

DAVID ROWE ARTISTS

Transitions....

We take great pleasure (and more than a little pride!) that changes to the David Rowe Artists roster are infrequent events, which makes the past couple of months feel like a whirlwind in our small office.

First, we are delighted to welcome the **Castalian String Quartet!** This young ensemble, founded in 2011, has already built a strong profile in their native UK and throughout Europe. Last year they received the inaugural **MERITO String Quartet Award** (bestowed after a distinguished jury stalked the various nominees anonymously in concerts throughout Europe), along with a **Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship Award**. They have also earned leading prizes at competitions in Banff, Lyon, and Hanover, and have been managed worldwide by Young Classical Artists Trust since 2016.



The Castalian String Quartet: Charlotte Bonneton (viola), Christopher Graves (cello), Sini Simonen (violin), Daniel Roberts (violin) [Photo: Kaupo Kikkas]

Many exciting milestones lie ahead, including numerous projects at Wigmore Hall where their Haydn Op. 76 series (recorded for an early 2020 release on **Wigmore Hall Live**) was warmly received last season. They will make their Carnegie Hall debut next Spring.

Arielle and I became aware of – and began actively tracking – this superb ensemble last year, and caught up with them for their US debut at the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC. We found ourselves captivated by a compelling artistic voice whose collective willingness to re-imagine familiar works with a fearless musical integrity truly stands out. Please familiarize yourself with the Castalian Quartet via their page on our website, where

you can quickly access videos, press acclaim, and some highly engaging podcasts. We trust you will soon pencil them in at the top of your short list, and look forward to speaking about them in the months ahead!

Earlier this spring we bid a fond *auf wiedersehen* to the peerless **Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet**, who after 30 glorious years decided 2019 would be their final year of touring internationally. This represents a particularly bittersweet milestone for me, since they were the only remaining “original” David Rowe Artist! For reasons still unclear they had the faith to choose me over Mariëdi Anders when I hung out my shingle in Spring 1998, and in our 20 years together we have delivered 151 performances during 15 North American tours. I must confess I never imagined a wind ensemble would become one of our strongest producers and most beloved artists. But that is absolutely what happened as they built from strength upon strength, concluding on the highest of notes (sorry) with the grandest and most well-received tour of all. Michael, Andreas, Fergus, Marion, and Walter have given so deeply and generously over all these years, and I know I speak now for every presenter and listener who had the joy to encounter the Quintet during their unprecedented career: ***THANK YOU for being such remarkable musicians, remarkable people, and, on a very personal note, such dear, dear friends. You will definitely be missed, and your legacy long remembered!***



Clarinetist Walter Seyfarth, hornist Fergus McWilliam, party-crashing buzzkill manager, bassoonist Marion Reinhard, flutist Michael Hasel, and oboist Andreas Wittmann enjoy the Palm Beach warmth following their final North American performance. [Photo: Amy Rowe]

St. Lawrence Shoots for 30

As they approach their 30th anniversary (“but they don’t look a day over 29!”), the **St. Lawrence String Quartet** are playing as well as ever!

In Toronto (site of their first professional concerts) *The Star* noted: “On the eve of its 30th anniversary, the **St. Lawrence String Quartet** demonstrated on Thursday night how the serious and the playful can comfortably live side-by-side on a classical concert stage. The Jane Mallett Theatre audience hosted by Music Toronto was left spellbound in a creative program that mixed the core of the string-quartet repertoire — courtesy of Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven — with two modern works that also included Canadian baritone Tyler Duncan... The effect was electric.”

“The Beethoven [Op. 135] piece, played before the intermission, was a revelation. There is a special talent — and hundreds of hours of preparation — in conveying the shifts from light to dark in this music. The St. Lawrences made it sound like it was happening in the moment, spontaneously, without ever losing a sense of where the music had to go. It was an outstanding interpretation.”

In Costa Mesa, CA, where SLSQ performed the six quartets comprising Haydn’s Op. 20, the *Los Angeles Times*, under the headline “**St. Lawrence String Quartet’s rare marathon of early Haydn is in-your-face exhilarating**” wrote: “The ensemble disrupted the mother of all disrupters, aka the father of the string quartet. It was pretty exciting.”

“Haydn was treated with irrepressible theatrical flair. Every phrase became a bold dramatic gesture....For all that, arrestingly



St. Lawrence String Quartet [Photo: Marco Borggreve]

dynamic teamanship among the four players allowed every gesture to be for the moment and every moment to be in your face. The string quartet as theater doesn’t get more exhilarating.”

And following a concert at Wolf Trap, *Washington Classical Review* also admired their Haydn: “Rather than a metronomic quickness, though, the group applied rubato to add some unpredictability and humor to their interpretation, turning corners with precision and unanimity. Each movement was limned with a palette of different tone colors, beginning with a shining first movement enlivened by the avian chirps and flutters that earned the piece its moniker. The second movement was a sort of muted whisper, all four instruments evenly matched.”

If you are not among the many presenters helping SLSQ celebrate their 30th, climb on board now for 31!

Elias Excel in Beethoven



The much-lauded release of the complete Beethoven quartets by **Elias Quartet** on **Wigmore Hall Live** has concluded with the final two volumes, and if anything the choir of praise has only grown stronger. Reviewing volume 6, *BBC Music Magazine* exclaimed: “These live performances burst with spontaneity. Passages of transcendent lyricism abound, the Adagio of Op. 18

No. 6 and the great slow movement of the second Rasumovsky Quartet being imbued with a sublime fluidity rare in modern performances.....Most striking, though, is the visceral excitement the Elias bring page after page, with passion and intensity of expression to the fore....The Elias enable Beethoven’s radical modernity to be heard afresh, this disc capping a cycle that takes a deserved place among the finest on disc.”

We find it truly remarkable that a live concert cycle can stand alongside the best studio ones, and are thrilled that audiences in four North American cities are in line to hear the complete cycle during 2020-2021!

But the Elias are about much more than Beethoven. Characterizing the group as “a nimble and wonderfully sweet-toned ensemble”, the *San Francisco Chronicle* enjoyed their pairing of Schumann’s Op. 41, No. 1 with Sally Beamish’s “Nine

Fragments” (written for the Elias and receiving its North American premieres on this tour), and then fully embraced “a superb performance of Benjamin Britten’s String Quartet No. 2 that caught the expansive vigor of the composer’s writing. Even in the placid first movement, which the composer marks “Allegro calmo,” there was an undercurrent of expressive urgency that enriched the texture of the music’s overarching stillness.

“And in the enormous finale — the piece’s crowning achievement, whose encyclopedic set of variations pays tribute to Britten’s Baroque forebear Henry Purcell — the performers rose to new heights of fearless eloquence, casting each chapter in this long but tight-knit saga in a specific dramatic light. The encore — a poignant, graceful Scottish waltz that Grant announced without naming it — was the perfect ending.”

Brentano and Antonio

No, not a Sicilian law firm, but rather the performance by **Brentano Quartet** on the instruments of Antonio Stradivari at Washington's Library of Congress. Every December the Library celebrates the old master's birthday by inviting an ensemble to perform on these priceless treasures, and this year it was the Brentanos with violist **Hsin-Yun Huang** in a trio of quintets.

As the *Washington Post* reported: "The bustling interplay of soaring and darting lines that opens Mendelssohn's Op. 87 quintet emerged with a rare lucidity and shimmering purity, giving way to feather-light tone in the Andante Scherzando. Mozart's glowering Quintet K. 406, possessed all the gravity and sober point-making one might wish for, but in a language of silvery, sweet violins, fine-grained (never throaty) violas and silken cello timbre that refused to growl. And, among so many instances of beauty, the darkly handsome tone spun out on a mere whisper of sound at the close of the middle movement of Brahms's Op. 88 quintet was simply astonishing. There was no mistaking that these are special instruments.



Brentano String Quartet [Photo: Juergen Frank]

"Of course, for all the excellence of those Strads on display, they didn't play themselves. It would have been achievement enough for Huang and the Brentano Quartet to offer competence, playing on museum instruments they only just took up. But their performances bespoke a technical finish, nuance and lived-in comfort in their phrasing that you'd expect had they been playing these instruments together their entire careers. Better still, they offered a set of striking interpretive insights into thrice-familiar works: They found the proto-Romantic fervor in Mozart, the Mendelssohnian lightness in Brahms, and the operatic exuberance and scope in Mendelssohn. Such playing would be cherishable even in a Strad-free zone."

On the opposite coast, the Brentanos performed at the gorgeous Green Music Center near Santa Rosa, where *San Francisco Classical Voice* found "the texture was limpid, transparent, and ultimately transcendent" during the opening Dvorak. And in Bartok's Second Quartet "the underlying rhythmic drive was unrelenting, and the group seemed to breathe as one. The unison section near the end was fabulous....The tight ensemble was

nowhere more evident than in the Presto pianissimo section, where the players' heads bobbed up and down in unison. It was hard to imagine that the intensity could be sustained, but the slow buildup of the Lento third movement proved just as riveting, especially the call-and-response between the violins and the lower strings. This was music-making of the highest order."



Dawn Upshaw [Photo: Brooke Irish]

Among numerous future projects is a new collaboration with soprano **Dawn Upshaw**, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer **Melinda Wagner**, and librettist **Stephanie Fleischmann**. "*The Dido Project*" will feature a first half of early English songs and consort music from the Renaissance and Baroque eras, culminating in Purcell's Dido's Lament. The second half then imagines Dido into our modern age in a newly commissioned monodrama for soprano and quartet. This unique offering will be available during the 2020/21 season.



You can pick your presenters. You can pick your nose. But you can't pick your presenter's moose's nose... (unless you are using Philip Setzer's violin bow!)

David Finckel & Wu Han Establish Residency in Florida

No, not “residence” – they still very happily call New York home – but in February **David Finckel and Wu Han** camped out in Palm Beach where they curated a week-long festival of concerts, lectures, and various audience interaction opportunities.

The festival was the brainchild of Society of the Four Arts Director of Music Programming Phillip Bergmann, who has admired the duo’s work for years as they have built thriving audiences from coast (New York’s Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center) to coast (California’s Music@Menlo). Phillip wondered if they would be interested to try their hand at a short festival in Palm Beach, and...well, of course!!

Drawing on their decades of experience and connections, David and Wu Han settled on “Romantic Evolution” as an organizing theme, and in describing the concept wrote: *The works on this three-concert series tell the story—in sound—of the birth and blossoming of musical Romanticism. Joining us for this mini-festival is a selection of musicians who are among the world’s most sought-after solo and chamber artists. And we are doubly pleased that the Society has invited us to include three informative, interactive events, featuring expert speakers and series artists.*

Guests included **Philip Setzer** and **Xavier Foley**, plus a special **Chamber Music**

Society of Lincoln Center ensemble comprising David & Wu Han with violinist **Arnaud Sussmann** and violist **Paul Neubauer**. Favorite works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms highlighted the programs, culminating in an all-Schubert afternoon featuring the Eb-Major Trio and “Trout” Quintet.

Audience response was so enthusiastic that a second festival is in the works for 2021!



Society of the Four Arts Director Phillip Bergmann takes serving artists literally, delivering much-needed caffeine to David Finckel, Wu Han, and colleagues! [Photo: David Finckel]

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