderful little touches here: the way the two violin parts weave together, the use of the opening phrase as the basis for the development, even a brief cadenza for the first violin at the center of the movement. But the principal impression is of the pleasure of making music, and the quartet speeds to its firm close on fragments of the finale's opening theme.

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

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906–1975)

The official Soviet position on serial composition was completely negative: the Soviets believed that Schoenberg's theory of composing with sequences of 12 tones was the worst sort of "formalism"—music separated from natural impulses and alien to the tastes of the public. But late in his career—at a time when his standing as a composer was secure—Shostakovich became intrigued by certain possibilities inherent in serial procedures, and 12-note sequences appeared in several works, principally the *String Quartet No. 12* and the *Violin Sonata*, both composed in 1968. Questioned about this during his final visit to the United States in 1973, Shostakovich told an interviewer: "I did use some element of dodecaphony in these works. Of course, if you take a theory and use solely this theory, I have a very negative attitude toward this kind of approach. But if a composer feels that he needs this or that technique, he can take whatever is available and use it as he sees fit. It is his right to do so. But if you take only one technique, whether it is aleatory or dodecaphonic, and use nothing but that technique, then it is wrong."

This comment is the best possible introduction to his *String Quartet No. 12*, for while 12-tone rows appear in this quartet, the music's harmonic language remains tonal—Shostakovich treats the 12-note sequence not as a row but as a theme to be developed in traditional ways. The quartet is in a specific key—D-flat major—and however chromatic Shostakovich's development may become, the music remains firmly anchored in that home key, as the triumphant conclusion demonstrates. Shostakovich's encounter with 12-tone music in this quartet is more a flirtation than an embrace—it is as if he raises the issue just to get beyond it.

String Quartet No. 12 has an unusual structure: a brief opening movement is followed by a long second movement that breaks down into smaller sections at different speeds and in contrasted moods. Some observers have been quick to relate these sections to the slow movement, scherzo, and so on of the traditional string quartet, but such a reading straitjackets Shostakovich's quite original music into other molds. Far better to take this music on its own terms than to attempt to understand it in ways that may be alien to it.

Solo cello opens the *Moderato* with the 12-note sequence that will recur throughout the quartet, but the first true theme—firmly tonal—follows immediately in the first violin. That same instrument has the lilting second idea at the *Allegretto*, another sequence of the 12 tones. Shostakovich's treatment of these ideas can be full of chromatic tension, but the movement remains fundamentally harmonic, and it comes to a quiet close.

The long second movement opens with fierce trills in the upper instruments as the cello spits out the five-note rhythmic cell that will run through this movement. This opening section, which can be quite abrasive, gives way to a long *Adagio*, introduced by solo cello—its somber song is answered by a dark chant from the muted upper voices, harmonized triadically. Material from the first movement begins to reappear here, and the *Moderato* fuses some of these ideas as it builds to a huge climax punctuated by biting chords. Finally the dancing first violin draws us into the concluding *Allegretto* section, derived from the cello's five-note cell at the opening of this movement. This section drives with great energy to its close, where the rhythm of that cell rockets home in triumphant D-flat major. In this quartet Shostakovich may raise the issue of serial music, but only as a starting point—the form and treatment of these ideas is anything but serial, and at the end the quartet seems to thumb its nose defiantly at the whole issue of atonality.

Shostakovich completed *String Quartet No. 12* on March 11, 1968, and the Beethoven String Quartet gave several private performances that June. Shostakovich, who knew that this music represented new directions for him, was quite pleased with these performances and with his new creation. Shostakovich dedicated this music to the Beethoven Quartet's first violinist, Dmitri Tsyganov, and that quartet gave the public premiere Moscow on September 14, 1968.

String Quartet in G Major, Opus 106

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

In April 1895 Dvořák returned to Czechoslovakia after three years as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. America had fascinated Dvořák, but during every moment in the New World he had been assailed by a stinging homesickness that even a long visit home could not cure. Once home for good, he spent the summer of 1895 happily at the family retreat at Vysoká, where he could roam the fields and woods and raise his pet pigeons. In his pleasure at being home, he even forgot about music for a while: "Since I came back from America I haven't put pen to paper…Here at Vysoká I grudge the time and prefer to enjoy the beauties of the countryside," he wrote to a friend.

But in the fall he returned to Prague, where he took up his duties as professor of composition at the Conservatory, and during November and December he composed the *String Quartet in G Major*, his first work since coming home. Some critics have been quick to hear this quartet as "a hymn of thanksgiving," an expression of joy at returning to his homeland, but we should be careful not to impose extramusical "meaning" on a piece of pure music. This is intensely-felt music, but by no means does it speak with unmixed joy. In fact, this complex, dramatic quartet rings at times with a vehemence unusual in chamber music.

This is big music, not just in its impressive length (40 minutes), but in its sound and range of expression. Dvořák's score is littered with instructions that push the performers to the limits of their instruments (*grandioso, con forza, appassionato, fortississimo*), and he demands such techniques as rolled chords, double-stopped octaves, and tremolos, sometimes thought inappropriate in chamber music. We should be careful about making easy assumptions as to what "message" this powerful quartet expresses—far better to let it speak for itself simply as music.

The very beginning of the *Allegro moderato* is deceptive: the quiet leaps and swirling triplets offer no hint of the violence ahead, which erupts as this dramatic

movement unfolds. Dvořák makes some surprising key changes along the way before the huge climax and powerful close. The slow movement is a series of variations on alternating themes. The grieving opening hardly sounds like music of thanksgiving, and throughout this impassioned movement Dvořák reminds his players: *cantabile e molto espressivo* and *con sentimento e molto cantabile*. The music rises to a tremendous C-major climax with a soaring, virtuoso part for first violin. The *Molto vivace* is a scherzo that sends the violins high above the lower voices, whose accompaniment bristles with complex rhythms. A brief slow introduction leads into the finale, a buoyant rondo. This movement features so many tempo (and mood) shifts that it has sometimes been compared to the dumka form. Its climax, which brings back first-movement themes, is dramatic and protracted.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger