



JERUSALEM QUARTET

This press book contains (in order):

- Artist bio
- Press excerpts
- Discography
- Full reviews (beginning with the most recent)
- Feature articles



NOTES: When searching for suitable pull-quotes, be sure to check through the "Full reviews" section. The "Press excerpts" are not comprehensive, and do not necessarily display the best selections.

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Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky, violin

Sergei Bresler, violin

Ori Kam, viola

Kyрил Zlotnikov, violoncello

www.jerusalem-quartet.com

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

Such was the *New York Times*' impression of the Jerusalem Quartet. Since the ensemble's founding in 1993 and subsequent 1996 debut, the four Israeli musicians have embarked on a journey of growth and maturation. This journey has resulted in a wide repertoire and stunning depth of expression, which carries on the string quartet tradition in a unique manner. 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 the 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. With regular bi-annual visits to North America, the quartet has performed in cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Washington, and Cleveland as well as in the Ravinia Festival. In Europe, the quartet enjoys an enthusiastic reception with regular appearances in London's Wigmore hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Munich Herkulessaal, Theatre des Champs-Élysées, as well as special guest performances at the Auditorium du Louvre Paris, the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and festivals such as Salzburg, Verbier, Schleswig-Holstein, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, Rheingau, Saint Petersburg white Nights and many others.

The Jerusalem Quartet records exclusively for Harmonia Mundi. The quartet's recordings, particularly the albums featuring Haydn's string quartets and Schubert's "Death and the Maiden", have been honored with numerous awards such as the Diapason d'Or and the BBC Music Magazine Award for chamber music. In 2018, the quartet released two albums, an album of Dvorak's String Quintet Op.97 and Sextet Op.48, and a much-awaited recording of the celebrated quartets by Ravel and Debussy. In the spring of 2019, the quartet will release a unique album exploring Jewish music in Central Europe between the wars and its far-reaching influence. Israeli Soprano Hila Baggio will join the quartet to perform a collection of Yiddish Cabaret songs from Warsaw in the 1920s. The quartet has commissioned composer Leonid Desyatnikov to arrange these songs, which will be sung in Yiddish. Schulhoff's Five Pieces (1924), a collection of short and light cabaret-like pieces, and Korngold's Quartet No.2 (1937) will complete the program.

Alongside its regular programs, the 2018/19 season will open with a premiere of its new Yiddish program. In October the quartet will be joined by Pinchas Zukerman and Amanda Forsyth for a US tour featuring string sextets by Strauss, Schoenberg and Tchaikovsky. March will include a return of the Brahms project featuring quartets, sonatas and quintets together with clarinetist Sharon Kam and pianist Matan Porat. After a second US tour in April, Bartok's 6 string quartets will be presented at London's Wigmore hall in May and then combined with Beethoven and performed in various venues in Bavaria.

2018/19 season only. Please discard earlier versions.

JERUSALEM QUARTET PRESS EXCERPTS

"The Jerusalem Quartet's debut on the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society series was breathtaking. Or jaw-dropping. Or maybe ear opening. In any case, it was brilliant."

— *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*

"Passion, precision, warmth, a gold blend: these are the trademarks of this excellent Israeli string quartet. Highlights? The finesse of phrasing in [Mozart's] K458's minuet; the exquisite tone of the ensemble's cello (formerly played by the great Jacqueline du Pré); and the slow movements that reach ever deeper into Mozart's heart."

—*The Times*, London

"As near to perfect as one can possibly find."

— *BBC Music Magazine*

"The musicians of the Jerusalem, which formed in 1993, invest intense focus and stylistic truth on everything they touch."

— *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland, OH

"Awe-inspiring. That is the best way I can explain the playing of the Jerusalem Quartet."

—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

"...what distinguishes this particular quartet is its sense of refinement and natural feeling for line, coupled with a fever-pitch intensity and commitment to the music. Musical electricity may be unfathomable, but one thing is for sure - they have it."

— *The Strad*

"It was as fine a night of string quartet playing as I've heard in a long time. Normally it takes years and years to develop such a blend of voices and such a spectrum of colours. They have loads of energy and passion and the control, finesse and sophistication to go with it."

— *Vancouver Sun*

"An absolute triumph. Their playing has everything you could possibly wish for."

— *BBC Music Magazine*

"Superlatives are inadequate in describing just how fine this playing was from one of the young, yet great quartets of our time."

— *The Strad*

"My personal favourite among the four (quartets) for their impeccable blend, and the wonderful tone of the leader, Alexander Pavlovsky, which is best described as a fiery sweetness. Since they formed at the Jerusalem Music Centre in 1993 their career has been a triumphal ascent."

— *Daily Telegraph*

"A vibrant night of music making....Four smart, listening musicians who responded to each other with the in-the-moment aplomb of improvisers. This was music full of sudden pauses, lingering silences, dramatic entries and something akin to the rhythmic displacements that jazzmen call swing."

—*New Orleans Times-Picayune*

JERUSALEM QUARTET DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDINGS

Dvořák: String Quintet Op.97 and Sextet Op.48 - with Veronika Hagen, viola and Gary Hoffman, cello

Bartok: String Quartets No. 2, 4, and 6

Beethoven: String Quartets Op.18

Smetana and Janacek: String Quartets

Johannes Brahms: Clarinet Quintet, String Quartet No.2- with Sharon Kam, clarinet

R. SCHUMANN - PIANO QUARTET OP. 47 & QUINTET OP. 44

W.A. Mozart - String Quartets Nos. 4, 17 & 22 - WINNER OF THE 2012 BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE AWARD

HAYDN. String Quartets Op.20,5, 33,3 & 76,5 vol.2

HAYDN. String Quartets Op.64,5, 76,2 & 77,1New Edition

HAYDN. A Haydn Celebration 1809-2009 - An illustrated CD-book about the life and works of Haydn

SCHUBERT. Death and the Maiden, Quartettsatz D.703

SHOSTAKOVICH. String Quartets Nos. 6, 8 & 11

DVORAK. Quartet op.96 'American', Piano quintet with Stefan Vladar

SHOSTAKOVICH: String Quartets Nos. 1,4 & 9

HAYDN. String Quartets Op.64,5, 76,2 & 77,1

Tchaikovsky String Quartet n.1, Shostakovich String Quartet no.3

Beethoven Op.18 no.6, Ravel, Dvorak Op.96

TEXAS CLASSICAL REVIEW

Jerusalem Quartet finds a bond across time between Beethoven and Janáček

Fri Mar 23, 2018 at 3:51 pm

By Steven Brown



The Jerusalem Quartet performed Thursday night for Chamber Music Houston.

The Jerusalem Quartet made quite a stylistic leap Thursday in Rice University's Stude Concert Hall. It opened its Chamber Music Houston program with Beethoven's Quartet in F minor, Op. 95, the "Quartetto Serioso." Then, skipping a century of musical evolution, the group launched into Leoš Janáček's Quartet No. 1, "The Kreutzer Sonata." And the players revealed musical kinships that bridged the two composers.

Yes, Janáček's subtitle harks back to Beethoven. But he actually took it from a story by Leo Tolstoy: *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which refers to Beethoven's *Violin Sonata No. 9*. Janáček's quartet has no connection to the sonata's mood or music, much less to the "Quartetto Serioso." The Jerusalem Quartet revealed deeper links between the two quartets. And the ensemble's vividness, precision and richness made them all the more compelling.

The group evidently needed no time to settle in. The brusque unison theme that opens "Quartetto Serioso" rang out as if the players spoke with a single, robust voice. Yet when more lyrical, individual voicings were called for moments later, the four musicians — violinists Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, violist Ori Kam and cellist Kyril Zlotnikov — relished their independence. As the melody moved from one player to another, each made it reach out yearningly, while his compatriots complemented the line with a murmuring, deftly woven background.

For the rest of the turbulent first movement, the group sa-

vored the music's contrasts. As the terse opening motif took more and more explosive forms, the players made it lash out in taut, fiery phrases. But they never let force deteriorate into coarseness. And when the music's gentler side reasserted itself, the players brought out its songfulness and intimacy, and its instances of warmth. The group's flair for eliciting drama and feeling at every turn would make the rest of the work — and later Janáček's quartet — just as potent.

After the hushed, tense close of the first movement, cellist Zlotnikov opened the second just as quietly. But now an introspectiveness prevailed, and the musicians spun out the music tenderly, and even sweetly, until it was time to summon more full-throated, enunciated tones.

Their reading of the third movement paired a sometimes biting, sometimes brooding intensity with deftly turned melody. Surging ahead in the final movement with a barely contained tension, the players then delivered a burst of brightness and agility to usher the "Quartetto Serioso" to its happy ending.

The parallels emerged as soon as the ensemble commenced with Janáček, *His Quartet No. 1* — interpreting Tolstoy's story of a bitterly unhappy marriage — also gets its power from pithy themes, sudden changes of mood and texture, fierce climaxes, and bursts of heartfelt melody.

Janáček's music is, if anything, even more concise and volatile. And the musicians threw themselves into it Thursday, wielding an even wider range of tone and color — from hauntingly quiet to ferocious — than they had in Beethoven. Yet they still held onto their polish, focus and assurance. Each strand of the music came alive: Melodies that were just a few notes long swelled and subsided expressively; and a single instrument's vigorous outcry could create an arresting contrast with the rest of the group — embodying, perhaps, the domestic turbulence in Tolstoy's novella. Thanks to Pavlovsky, some of the first violin's flights of melody had the impact of plaintive soliloquies.

As the intensity built, another electrifying ingredient appeared: the ponticello bowing effects — source of a hollow, metallic tone that can either whisper or scream. Yet the group never let the ponticello lines lapse into mere scraping, as some quartets do.

After intermission, the players slipped adroitly into the buoyant rhythms, sleek lines and subtle shadings of Claude Debussy's *Quartet in G minor*. As in Beethoven and Janáček, the players did build up to some bursts of abandon. But they put their emphasis on the supple flow of melodies, crisp energy and the spring in the music's step. The *Andantino*, with its long, silky lines and glowing half-shades, was a particular treat: Without turning lethargic, it exuded stillness. And the group brought something of the same aura to its encore, the slow movement of Beethoven's *Quartet in F major, Op. 135*.

Chamber Music Houston returns April 12 with Artemis Quartet playing Mozart, Bartok and Schumann. chambermusicohouston.org

theStrad

APRIL 2017

ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890



BARTÓK String Quartets

nos.2, 4 and 6

Jerusalem Quartet

HARMONIA MUNDI HMC 902235

Beauty and muscular intensity abound, just as they should in Bartók

The Jerusalem players open Bartók's Second Quartet with a passionate account of the first movement, knitting its disparate elements into a satisfying whole, imbued with warmth and featuring some beautiful high keening from cellist Kyril Zlotnikov. The snarling, raucous second movement is shocking in its pagan intensity, and the mystery of the slowly unfolding finale is heightened by exemplary attention to Bartók's markings. The first movement of the Fourth Quartet snaps away splendidly, with some wonderful muscular glissandos. The cellist shows his mettle again with a robust recitative at the opening of the third movement, with beautifully spectral playing from the other players to follow. The pizzicato fourth movement is full-bodied, perhaps a little too much so when Bartók asks for quiet. In the finale the players are too wise and musical to treat every fortissimo as an attack (as some do), and there is beauty and sophistication to match the energy.

In the Sixth Quartet the playing is clear and limpid in the first movement; the Marcia and Burletta are by turns rhythmically crisp and low-down louche. The plaintive last movement is simply done and affecting. These are fine performances, shot through with beauty. The recording is close-miked and resonant.

BY TUPAC WARDON

TIM HOMFRAY

THE PLAIN DEALER



Jerusalem Quartet treats Cleveland Chamber Music Society to evening of rare depth (review)

Updated Mar 23, 2017; Posted Mar 23, 2017

By **MARK SATOLA**

SHAKER HEIGHTS, Ohio -- When a violin soloist performing a concerto with an orchestra breaks a string, it's traditional for the concertmaster to hand her instrument to the soloist so the performance can continue with barely a ripple of interruption.

When, however, it's a player in a string quartet, there's not much that can be done except exit the stage and put on a new string. That's what happened Tuesday night at the Jerusalem Quartet's appearance at Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights, toward the end of the last movement of Prokofiev's String Quartet No. 1 in B Minor.

There was a pop, the music came to a halt, and first violinist Alexander Pavlovsky left the stage to replace the broken string. It only took a few minutes, and then Pavlovsky returned, to appreciative applause, and the quartet picked up where they left off.

It's a good measure of the Jerusalem Quartet's supreme artistry that once they resumed playing, it was as if there had been no interruption at all.

The group's appearance Tuesday was a return engagement with the [Cleveland Chamber Music Society](#). The Jerusalem Quartet's stature has only grown since their auspicious debut in 1996, and their Cleveland recital demonstrated the hows and the whys of their quick ascent to the top ranks of chamber ensembles.

The Jerusalem Quartet plays with artistic authority, immense energy, perfectly blended tone, and a unity of ensemble that borders on psychic. Their readings of quartets by Haydn, Dvorak, and the aforementioned Prokofiev provided one of the most substantial musical evenings in recent memory. Even the encore was no trifle; the quartet returned to give a

snapping reading of the all-pizzicato fourth movement from Bartok's challenging String Quartet No. 4.

You knew you were in good hands in the opening bars of the opening work, Haydn's String Quartet in D Major, Op. 64 No. 5, which has earned the soubriquet "The Lark" for the shapely, upward-rising figure in the first violin, which was played with beguiling skill and sweetness by Pavlovsky.

Haydn's quartets do not overstay their welcome, usually clocking in at 20 minutes or so, but the old master, by the time he wrote the six Op. 64 works, knew how to pack his succinct essays with plenty of ingenious activity. The Jerusalem Quartet brought out all the quartet's brilliance with a performance full of interpretive felicity. They could have encored the entire quartet and no one would have objected.

The Prokofiev quartet was given a reading of great intensity. The players navigated the composer's kaleidoscopic shifts of tonality and mood masterfully but also with great clarity, so that one always knew where one was in Prokofiev's twists and turns. It can only be assumed that the extra measure of applause at the end was as much for the outstanding reading as for quartet's aplomb in the affair of the broken string.

Dvorak's unjustly neglected String Quartet No. 13 is one of the composer's most harmonically advanced works, as well as one of his most intellectually profound. The Jerusalem's passionate and committed reading made a strong case for its greater presence in the repertoire, especially in the emotionally complex finale, which the Jerusalem players brought to vivid and moving life.

The encore made a lengthy evening even longer, but it almost didn't matter. One suspects the audience happily would have let the quartet play another hour.

SEPTEMBER 20 2016

Jerusalem Quartet review: A thing of beauty and intelligence revealed

Peter McCallum

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Musica Viva, City Recital Hall, September 19

★★★★½

The Jerusalem Quartet takes the experience of listening to a string quartet a little beyond Goethe's famous dictum that it is like a conversation among four intelligent people.

Intelligent people sometimes say foolish things, go off track or drop their h's, whereas the Jerusalem Quartet delivered each musical utterance, each thought, each phrase at such a pinnacle that it was more like listening to a truth revealed or a thing of beauty unveiled.

In Beethoven's String Quartet in B flat, Opus 18 Number No. 6 they created an engaging mixture of lively energy and impeccable phrasing, so that one entered a state of high mental alertness where each inflection or intake of breath was meaningful.

Advertisement

In terms of the dynamic, no one phrase was quite like the one before, and the colouring was in a constant state of evolution.

The fourth movement is preceded by a remarkable representation of melancholy (*La Malinconia*), with striking harmonic adventurousness and the quartet's carefully shaded modulations drew the listener in.

Composer Ross Edwards noted in a talk from the stage that, in preparing his String Quartet No. 3, *Summer Dances*, the quartet had identified Jewish affinities. In the performance these were particularly salient in the third movement, *Nocturne: Forrest II*. From simple textures, they would highlight individual notes with a quirky accent or bring a new colour to create eerie moments, suppressed sighs and lonely songs.

This five-movement work alternates such nocturnal moods with more animated rituals, ending with a restrained *Lotus Dance* followed by an *Ecstatic Dance*.

The first movement of Dvorak's String Quartet No. 13 in G captured something of the stirring bustle of nature in springtime, with fresh birdsong-like ornaments and moments of animation and flight.

The second movement began in Beethovenian thoughtfulness, but the cheer of the subsequent music was like listening to a conversation of four intelligent people relieved of the burden of profundity.

The New York Times

Review: Jerusalem Quartet Starts a Weeklong Marathon

By **CORINNA da FONSECA-WOLLHEIM**

JAN. 29, 2016

A good string quartet, wisdom has it, is like a single instrument with 16 strings. That sort of unity of sound and purpose is a given in any performance by the extraordinary Jerusalem Quartet, which on Thursday completed the opening leg of a marathon in which it will play all six Bartok quartets and the first six quartets by Beethoven within a single week at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. But during the Andante of Bartok's Quartet No. 5 on Thursday, the ensemble seemed to morph not so much into a super-instrument as into something organic and animalistic that moved with louche and unpredictable grace.

The concert, at the Rose Studio, comprised Bartok's first, third and fifth quartets, works that need feline flexibility of expression. The technical innovations in his writing for strings — the skittish bow taps, the string-snapping pizzicatos — have long since been absorbed into players' technical lexicon. But it still takes an ensemble with a strong vision to make them speak.

The violinists Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, the violist Ori Kam and the cellist Kyril Zlotnikov each bring formidable chops to the task. In the nervy chromaticism of Bartok's late-Romantic first quartet, the ensemble's sound was glossy and generous, with only Mr. Zlotnikov's cello occasionally giving hints of a violent undertow.

In the Quartet No. 3, the players produced a cooler, smokier sound suited to a work that weds irony and pathos with big slurpy portamenti (slides from one note to another) answered by mocking plucked notes. Like a great actor, the ensemble managed to imbue each moment with tragedy and comedy at once.

But in the finale of the Quartet No. 5, between the million-notes-a-minute breathlessness of the Allegro and the white blur of the final Presto, Bartok shines the spotlight on the second violin with an innocent tune that makes for a moment of pure silliness. Taking the expressive marking "con indifferenza" ("with indifference") to heart, Mr. Bresler played it with out-of-tune apathy of an undermotivated beginner, in what was perhaps the night's most astonishing transformation.

The Jerusalem Quartet performs Beethoven quartets at Alice Tully Hall on Sunday and Tuesday and the rest of the Bartok quartets at the Rose Studio on Thursday; chambermusicsociety.org.

GRAMOPHONE

The world's authority on classical music since 1923

Beethoven

Six String Quartets, Op 18

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi (M) © HMC90 2207/8 (153' • DDD)



With Haydn, Mozart and Schubert under their belt, it was only a matter of time before

the Jerusalem Quartet turned their attention to Beethoven. Their only previous taster was a recording of Op 18 No 6, coupled with Ravel and Dvořák, from more than a decade ago. As you'd expect from this group, personality, integrity and lustrous tone are all high on the agenda. The slow movement of No 1, for instance, is given at a relatively brisk pace, avoiding all temptation to over-romanticise it; but, by making the chugging accompaniment relatively prominent, there's a sense of unease as the melody struggles to make itself heard. They are alive to the drama of Beethoven's all-important silences too.

Others may find more extremes in this set of quartets. The third movement of the Third can sound more febrile – as the Takács ably demonstrate in the Trio, with its sharply pointed hairpin dynamics – while in the finale of the same work the Jerusalem are a touch gentler than the Takács, the irrepressible Lindsays and the supreme Hungarian Quartet, while the Talich (on Calliope) put more emphasis on a sense of wistfulness. The Jerusalem's Fourth Quartet is a particular highlight, from the irresistibly characterful viola-playing, a first-movement development full of fire and intensity and a third movement that seems to be paced just right, and in the coda of the finale they really throw caution to the wind, similar in approach to the thrilling Takács but with a more refulgent sound.

They capture well the very different worlds of each quartet, and the variation-form slow movement of No 5 is given with plenty of charm, the trill-infused fifth variation sounding truly unbuttoned. Even if the Hungarian are peerless here in the

interplay between musicians in the chattering finale, the Jerusalem run them close, the ending warmly insouciant.

The Sixth Quartet certainly doesn't lack for energy in the first movement, a whisper faster than the Takács and more gleeful than the Belcea. In the slow movement their characteristically rich tone again comes into its own, while the contrast between the finale's mysterious opening and the ensuing *Allegretto* is potently conveyed. Add to that a wonderfully naturalistic recording and you have a triumphant addition to the bulging Beethoven catalogue. **Harriet Smith**

Op 18 – selected comparisons:

Hungarian Qt (11/54⁸, 1/55⁸) (REGI) ➔ RRC7011 or (HERI) ➔ HTGCMD045

Lindsay Qt (1/80⁸) (RESO) RSB801

Takács Qt (4/04) (DECC) 470 848-2DH2

Belcea Qt (1/13⁸, 8/13⁸) (ZZT) ZZT344

The Seattle Times

Jerusalem Quartet brings out Bartok's best

Originally published February 20, 2015 at 11:59 am

By [Philippa Kiraly](#)

Special to The Seattle Times

The Jerusalem Quartet made its Seattle debut *Thursday night with a reputation as one of the more stellar groups to have emerged in the past couple of decades. It's safe to say the quartet lived up to its accolades.*

For the UW World Series at Meany Theater, the foursome — violinists Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, violist Ori Kam and cellist Kyril Zlotnikov — chose Haydn's Quartet No. 59 in G Minor ("Rider"), Bartok's String Quartet No. 4 and Schubert's String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor ("Death and the Maiden").

Although all three works belong to mainstream genres with which a listener could feel comfortably familiar, there was a host of differences in the Jerusalem's performance of them. The way the quartet interprets the music brought many different images to the mind during the performance, as if the musicians were painting pictures. Much of it was done through reflections of moods, which changed from phrase to phrase, like flashes of light.

They rarely played at top volume, using fortes more as peaks here and there. They used dynamics as effective coloration, changing and shading phrases all the time combined with the variations in mood, carrying both to an extent we rarely hear, but always done with subtlety.

The Haydn received a performance of early classical elegance with clear articulation, fine ornamentation and vibrato used more as comment than ubiquitously. There was seamless give-and-take between the players with a matched tone and a relaxed style among all of them, no matter what the tone of the music: musing, urgent, lighthearted, incandescent.

Many groups beat the daylights out of Bartok, emphatically and scratchily digging out the notes. The Jerusalem was no less emphatic where it was needed but there was no digging, and scratches were used rarely so that the subtleties of the music came to the fore. Even the second movement's beelike buzzing changed from what might have been contented bees to agitated ones in darting forays of perpetual motion, while in the fourth, the group achieved amazingly different types of pizzicato (plucking the strings), coloring the music still more.

Contrasts between decisive chords and murmuring yearning in the Schubert; hurried figures, like reaction to disaster, juxtaposed with suddenly positive moments; anguish changing to serenity and then to something ominous; the musicians brought out all this and more with ebbs and flows, so it was like seeing a musical portrait in sharp relief and vibrant colors, with intensity and delicacy at the same time.

It's disciplined playing, and the musicians were always exactly together even in the faster and faster moments at the end of the Schubert.

The exciting performance drew enthusiastic audience response, but the Jerusalem members took their bows unsmiling — no communication with the audience at all.

Philippa Kiraly

theStrad

ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

SMETANA String Quartet
no.1 in E minor 'From my life'
JANÁČEK String Quartets
no.1 'Kreutzer Sonata'
& no.2 'Intimate Letters'
Jerusalem Quartet

HARMONIA MUNDI HMC902178

**Performances that bring
out the personal nature
of the works' inspirations**



It is clear from the opening of Smetana's First Quartet that the Jerusalem players have the quality essential for all these deeply personal works: character, and lots of it. It shows itself in myriad details, even as the music sweeps energetically onwards, in the tailing of a phrase, a beautifully judged dynamic shading, the length and tone given to a staccato note. Everything is alive and colourful, whether subtle or broad: second violin and viola carry off their trumpet impersonations splendidly in Smetana's Polka, and the finale swings along with an infectious mixture of the light and the earthy. The final sense of grief at Smetana's deafness is palpable.

There is grief, too, in Janáček's First Quartet, where the players eloquently capture his portrait of a trapped young

April 2014

theStrad

ESSENTIAL READING FOR THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

CDS REVIEWS

theStrad
RECOMMENDS...



BRAHMS String Quartet in A minor op.51 no.2, Clarinet Quintet in B minor op.115

Jerusalem Quartet, Sharon Kam (clarinet)

HARMONIA MUNDI HMC 902152

Beautifully polished performances of two Brahms masterpieces



Thankfully we have passed beyond the era when clarinetists thought of the

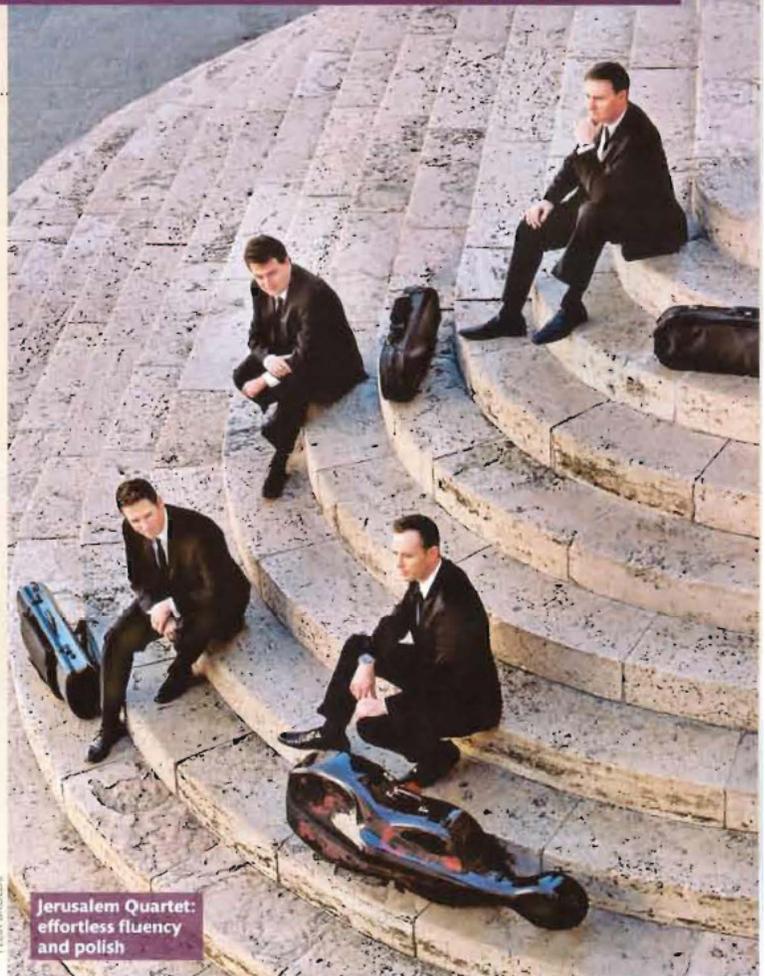
Brahms Quintet as a quasi-concerto, though few have gone quite so far in the opposite direction as Sharon Kam, whose playing for much of the time melts into the string textures. The result is by far the most intrinsically beautiful performance of the work that I have ever encountered. Everything ebbs and flows with

a natural pulse, the first movement's development could hardly be gentler and if the Adagio may possibly be a tad too slow, it leads neatly into the players' unhurried Andantino and a reflective view of the finale.

A defining characteristic of the performance is its refined dialogue, and the balance within the Jerusalem Quartet is also exemplary as the players capture every dynamic nuance. That is equally true of the foursome's view of the A minor Quartet, where the outer movement's mood changes are boldly stated and contrast with an unusually wistful approach to the slow movement. For many the Alban Berg Quartet's recording (EMI) is irreplaceable, but this would now be my first choice.

Throughout the disc, the playing has an effortless fluency and polish, and the warm quality of the recorded sound adds to the beauty of the quartet's tone.

DAVID DENTON



Jerusalem Quartet: effortless fluency and polish

July 2013

GRAMOPHONE

The world's authority on classical music since 1923

Brahms

String Quartet No 2, Op 51 No 2.

Clarinet Quintet, Op 115^a

^aSharon Kam *cl* Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2152 (71' • DDD)



Israeli clarinetist joins the Jerusalem Quartet

Few command Brahms's string quartets the way the Jerusalem do here in Op 51 No 2. Even the most reputable players can't always make the close-knit harmonies sound out, leaving the thematic transformations to peek out from behind layers of texture, resulting in music that seems remote. Immediacy certainly isn't lacking here, partly because the quartet's tight blend never allows the sound to become unwieldy but achieves a specificity allowing a greater degree of contour, not to mention more shades of muted mystery.

With every phrase and movement having distinctly different things to say, the piece takes on as much narrative thrust as any of Brahms's symphonies, even when sometimes-skipped repeats are observed (the first movement's, for example). Also, the group's ability to play softly yet maintain ensemble stability and strength of timbre contributes greatly to the performance's sense of light and shade. Much of the recording's success has to do with the engineering, which effectively takes you inside the Jerusalem's sonority yet maintains an overall acoustical aura that also delivers Brahmsian lushness.

Joined by Sharon Kam in the Clarinet Quintet, the Jerusalem exude an even greater sense of freedom with much more give and take within any given tempo. Kam has lovely, warm tone and seamless *legato*, but what sets her apart from her contemporaries is her chemistry with the quartet. Everyone seems to draw ideas and energy from the others in a performance that has great flights of passion, without imposing an anachronistic Romanticism on the music. Even in her rhapsodic solos, Kam maintains a poise and restraint. The terse, mysterious ending that often feels strangely abrupt sneaks up from behind – quite nicely. **David Patrick Stearns**

The New York Times

It's Your Own Funeral, Shostakovich

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Published: March 15, 2013

Like a man writing his own obituary Dmitri Shostakovich composed his String Quartet No. 8 as a requiem for himself, weaving it together with an autobiographical motif consisting of the letters D-S-C-H.

These letters — the first four of D. Schostakowitsch, the German spelling of his name — are translated to musical notes as D, E flat, C and B. The quartet opens with the [cello playing the funereal sequence](#), which is then mournfully intoned by the other strings. A solo lament unfolds over a low drone before the other voices join in the plaintive dialogue. The piece includes multiple autobiographical references to previous works, including quotations from his First and Fifth Symphonies in the first movement.

The [Jerusalem Quartet](#) will perform the work on Tuesday evening, alongside the 4th, 10th and 11th Quartets. The ensemble's series of four concerts featuring Shostakovich's complete cycle of 15 string quartets begins on Sunday afternoon at Alice Tully Hall, presented by the [Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center](#).

Shostakovich wrote the Eighth Quartet in 1960, while visiting the ruins of Dresden, which was destroyed by an Allied bombing raid in 1945. He was on assignment to write a score for "Five Days, Five Nights," a film about the bombardment. While in Germany he completed the quartet in three days.

There is a duality to much of [Shostakovich's music](#), an outer veneer that broadcasts one message and an interior

that conveys another, with censors and audiences at the time interpreting the scores according to their own predispositions.

The published score of the Eighth Quartet included the subtitle "To the Victims of Fascism and War," although some scholars, and Shostakovich's children, have maintained that he didn't write the subtitle himself. On one level the Eighth can be heard as a narrative of Soviet repression and wartime destruction. "But even this public piece that deals with something collective is a very personal piece, in a way the 'Leningrad' Symphony is not," said [Ori Kam](#), the Jerusalem's violist.

"The quartets in general are a window into Shostakovich's soul," he added.

Along with many other artists at the time Shostakovich faced constant censorship and scrutiny, his music denounced as "formalist" by the Soviet authorities and banned on several occasions. Even a listener knowing nothing of the historical background of the works might well assume they were written in a climate of fear, discernible from the frequent evocations of paranoid shadows and scurrying footsteps anxiously woven through many of his works. Much of his music attains panic-inducing climaxes, as the Eighth Quartet does in the second movement.

This [section is trademark Shostakovich](#). Frantic repeated motifs escalate with nerve-shattering intensity, reflecting the mind-set of a man who in 1948, when expecting to be arrested, slept by the elevator in his apartment building so his family wouldn't be startled by a knock on the door in the night. Shostakovich often wove Jewish themes and folk songs into his music, an increasingly dangerous interest during Stalin's anti-Semitic campaigns during the 1940s and '50s. In the second movement of the Eighth Quartet he quotes a Jewish theme from his Piano Trio No. 2.

Sardonic waltzes, like the eerie one that unfolds in the third movement, are another Shostakovich trademark, this one based on the D-S-C-H motif. He also refers to a cello concerto written the previous year for Rostropovich.

The three urgent fortissimo chords that open the fourth movement against a low drone and resurface later in the section evoke the bombing of Dresden, a plaintive melody later unfolding like a requiem for the dead. Shostakovich refers to the revolutionary song "Tormented by Harsh Captivity" and an aria from his opera "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District," which had been withdrawn from the stage after its denunciation by Stalin.

The five movements are played without pause, "a beautiful arc that encompasses the depth of the human experience," Mr. Kam said. The final movement echoes the first, using the D-S-C-H motif in a somber fugue.

The work's accessible and communicative language has helped render it the most popular of the 15 quartets, with stark emotional qualities as shattering as those of the late Beethoven quartets. Listening to them is certainly an intense experience, but Mr. Kam, who has performed the complete cycle with the Jerusalem Quartet on several occasions, said that while he thought the audience might want to hear a "nice Haydn or Mozart" quartet afterward, "that by the second concert the music communicates to the



Photo: Felix Broede

The Jerusalem Quartet, which will play Shostakovich's string quartets this month, includes, from far left: Alexander Pavlovsky, Sergei Bresler, Kyril Zlotnikov and Ori Kam.

audience in a way it couldn't when just one quartet is programmed." "The Sixth Quartet is probably the only one I could say is optimistic," Mr. Kam said. "But I don't see the Eighth as depressing. I see it as very charged. It goes very deep into a person, into his inner world."

According to Mr. Kam — who is of Russian descent but is the only member of the Jerusalem Quartet not born in the former Soviet Union — "the palettes of expression in Russian culture are more multifaceted than what we are used to in the West."

He continued: "We think of sad as a negative thing, but for Russians there is a beautiful sad that is also cathartic. Every emotion is more multilayered in its meaning."

"You leave these concerts feeling like you know the man," Mr. Kam added. "It sounds like a good sales pitch, but it is amazing. I saw the music differently after doing a cycle. No other composer embodies the period and place he lived in like Shostakovich. The Eighth Quartet is a piece of art that expresses that moment."

The New York Times

MUSIC REVIEW

Moments of Lyricism in a Purely Russian Story

By CORINNA da FONSECA-WOLLHEIM

Published: March 18, 2013

In Shostakovich's career, pockmarked with forced commissions, attempts to placate Soviet officials and humiliating bouts of censorship, his string quartets occupy a special place. Many critics have likened them to a confessional into which the composer confided the fears and hopes he had to suppress in public. But most of all, the 15 quartets represent the music Shostakovich wanted to write at a given moment.

The current survey of the complete cycle by the [Jerusalem Quartet](#) presented by the [Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center](#) at Alice Tully Hall offers a look at how that music changed over four decades. The first concert on Sunday afternoon encompassed the Haydn-like optimism of the Neo-Classical Quartet No. 1 in C (1938), the abstract ruminations of the Quartet No. 5 in B flat, the Quartet No. 6 in G (1956) with its gorgeous grief-stricken Lento and the Quartet No. 12 in D flat, in which Shostakovich plays with 12-tone motifs.

The Jerusalem Quartet played it all with equal passion and a tender sense of ownership. Three of its members were born in the former Soviet Union (the two violinists, Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, and the cellist Kyril Zlotnikov), and the California-born violist, Ori Kam, has Russian roots. In their program notes the players recall studying with friends, colleagues and students of Shostakovich: "This music seems to tell 'our' story."

Then again the quartets are rarely story driven. Instead Shostakovich uses them to investigate musical forms

and their expressive potential with scientific curiosity. How do you write a waltz so that it spins from wistful to sinister in a few bars? When do the repetitions in a passacaglia feel oppressive rather than reassuring? How do you treat a 12-tone theme so that the listener develops a fond familiarity with it?

In the process Shostakovich distills moments of lyricism, melancholy or heroism, but they tend to be fleeting, slipping back into abstract passages more preoccupied with the beauty of structure and color. The Jerusalem Quartet brought a beautiful sense of flexibility to these cinematic changes of light and shadow that require subtle adjustments of tone and timbre. Mr. Pavlovsky, playing the first violin part, produced a veiled, floating sound for the passages where the musical material is guarded and unsure. When called for, his sound grew rich and charismatic. Mr. Kam's viola glowed in the solo that opens the second movement of the first quartet. The generosity of Mr. Zlotnikov's playing breathed warmth into the soulful cello solo in the Quartet No. 6.

In Shostakovich's quartets any player can be corralled into the rhythm section at a moment's notice, and the Jerusalem players rose to the challenge with a crisp sense of time, marking rhythms with juicy pizzicatos or cricketlike chirps.

With the exception of the first, none of the quartets in Sunday's program had ever been performed at the Chamber Music Society before. That the concert and part of the remaining series are sold out shows how keen audiences are to see Shostakovich up close and personal.

The Shostakovich Cycle continues this week at Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center, chambermusicsociety.org, (212) 875-5788; limited availability.



OregonLive.com

Everything Oregon

Jerusalem Quartet gives compelling performances of Shostakovich string quartets: Review



By [David Stabler, The Oregonian](#)

on March 12, 2013 at 2:01 PM, updated March 12, 2013 at 2:02 PM

Dmitri Shostakovich's 15 string quartets trace a creative path from youthful vigor to dread of death, tensely combining along the way pathos with caustic comedy, folk melodies with modern angularities and passionate outbursts with passages so bleak and austere they leave you gasping for breath. Each is compelling in its own right; as a set representing an intimate creative autobiography, they're rivaled only by Beethoven's, and a traversal of the complete cycle by any decent quartet qualifies as a major event.

Presented by [Friends of Chamber Music](#) at Portland State University's Lincoln Performance Hall, this week's concerts featuring the Jerusalem Quartet in all 15 are so far -- after concerts Sunday afternoon and Monday evening -- already much more than that. They're a resounding triumph, easily among the most memorable musical performances in Portland in recent memory.

The quartet -- violinists Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, violist Ori Kam and cellist Kyril Zlotnikov -- [arrived here on rafts of lavish praise](#), but then so do most of their cohort, and from looking at them you'd be forgiven for some skepticism. They look awfully young to have been playing together for 20 years (most of the quartet formed at the Jerusalem Conservatory of Music and Dance in 1993; Kam is a recent replacement for one of the founders) or to have acquired the wisdom that radiated from their playing from the opening measures of the Quartet No. 1.

At this level of quartet playing, which is to say, the highest, it's difficult to distinguish what makes one ensemble different from another, but some aspects of their performance stand out. Their ensemble is uncanny: they breath together, they lean into notes and phrases together, and their attacks are consistently precise, as is their intonation as they end the quartets in heart-stopping pianissimos. But as precise as they can be, they don't sound fastidious -- their stabbing attacks in the second movement of the Quartet No. 10, Monday, were a cacophony of wood, steel and horsehair that banged off the back wall of the hall to haunting effect, and their earthy sound in the opening of the Fourth underscored its echoes of folk music.

Generally, their sound was so warm and subdued that it was often difficult to tell whether or not they were playing with mutes. Individually, they were distinctive and supremely flexible. Few quartets achieve the balance they did, each member rising up and falling back within the ensemble to give a natural sense of fluidity and depth. Shostakovich's lean textures, especially in the later quartets, put each member on display, and each shone as a soloist.

Beyond the details of tone and technique, though, there has been a powerful sense of drama, in each quartet and over the set as a whole. Each program has combined early, middle and late quartets in a meaningful trajectory -- even just the jump from the First to the Fifth in the first half of Sunday's program prefigured the arc of the cycle as a whole.

Tickets for the remainder of the series, Wednesday and Thursday nights, are sold out, but the quartet plays the cycle again at New York's Lincoln Center beginning this Sunday. If you can make it there, you should.

-- [James McQuillen](#)

Concert review: Jerusalem Quartet reaches destination

October 25, 2012 12:46 am

By Andrew Druckenbrod / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There's a mathematical spinoff of a Zeno paradox that says you can never reach your destination. To get somewhere, you first must travel halfway to it, but from there you need to pass the midpoint of the remaining distance. You end up getting closer and closer, but never reaching the goal.

Performing music is not unlike this. Musicians never feel they get to the interpretation they want to or achieve perfection, whatever that may be. But it is within those minute gradations that a performance goes from wonderful to **awe-inspiring. That is the best way I can explain the playing of the Jerusalem Quartet** Tuesday night at Carnegie Music Hall. In its long-awaited debut on the Pittsburgh Chamber Music Society series, they were closer to my conception of how Mozart and Shostakovich, dare I say, should sound. Everyone's take will be different, but surely the performance landed in that area for most.

Violinists Alexander Pavlovsky (first) and Sergei Bresler (second), cellist Kyril Zlotnikov and violist Ori Kam displayed the discipline of a top orchestra string section yet the nuances of a chamber choir, all evident in a performance of Mozart's "Prussian" Quartet. The collective tone almost sounded as if they had mutes on (the tiny rubber pads that dampen sound when attached to the bridge, not silence it). It was mellow and broad, never tinny even in the higher registers. In the first movement, the phrasing gave weight to the contours between the beginning and ends of lines. The last notes were often offered shorter than written duration, but still rang with definite attainment.

This was not dull or ambiguous playing in the least. The musicians thrust the cascading scales of the second movement from the texture more so than is typical and Mr. Zlotnikov and Mr. Kam put their stamps onto counter melodies and distinct harmonies throughout. The former appeared to be almost intrusive in his desire to connect with the others, but closing one's ears allowed you to realize these looks were deceiving: his was present but collaborative and supportive.

Shostakovich's Quartet No. 1 was full of character but also cohesiveness. Dissonance swirled within the music rather than in opposition to it. Mr. Kam's solo in the second movement seemed to capture the sorrow and solitude of the composer's alienated relationship to his country. Or, without adding such meaning, he superbly mustered an opaque timbre amid steadfast legato.

The quartet ended with a sweet yet spacious performance of Borodin's Quartet No. 2.

Cleveland Plain Dealer

October 10, 2012

Jerusalem Quartet soars in Cleveland Chamber Music Society's new home

Donald Rosenberg, The Plain Dealer

Hooray for the Cleveland Chamber Music Society -- and everyone else who savors music-making of intimate magnetism. After too many years enduring the acoustical haze of Fairmount Temple Auditorium in Beachwood, the society this season has taken up residence in the crystal-clear sonic environment of Plymouth Church in Shaker Heights. Listeners no longer will scratch their heads figuring out what the musicians are trying to impart. The days of distant performances are gone. In the sanctuary at Plymouth Church, the artists are so close to the audience that every detail can be discerned.

The Jerusalem Quartet had the honor of providing the details Tuesday to open the society's 63rd season. In its fifth appearance in the series, the ensemble lavished scrupulous attention on music by Mozart, Shostakovich and Brahms, with a bit of Debussy for dessert.

So many excellent string quartets are active today that you might wonder why the society keeps engaging the Jerusalem. Then **the musicians begin to play and you surrender to the intensity, sensitivity and sheer beauty of the performances.**

Tuesday's program may not have won awards in the adventure department, but it did present the Jerusalem in diverse styles. The concert also introduced the audience to the ensemble's splendid new violist, Ori Kam, who applied noble definition to whatever he touched.

The individuality of voices that is a hallmark of the Jerusalem can partly be ascribed to its seating, with violins sitting across from one another, the cello next to the first violin and the viola next to the second. The arrangement had a beneficial effect on all of the night's scores, especially the opening work, Mozart's Quartet in B-flat major, K. 589.

At turns graceful and dramatic, the interpretation vividly acknowledged Mozart's swift changes of mood and harmony. Cellist Kyril Zlotnikov brought eloquent shading to the solo that opens the slow movement and elsewhere vividly shared material with his impeccable colleagues, Kam and violinists Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler.

The group has played music by Shostakovich here before, and it was a pleasure to hear the players inhabit the Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108, on this occasion. From the ironies and disembodied gestures of the first two movements to the finale's fugal ferocity and eerie waltz, **this was a performance of penetrating character.**

A similar ability to tap into expressive extremes pervaded the Jerusalem's account of Brahms' Quartet No. 3 in B-flat major, Op. 67. The musicians solved the composer's rhythmic puzzles with elegant ease and heightened emotional contrasts to rapturous and mysterious effect.

For something completely different (and exquisite), the ensemble offered the slow movement from Debussy's Quartet in G minor as an encore. No one is likely to be disappointed if/when the Jerusalem makes a sixth appearance in the society's series.

CHAMBER

The *Goldner Quartet* dusts off Hamilton Harty's chamber music; the *Nash Ensemble* are busy with discs of Borodin and Schumann; plus an impressive debut from the *Valentin Berlinsky Quartet*



ARENKY • BORODIN • GLAZUNOV

Borodin: String Sextet; Glazunov: String Quintet, Op. 39; Arensky: Quartet for violin, viola and two cellos, Op. 35
The Nash Ensemble
Onyx 4067 65:41 mins
BBC Music Direct £13.99

This well-planned album offers three complementary works linked both by the genial spirit of Borodin, Russia's first great master of chamber music, and also by each of their ensembles featuring the rich-toned palette of two cellos. Borodin's Sextet, the surviving two movements of an early work from 1860, predates his involvement with Balakirev's 'Mighty Handful' (which also included Cui, Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov). Its Mendelssohnian first movement shows little sign of his own distinctive voice, yet it has considerable charm, and his masterful writing for this ensemble is evident in both this and in the curiously Brahms-like slow movement. Both movements are played here by the Nash Ensemble with relish and conviction.

Glazunov's Quintet of 1892 is clearly inspired by mature Borodin. Its deft counterpoint and sweet harmonies perhaps offer insufficient contrast to sustain interest through its considerable length; yet, as Philip Borg-Wheeler's informative booklet note suggests, its inventive *pizzicato Scherzo* anticipates that of Debussy's Quartet composed just a year later.

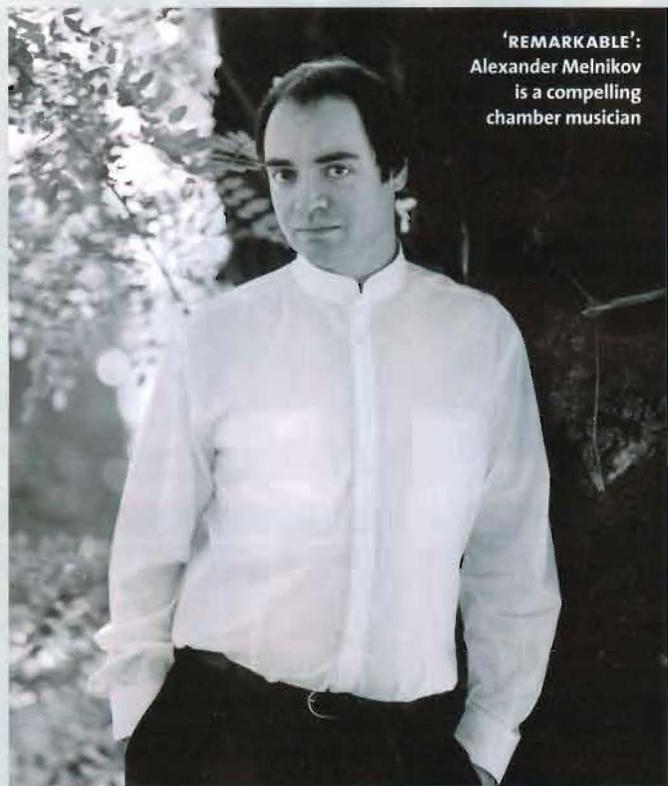
Top of the bill in every sense is Arensky's Quartet of 1894, presenting a hugely inventive variety of textures from its unusual line-up, particularly in the celebrated set of variations on Tchaikovsky's 'The Crown of Roses'. That movement is often recorded in a version for full string orchestra; but hearing the original scoring, especially in this sensitive performance, clarifies both Arensky's inventive variety of texture and colour, and the music's essential intimacy. And the Quartet's outer movements, with their quotations of Russian Orthodox chants and 'Slava Bogu' (famously used by Musorgsky in the coronation scene of his opera *Boris Godunov*), add striking gravity to what was surely Arensky's memorial to Tchaikovsky.

Daniel Jaffé
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

MUSIC CHAMBER CHOICE

Spellbinding Schumann

Erik Levi applauds the Jerusalem Quartet and Alexander Melnikov



'REMARKABLE': Alexander Melnikov is a compelling chamber musician

from cello, viola and then violin. All too often this passage sounds muddy, but Melnikov blends his tone to match exactly that of the strings. Another remarkable passage is the *Un poco largamente* section of the second movement of this work: in Melnikov's hands, the gently oscillating crotchet triplets in the piano never obscure the very different rhythmic patterns that we hear in the strings.

Naturally the Jerusalem Quartet is a hugely responsive partner in this process. The magical non-vibrato opening of the Piano Quartet generates intense expectation for the ensuing *Allegro ma non*

This is playing that is deeply felt but never indulgent or mannered

troppo, while the scurrying almost Mendelssohnian string articulation in the *Scherzo* is matched by Melnikov's crystal-clear and fleet-of-foot playing. Warm but subtly modulated phrasing characterises the nostalgic string solos in the *Adagio cantabile* and there's great exhilaration and exuberance in the Finale. The Quintet offers similar strengths with playing that is deeply felt but never indulgent or mannered. With a recording that offers depth of sound and admirable clarity, Schumann's two chamber masterpieces are brilliantly served.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

ON THE PODCAST
Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on our **BBC Music Magazine** podcast, available free on iTunes or at www.classical-music.com

in his fine recordings of Dvořák's Third and Fourth Trios with Isabelle Faust and Jean-Guihen Queyras. So it's hardly surprising that his partnership with the Jerusalem Quartet in Schumann should be equally compelling. What makes his playing so remarkable is an ability to achieve an ideal balance with the strings, illuminating Schumann's seemingly dense part writing. A good example comes at the beginning of the development section of the first movement of the Piano Quintet where Schumann asks the piano to double a solo line



SCHUMANN

Piano Quartet & Piano Quintet
Jerusalem Quartet/Alexander Melnikov (piano)
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902122
54:56 mins

Available arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic
Alexander Melnikov's credentials as an outstanding chamber musician have already been demonstrated



MUSIC

MAGAZINE

MAY 2012

CHAMBER AWARD

Jerusalem Quartet

Mozart *String Quartets K157, 458 & 589*

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi HMC 902076



No single group or artist has won as many awards as the Jerusalem Quartet, now on to their third, with a dazzling disc of Mozart Quartets. Violinist

Alexander Pavlovsky is quick to pay tribute to their long-time producer, Martin Sauer: 'He is our audience when we record, and we always learn so much from him: it's an exciting experience.' One of the surprise highlights of the disc is the early Milanese Quartet K157: 'We thought it was simple, but as we worked on it, a wide world of colours and connections opened up. The *arioso* has links to the Requiem, there are so many subtleties to be found in each repeat, we ended up taking the longest time on this one.' He compares Mozart to one of Chagall's paintings of his airborne wife: 'Haydn is earth-bound, but Mozart is ethereal; you sense a genius; that operatic feeling and warmth is unique.' ▶

Buffalo News

March 14, 2012

Jerusalem Quartet earns 2 standing ovations

By Garaud MacTaggart

News Contributing Reviewer

Prior to the Jerusalem Quartet taking the stage Tuesday night, their violist Ori Kam sat down with Peter Hall, classical music program host at WNEDFM. Standard questions were asked about the quartet's instruments and their vintage, along with queries about any insights Kam might give about the works being performed.

The answers to those questions were fairly interesting, but the most arresting portion of Hall's interview involved the differences between how arts are supported in Israel versus the United States (no state funds versus government or university grants) and the demonstrations by the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel that have disrupted some of the group's concerts in the past year.

The protests evidently stemmed from the mistaken impression the State of Israel was supporting the Jerusalem Quartet's existence via some sort of government mandate.

Once the full quartet took the stage, the music that followed rose above current world issues, if not permanently, certainly for one evening. The program opened with Ludwig van Beethoven's Quartet in G major (op. 18, no. 2). This piece is heard every year courtesy of the Slee Beethoven Cycle at the University at Buffalo and, as a result, has a familiarity factor built into it for area chamber music fans.

Particularly impressive in this performance was the way the quartet handled the second movement adagio, setting up a silken contrast to the bounce of the third movement scherzo.

For my money though, the real revelation of the evening came just prior to intermission, when the ensemble took on Dmitri Shostakovich's fourth string quartet. This work has three movements, creating a temporal backdrop where the overall speed changes subtly, focusing more on tonal shading for dynamism. It's a matter of nuanced intensity and a not-to-be-ignored beauty. The cello and viola have prominent roles to play, helping create an atmosphere ripe with drama and emotional flux.

This was concentrated Slavic heart-on-sleeve writing with every last bit of emotion wrung from the score by the players. The audience gave the musicians a well-deserved standing ovation, something that happens more often at the end of a concert than in the middle.

After intermission, Johannes Brahms' Quartet in A minor (op. 51, no. 2) was revealed as another gem. The British music critic Malcolm MacDonald wrote that Brahms' quartets were filled with "a somewhat pressurized eloquence, rich (practically clotted) with musical substance and compositional subtlety." He was right.

This was a dense piece of music where the finale dances and sings with a blend of passion and tenderness, flexing melodic muscles and wooing the listener with intelligent charm. Everything is in its place. Energetic, sprightly playing alternates with more affectingly sober moments to create a whole greater than its parts.

Not surprisingly, the group's performance received another standing ovation. It was a good night.

South Florida Classical Review

March 12, 2012

Jerusalem Quartet displays tonal beauty and artistic intensity at Four Arts

By David Fleshler

Few chamber ensembles produce the sheer beauty of tone of the Jerusalem String Quartet. The four young musicians, who performed Sunday at the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, present a corporate tone that practically glistens, led by the seamless, honeyed playing of first violinist Alexander Pavlovsky.

While some of our most eminent—and venerable—chamber ensembles allow defects of intonation and tone production, with unevenness of line and just plain scratchiness, to mar their performances, there wasn't a trace of this from the Jerusalem ensemble. And they combined their first-class technical skills with an intense but interpretively flexible approach to the music that produced an excellent concert of Beethoven, Shostakovich and Brahms.

Beethoven's early String Quartet No. 2 may be rooted in the classical form established by Haydn but it contains lots of brio, and the Jerusalem musicians uncovered every bit of it. Pavlovsky was particularly impressive in the first movement, rocketing up the E string in fast triplets that in his hands became the climactic notes they should be. The third and fourth movements moved with agility and lightness. Yet the musicians brought a forcefulness and weight to the last movement, giving the opening theme a clipped precision but then quickly plunging into the near-orchestral scale at which they seemed particular adept.

Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 4 contains less of the anguish, dark shadows and sardonic humor of the composer's other works in the form. Heard much less frequently than the other two quartets on the program, this work brought out the Jerusalem ensemble's best qualities—the technical sureness, richness of tone and deep musical concentration.

They brought the first movement through its moody, constantly changing harmonies to a powerful climax before letting it die out. The second movement provided an opportunity for the shining violin playing of Pavlovsky, whose account of the long song-like melody was warm, melancholy and evocative, joining well in a quasi duet with the darker tones of cellist Kyril Zlotnikov. In the next movement, Zlotnikov and violist Ori Kam displayed an adeptness at galloping melodies that cut easily through the surrounding sound of the other musicians, thanks also to Shostakovich's transparent string writing. The strange last movement, with its air of mystery and subdued ending, came to a great climax, with a brilliant, crashing chords accompanying the first violin's agitated melody, and second violinist Sergei Bresler contributing sonorous broken chords to the sound, before the music died out.

Given the ardor they had poured into the Beethoven and Shostakovich quartets, one feared their intensity would overwhelm the autumnal Viennese tone of the Brahms String Quartet No. 2. Not the case, as it turned out. They took the first movement at a moderate tempo and brought a relaxed feel to the nostalgic second theme. The second movement's melody in the violin took place over an accompaniment that was tonally rich without becoming too heavy, with the musicians bringing a tense excitement to the dramatic middle section, in which the violin snaps out clipped phrases over tremolos in the other instruments. The Israeli musicians also brought a tone of mystery and tension to the third movement, and the last movement came off with a fine, controlled tension and power.

Mozart

String Quartets – No 4, K157;
No 17, ‘Hunt’, K458; No 22, K589

Jerusalem Quartet (Alexander Pavlovsky, Sergei
Bresler *vs* Amichai Grosz *va* Kyril Zlotnikov *vc*)
Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2076 (76' • DDD)

K458 – selected comparison:

Pražák Qt (PRAG) PRD/DSD250 242

K589 – selected comparison:

Mosaïques Qt (NAIV) E8834

**Quartets both early and late,
played with revealing conviction**



“Rather prim and formal throughout, and presents little variety in its part-writing” – a verdict on K157 from

Thomas F Dunhill in 1927. Well, formal perhaps in the first movement but prim it isn't. Nor is the playing of the Jerusalem Quartet, whose attention to the shaping of paragraphs alleviates the inexperience of a youthful composer. Eventful, though, is the slow movement (marked *Andante* by Mozart *père*), from which the musicians extract an expression of feeling that doesn't suggest immaturity.

Every repeat in all three works is observed. The expansion of scale is noticeable, particularly in K458. And it's here that the Jerusalem begin to show their mettle. Something both grand and reflective is suggested in the first movement, grand in the “hunting” motif of the exposition, reflective in the F major beginning of the development to which a touch of sobriety is added as the music sinks into F minor a little later. These artists aren't stratified. Bowing varies from precise attack to breathy delicacy; and lines are supple, contoured through flexure of phase and the easing or tightening of pace without ever disrupting pulse.

Sound and balance throughout is realistic; but whereas the transfer level of these two works is high, that of K589 is low. Lift the volume to experience another emotional response to the many possibilities inherent in interpretation, and where the depths plumbed in the *Larghetto* are of an eminence that says it all with so much conviction. **Nalen Anthoni**

Rubbra

String Quartets –
No 1, Op 35; No 3, Op 112; No 4, Op 150

Maggini Quartet (Gina McCormack, David Angel
vs Martin Outram *va* Michal Kaznowski *vc*)
Naxos © 8 572555 (55' • DDD)

**The Magginis continue their exploration
of British quartets with music by Rubbra**

This disc completes the Naxos cycle of the four quartets of Edmund Rubbra. They make an exceptionally well co-ordinated group,

theStrad ★
 RECOMMENDS...

MOZART String Quartets
 in C major K157,
 in B flat major K458 'Hunt'
 & in B flat major K589

Jerusalem Quartet

HARMONIA MUNDI HMC 902076

**First-rate accounts of three
 varied Mozart quartets**


For this sublime disc the Jerusalem Quartet chooses one 'Italian' work, one 'Haydn' and one 'Prussian'. The playing in the three-movement early

piece is alert and very beautiful: the wistful Andante is touchingly done, at a plausible tempo.

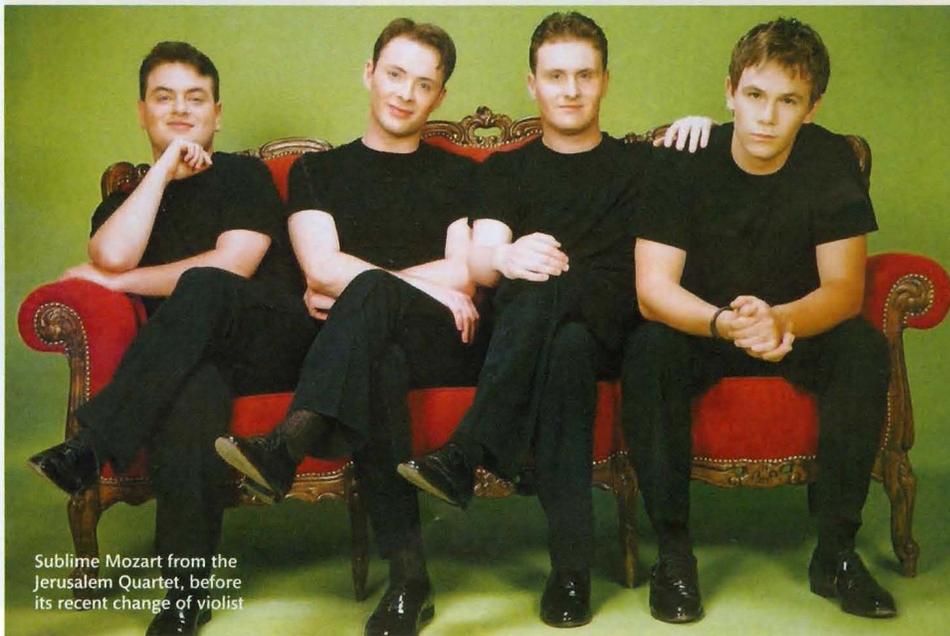
The 'Hunt' opens with an easy spring to its step and, although the playing is never tense, the attention is held through all Mozart's repeats. The minuet is quite easy-paced, with an enjoyably strutting trio; the Adagio is most profoundly played; and the finale is lively.

The later B flat major Quartet displays lovely tone from the start: vibrato is never overdone, but at the other extreme, there is none of the starkness that mars some of the

Hagen Quartet's more recent Mozart. In the main theme of the Larghetto, the Israelis avoid the unmusical *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe* version. Again they find an agreeably easeful tempo for the minuet, with a delightful trio. The carefree finale is playfully despatched.

I can think of versions of the 'Hunt' that match this one, but the performance of K589 is the best since the old Boskovsky (Decca). Generous with repeats and sympathetically recorded, this CD sends violist Amichai Grosz off to the Berlin Philharmonic on a considerable high.

TULLY POTTER



Sublime Mozart from the Jerusalem Quartet, before its recent change of violist

CREDIT

CHAMBER

Ray Chen makes a stand-out debut with Stravinsky and an all-virtuoso disc; *Michael Collins* shows lyrical leanings in a stylish clarinet recital; plus viola player *Maxim Rysanov* proves an ideal fiddler in Brahms

MUSIC CHAMBER CHOICE

Youthful brilliance

Erik Levi welcomes the Jerusalem Quartet's revisionist early Mozart



NATURAL POISE:
the Jerusalem Quartet
convince in Mozart



MOZART

String Quartets: No. 4 in C, K157; No. 17 in B flat, K458; No. 22 in B flat, K589

Jerusalem Quartet
Harmonia Mundi HMC 902076
76:09 mins

Available Arkivmusic.com/bbcmusic

Mozart scholars tend to regard the majority of the composer's earliest quartets as of little consequence. Not so the Jerusalem Quartet, who open this captivating release with a beautifully sculpted C major, K157. Observing every repeat in this three-movement work might seem counterproductive, inflating the musical argument beyond its modest proportions. Yet the

Jerusalems overcome the problem by drawing one's attention to different musical details second time round. Tempos throughout are admirably judged and the interaction between each individual line sounds totally natural. Thus the opening *Allegro* is projected with all the requisite grace and

The Jerusalem balance full-blooded tone with exemplary clarity

elegance, the central operatically inspired C minor *Andante* sounds deeply affecting without recourse to exaggerated interpretative gestures, while the *Presto* finale fizzles along with high-spirited youthful energy.

The Jerusalem Quartet's approach, balancing full-blooded tone with exemplary contrapuntal clarity and a sure sense of structural direction, brings even greater

musical dividends in the two mature quartets. Once again decisions regarding tempo and the delineation of inner musical details seem totally convincing. A good example is the *Adagio* of the *Hunt*, K458, where the Jerusalems adopt a broadly spacious speed which enables every expressive gesture to make its impact without any hint of dragging. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the *Finale* is delivered at a high-octane pace but never sounds rushed. In the *Prussian*, K589, a special delight comes in the middle section of the *Minuet* in the form of unexpected harmonic twists and bursts of virtuosic energy.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



ON THE PODCAST

Hear excerpts and a discussion of this recording on our **BBC Music Magazine** podcast, available free on iTunes or at www.classical-music.com

April 2011

Audiophile Audition

March 22, 2011

Superlatively recorded early, middle and late quartets of Mozart performed with brilliance and pathos.

Published on March 22, 2011



MOZART: String Quartets K. 157; K. 458; K. 589 – Jerusalem Quartet – Harmonia mundi HMC 902076, 76:09 ***:**

More than any other classical music form, the chamber music CDs that are being issued today show how good today's classical musicians have become. This recent release, showcasing the Jerusalem Quartet performing three quartets of Mozart from different time periods, is a case in point. Founded in 1993 in Jerusalem, they were tutored by the violinist Avi Abramovitch and from 1999 to 2001 were supported as a BBC New Generation Artist. In 2008 their interpretation of Schubert's *Death and the*

Maiden quartet won the 'Diapason d'or of the year 2008.' The Jerusalem Quartet's shading of tempo and dynamics, their polished, yet dramatic readings, spot on intonation, clean articulation and skill at revealing the underlying emotion of these quartets won me over. The detailed and reverberant sound produces an immediate impact that is almost symphonic in nature.

The *K.157* (the third 'Milanese' Quartet) was written when Mozart was 17 and under the influence of his trips to Italy. The distinctive movement is the pensive *Andante*, an extraordinary expression of interior pensiveness for a teenager. Here it's played as a slow waltz with an elegant sadness that reveals the emotion underneath. Framed by an *Allegro* that is dramatic and lyrical and an exuberantly brief *Presto*, it's a performance that evokes wonder at Mozart's youthful fecundity.

In *K. 458* (incorrectly named "Hunt" for its opening chords that hardly represent a brace of horns), Mozart entered a world that "transfigured the genre (of string quartets) and imbued it with a degree of subjectivity and intensity of feeling that was not again reached until Beethoven's '*Razumovsky*' Quartets two decades later," as Mozart author Maynard Solomon contends. It was during a private performance of this '*Haydn*' Quartet that the composer told father Leopold that he regarded Mozart as "the greatest composer of the age." **The Jerusalem Quartet's superbly executed trills, and their ability to balance the tension between the dramatic and the lyrical moments in the lengthy first movement without diminishing their intensity, makes this performance special. The ineffable sadness underneath the surface beauty of the Adagio is exquisitely expressed.**

K. 589 was one of the four quartets commissioned by Frederick William II, King of Prussia, who was an accomplished cellist and patron of music. Written when he was 34, under extremely stressful physical and economic conditions, Mozart transcends his perilous state and composed his penultimate masterpiece in this genre. Contrapuntally rich, melodically pregnant, inwardly contemplative (but not depressive), this quartet resonates with the wisdom and acceptance of old age. Appropriately, it ends quietly.

Throughout this CD, the Jerusalem Quartet successfully navigates the ambiguity of Mozart's music – the cheerfulness – the sadness – the torment and release - while remaining within the precise restraint of the Classical style. This is a beautiful disc of glorious music.

-- Robert Moon

"... an absolute triumph. Their playing has everything you could possibly wish for."

Miraculous Haydn

ERIK LEVI *applauds the Jerusalem Quartet's latest recital*



HAYDN

String Quartets: in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5; in C, Op. 33 No. 3 (The Bird); in D, Op. 76 No. 5

Jerusalem Quartet
Harmonia Mundi
HMX 2962030 62:32 mins

BBC Music Direct £9.78

The Jerusalem Quartet's second recording of Haydn Quartets is an absolute triumph. Their playing has everything you could possibly wish for. Miraculously honed intonation and perfect ensemble is matched throughout by an innate understanding of Haydn's mercurial and immensely varied musical language. A veiled sense of melancholy hangs over the opening movement of the F minor Quartet,

the interpretation emphasising its sombre nature and its unexpectedly adventurous modulations. The fugal Finale, on the other hand, is all nervous energy, articulated with tremendous rhythmic verve.

There's also plenty of vigour in the outer movements of the *Bird* Quartet, the mellifluous first violin line in the opening *Allegro moderato* accompanied by chirpy repeated quavers. Although the *Presto* finale, taken at a daringly fast pace, might seem almost too hectic, the players nonetheless manage to convey the music's skittish humour while delivering the running semiquaver passages with dazzling precision. At the other end of the emotional spectrum, the second movement *Allegretto* balances simplicity with wonderful charm in the trio.

The emotional epicentre of their performance of the Op. 76 No. 5 Quartet is the *Largo*. Projected here with great tenderness and warmth,



STEPPING IT UP: Jerusalem Quartet play exemplary Haydn

it provides a perfect contrast to the elegance of the opening movement, the teasing rhythmic ambiguities of the minuet and the bravura of the Finale. Recorded in superb

sound, this has to be one of the best Haydn quartet recordings to be released in his anniversary year.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★





Artistic Quality **10/10** *Sound Quality*

JOSEPH HAYDN

String Quartets in F minor Op. 20 No. 5; in C major “The Bird” Op. 33 No. 3; in D major Op. 76 No. 5

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi- 2962030(CD)

Reference Recording - None for this coupling

The Jerusalem Quartet’s first disc of Haydn quartets was very good, but as my colleague Dan Davis pointed out, its only defect was a tendency toward excessive haste. Here, in the finales of the Op. 33 and Op. 76 quartets, the music does move at a pretty ferocious clip, but there’s no hint of breathlessness--just plain excitement. In all other respects these are magnificent performances. Highlights include the richly lyrical slow movement of Op. 20 and a beautifully paced concluding fugue; a first movement of Op. 33 that’s truly “bird-like” as well as full of humor; and a minuet in Op. 76 whose rhythmic games, nicely pointed, turn it into a genuine scherzo. In short, these players don’t put a foot wrong interpretively, uphold the highest standards technically, and enjoy splendid engineering (just listen to the pedal-point in the cello in the finale of Op. 20!). There’s no need to say more: why read on when you could be listening?

theStrad

MAY 2009

VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

"Superlatives are inadequate in describing just how fine this playing was from one of the young, yet great quartets of our time."

JERUSALEM QUARTET

Wigmore Hall, London 10 February 2009

If Haydn himself were able to listen to his celebrations this year, he would undoubtedly be thrilled with the Jerusalem Quartet's readings of his music. This ensemble performs as one mind, yet within its unity of purpose the individual strands are allowed to weave their way into the narrative. The players judiciously selected works reflecting different stages of Haydn's life, beginning with op.20 no.5, where the harmonic rhythms were acutely depicted and the clarity of textures in the fugal Finale breathtaking. In the 'Bird' Quartet op.33 no.3 they inspired wit – one almost felt one could hear Haydn chuckling to himself – carefully illustrating the subtle working of the music's motives.

The almost operatic gestures of the 'Rider' Quartet in G minor op.74 no.3 were virtuosically delivered, and a Schubertian depth graced the work's Adagio, where the homophonic progressions were mapped out with great harmonic perception. A fantastic awareness of dynamic gradations and phrase characterisation ignited their interpretation of the Quartet in G major op.77 no.1. Superlatives are inadequate in describing just how fine this playing was from one of the young, yet great quartets of our time. **JOANNE TALBOT**



Jerusalem Quartet: thrilling

MARCO BORGHEVE

The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH)

April 23, 2009

REVIEW – by Donald Rosenberg

How lucky can we get? The appearance of one stupendous string quartet per week would seem to be enough for any chamber-music lover. But two?

The phenomenon occurred this week when the Jerusalem Quartet and the Juilliard String Quartet gave local performances on consecutive nights. The Jerusalem returned for the third time in recent years Tuesday to play for the Cleveland Chamber Music Society at Fairmount Temple Auditorium in Beachwood.

The venerable Juilliard (founded 1946) was onstage at Oberlin College's Finney Chapel for a concert Wednesday in the even more venerable Artist Recital Series (founded 1878).

It was a breathtaking 24 hours. Both ensembles claim distinctive personalities and inquiring musical minds. The Jerusalem players look like newfangled college grads, the Juilliard like the seasoned pros their members are.

There's no need to compare. The Israeli and American players drew listeners deeply into each musical world, with Haydn -- the so-called father of the string quartet -- as unifying figure.

The musicians of the Jerusalem, which formed in 1993, invest intense focus and stylistic truth on everything they touch. They brought crisp articulation and vibrant interplay to Haydn's Quartet in C major, Op. 33, No. 3, subtitled "The Birds," possibly for the chirping grace notes in the first movement.

Alexander Pavlovsky, the Jerusalem's first violinist, led the brilliant, elegant way. His collaboration with violinist Sergei Bresler, violist Amihai Grosz and cellist Kyril Zlotnikov reaped special rewards in the slow movement's tender utterances and the finale's jocular wit.

Debussy's Quartet in G minor, Op. 10, received a reading of penetrating drama and detail. **Rhythms were coiled, textures lucid. Volatility was balanced by superb definition of the score's wistful poetry.**

In Borodin's Quartet No. 2 in D major, several of whose themes crept into the musical "Kismet," the musicians shared ardent materials as if engaged in empathetic conversation. Borodin's lyricism soared and the folk aspects had boisterous momentum. Their encore was a lilting movement from a Haydn quartet.

[balance of review discussed the Juilliard Quartet and is omitted.]

Vancouver Sun

April 20, 2009

Reviewed: A weekend of stunning classical offerings

By David Gordon Duke

At The Telus Studio on Saturday afternoon, the Vancouver Recital Society mounted its third annual “Surprise” concert. This cheeky conceit included sealed programs and a totally empty stage, barren of such clues at music stands, chairs, or instruments; then at last it was revealed that the Jerusalem Quartet was the mystery guest at this feast. The four young players offered a serious recital of Haydn, Bartók (his rich, powerful Fourth Quartet) and Borodin. Chamber music in the Telus, close up and so very personal, is an unalloyed joy, and the Haydn/Bartók pairing proved especially memorable. Even Borodin’s syrupy Second Quartet was given **a performance of such incandescence that this old warhorse seemed fresh and wonderful.**

The final event of my very full weekend was another performance by the Jerusalem Quartet at the Chan featuring more Haydn, Debussy’s sole string quartet, and Brahms’ Clarinet Quintet. Lithe Swedish clarinetist Martin Fröst (whose “Beyond All Clarinet History” re-imagining Bach project was yet another part of Friday’s log-jam of concerts) proved entirely complementary to the Israeli quartet. **A beautifully integrated reading was edgy and voluptuous by turns, and the intense emotion of the great meditative quintet was never far from the surface.**

The Sydney Morning Herald

Revved up for a ride with Ravel

The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)

Harriet Cunningham, 15 October 2008

“This is quartet playing of the highest degree.”

The Jerusalem Quartet has a very distinctive sound: tough, loud but never coarse. The opening to Smetana's String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, *From My Life*, was dominated not by the brash opening chord but by the handsome beauty of the theme ringing out from the viola player Amichai Grosz. It was forceful but not aggressive, persuasive but not pushy, and it set the tone for the concert. It was a gutsy performance which positioned Smetana's heart firmly on his sleeve.

Musica Viva Australia's featured composer this year is Richard Mills, and on this tour the Jerusalem Quartet gave the world premiere of his third string quartet, commissioned by Julian Burnside. It contrasts dramatically with his first quartet, performed by the Goldners this year.

The first develops like a conversation between four deliberately distinct characters. The third develops more like an improvised song: player one comes up with an eloquent gesture which is adopted, accompanied, amplified by the others until that idea has run its course, at which point someone proposes another gesture and the process starts again. The Jerusalem Quartet was well-equipped to handle the organic polyphony of the work and gave it a sense of purpose which the music itself sometimes seemed to lack.

Ravel's String Quartet in F major is, on the surface, the antithesis of Smetana's: all understated elegance. How would the quartet's big sound handle the tricky corners of the serene grace? Like a powered-up 4WD on dirt roads, it was all about skill - the ability to choose the line and keep to it, without touching the brakes. The pianissimos were microscopically loud and clear, the pizzicato second movement was fast and furious and the finale was a beautifully crafted thrill ride. This is quartet playing of the highest degree.

The New Zealand Herald

String Quartets do not come any better than the Jerusalem

The New Zealand Herald

William Dart 6 October, 2008

A few bars into Smetana's From my Life Quartet, it was clear this was an event, the likes of which could not be equalled in Wigmore Hall or the Lincoln Centre. String quartets do not come any better than the Jerusalem.

The passionate playing of violist Amichai Grosz illuminated Smetana's first pages, leading to some stormy outbursts from the whole group, as the composer bared his soul. Seconds later, the four men melted into the major of the second subject theme, with a discreet flutter of rubato. The second movement was emphatically a polka, with a wittily lurching trio. There would be more rustic revels in the Finale, but not until the musicians took on the outer limits of expressivity in the great Largo.

Mark Kopytman's Cantus II is a powerfully hewn score and much of its effectiveness came from the sheer concentration of the four young men delivering it. Power-driven unisons fuelled myriad lines and colours and remarkably cohesive music was brilliantly communicated.

After interval, the four men made it clear Ravel's Quartet is indeed a supreme example of its art and genre. It stole upon us with glassy, translucent textures but the music soon swept us away with its very Gallic grace, incorporating one decrescendo so swift and sure it seemed to have taken place on a centime. The breathtaking moment came when Grosz and the energetic leader Alexander Pavolvsky shared duties in one of the composer's most rapturous melodies. The Scherzo was cast in long, generous phrases, its middle section anticipating the mercurial textures of the following movement. The Finale was dashed off with such joi de vivre that its final chord wowed with the thrill of it all.

An encore of the Notturmo from Borodin's Second String Quartet reminded one that the quartet will play this work in Hamilton tonight, with Kopytman and Haydn. The opportunity to hear this superb ensemble in the WEL Energy Academy of Performing Arts is not to be passed up lightly.

“As near to perfect as one can possibly find.”

Finding the answer

MICHAEL TANNER *hails the Jerusalem's Schubert*

BBC
music
CHOICE



SCHUBERT

String Quartet in D minor, D810 (Death and the Maiden); Quartettsatz in C minor

Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi HMC 901990

51:55 mins

BBC Music Direct

£13.99

The youthful Jerusalem Quartet has been gaining plaudits and awards already, and now they are to be heard on an outstanding disc which shows their calibre in music which is far more demanding, certainly emotionally and spiritually, than any they have set on disc previously. Schubert's mature string quartets have often been criticised for the 'orchestral' nature of the writing, which, more than Beethoven's, even, demands that four stringed instruments

create sounds as ample and harmonically dense as you'd expect from a much larger group of players. In the C minor Quartet Movement this tendency is already apparent, and the Jerusalem Quartet manage to capture precisely the windswept character of this music, alternating with its pained sweetness. The recording is spacious, immediate but not oppressive.

By the time Schubert wrote the amazing *Death and the Maiden* Quartet four years later, he knew his days were numbered. The intensity of the assault has been stepped up, and so has the plangency of the reaction to it. This is brutal and disquieting music, and even more so in the second movement, where the variations on the title song range from bleak 'consolation' to rampant despair. The *Scherzo* is a hammering machine, while the finale is maddening in its refusal to stop its surging dotted rhythm.

How to go with Schubert all the way, but not overdo it in the light



STANDING THEIR GROUND:
The Jerusalem Quartet are unrivalled in Schubert

of what has been composed since? That is the huge problem posed by this music, and the Jerusalem Quartet has found the answer to a greater degree than any that I can recall hearing. Their mastery of rubato is as refined as that of any contemporary group, and this disc

is as near to perfection as one can possibly find.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★

BENCHMARK RECORDING
Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi HMC 901990

Young men from the old city

Still in their twenties, the Jerusalem Quartet are taking the chamber music world by storm. But, they tell Charlotte Smith, their chemistry is a wonderful accident

“Our ensemble was formed by happy mistake,” insists Jerusalem Quartet cellist Kyril Zlotnikov. “Like all students at the Jerusalem Music Centre we played in the school orchestra and because the four of us were around the same level, we were grouped together as a string quartet.” Despite Zlotnikov’s matter-of-fact assurance, it’s difficult to associate “mistake” and “coincidence” with the young ensemble. After all, this is a group of players who have been successfully performing together for 13 years – and have each yet to reach the age of 30.

Talking to me barely an hour before a sold-out Wigmore Hall performance, the four men are quiet, professional and very obviously focused on the concert ahead. So focused, in fact, that their evening rehearsal, due to finish at 6pm, carries on for another half an hour, throwing into doubt whether my interview will take place at all. As I wait to be ushered into the green room, the strains of intensive rehearsal can be heard through the heavy wooden doors separating concert hall from foyer as the group perfects the more difficult corners and patches of Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden*. Perfectionism such as this has very little to do with luck and everything to do with dedication and hard work.

Of course in some respects, Zlotnikov is right. That four equally talented and more importantly like-minded string-players were in the right place at the right time is indeed a “happy” coincidence, especially as three of the musicians were not native Israelis. Rather, they moved independently to Jerusalem with their families from Ukraine and Belarus at the beginning of the '90s. Still, there is no doubt the group was “manufactured” – an experiment that has paid dividends for the Jerusalem Music Centre (JMC).

Since the 1980s the JMC’s Young Musicians’ Group, an independent programme seen to have “revolutionised” string-playing in Israel, has worked in conjunction with students’ formal music studies. An initial elite group of 30–40 school students chosen through America-Israel Cultural Foundation auditions were given scholarships for special chamber music coaching, emphasising the non-competitive and social nature of music. So far the Jerusalem Quartet have been the star product of the programme, but there is evidence with the up-and-coming Ariel Quartet that the experiment is capable of producing more than just a one-off success story. “Around the time we started, no group there had really stayed together longer than six months to a year,” says first violin Alexander



Pavlovsky. “But now it is common to put groups together through the music centre because they have seen that it works.”

The Quartet are certainly of the view that forming at such a young age, and the intensive tuition they received from Avi Abramovich of the Jerusalem Academy, does mark them out from the competition. “I don’t know of any other young professional ensemble that have played together for so long,” says violist Amichai Grosz, “and I think that sound-wise we have developed something very special. Usually at our age string quartets are in the process of establishing themselves, but since we started so young we were able to develop our sound as a group. Now it is something very natural – as if we were a single player. When people hear us for the first time,

they always remark on the togetherness of our sound and of our musical intent. We are able to project a completely unified vision of the work.”

This is something very much in evidence at the Wigmore concert. The Jerusalem’s sound is rich and full – at times even overpowering – and brimming with masculine energy. More than performing with a united voice, the players seem interchangeable – if you close your eyes it is sometimes difficult to tell which member performs a particular line. Indeed, so integrated is the sound in the Schubert that when the group is joined by Stefan Vladar for Brahms’s Piano Quintet, the piano seems almost an intrusion.

This is not to say that the Quartet have limited themselves in number or quality of collaborations. In the month before the

Four become one: the
Jerusalem Quartet in action



**IN CONCERT AND
ON DISC**

Forthcoming highlights of the Jerusalem Quartet's busy performance schedule includes concerts in Munich (**Herkulesaal der Residenz, February 20**), Dortmund (**Harenberg City-Center, February 24**), London (as part of the Steven Isserlis Project at the **Wigmore Hall, early April**) and Bordeaux (**Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux, June 26**). Their Harmonia Mundi recording of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* is due in the spring.

varied catalogue of string quartet music at their fingertips, the group's choices are hardly limited. One would think, with a Shostakovich concert cycle under their belt in London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Vancouver and Dortmund, that the composer's 15 string quartets would be an obvious place to make a recording mark. Yet, after releasing Quartets Nos 1, 4 and 9 in May 2005 and Nos 6, 8 and 11 in spring 2007, the group have no plans to record the rest in the foreseeable future. Instead, following the release of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* and *Quartettsatz* in May, there is talk of a follow-up to their 2004 Haydn Harmonia Mundi debut and then a contemporary album. "We are always searching for a variety of sounds," says second violin Sergei Bresler. "With each album we release, we try to do something different and something that will engage the public." Zlotnikov adds: "Unlike some quartets who specialise in one type of music, we try constantly to challenge ourselves and our audience with a flexible attitude to the repertoire."

And that, it seems, is key to the Jerusalem Quartet's continuing success. If the group's origins had more than a whiff of boy-band manufacturing, its approach to the repertoire is anything but factory-made formula. Beginnings such as these might easily result in a cynical attitude to the classical market, but a respect and love of string quartet music and the art of string quartet playing has ensured that if the group is measured in its career choices, it is never boring. "Chamber music – especially string quartet music – is one of the most difficult musical genres to perform at a really high level," says Grosz. "But it is also the most rewarding." The Jerusalem Music Centre, then, despite the controlled exterior, has been far from a stifling experience. Impressing on its young charges the importance of social involvement and the greater cultural relevance of classical music, the centre has shied away from the self-promoting pressure-cooker feel of similar programmes for talented youngsters. And it is this emphasis on the social nature of music-making which enables the Jerusalem to perform as one.

Yet, even with the early help and tuition the group received, one only has to listen to the exuberance of the Jerusalem Quartet's playing to understand the happy quirk of fate in their formation. Theirs is a chemistry that could never be taught and in this respect Zlotnikov is absolutely right. Individually the group are four fine players, but together they are something very special indeed. ●

Wigmore concert the group were hard at work on a three-concert Brahms project in Amsterdam, collaborating with viola player Lawrence Power on the G major String Quintet, Martin Fröst on the Clarinet Quintet and Stefan Vladar on the Piano Quintet. During the 2002 Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival, Daniel Barenboim performed Dvořák's Op 81 Piano Quintet with the group – a work they would later record with Vladar. The collaboration would also encourage Barenboim to appoint Zlotnikov as principal cellist of his West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in 2003 and to record the complete Mozart piano trios with him and violinist Nikolaj Znaider for EMI in 2006. Even during the Jerusalem's formative years, first-rate musical partnerships with such artists as Isaac

Stern were a common occurrence, organised through the Jerusalem Music Centre's Visiting Artist Programme.

But despite 13 years together, and typical of the Jerusalem's carefully planned approach to career and reputation, the group would prefer to concentrate on the string quartet repertoire for the time being – at least as far as recording is concerned. "Our contract with Harmonia Mundi allows us to issue a new CD every year and although one of our first albums included the Dvořák Quintet with Stefan Vladar we believe it is important to represent the quartet first and foremost in our initial CDs," says viola player Amichai Grosz. "Possibly after the eighth CD we may approach the larger chamber repertoire." Given the particularly rich and