



2024/2025
77th SEASON

**Friends of Chamber Music present the Ariel Quartet in concert
at the Vancouver Playhouse, Tuesday, October 29, 2024 - 7:30 pm**

Ariel Quartet

Alexandra Kazovsky, Violin
Gershon Gerchikov, Violin
Jan Gruning, viola
Amit Even-Tov, cello



Distinguished by its virtuosity, probing musical insight, and impassioned, fiery performances, the Ariel Quartet has garnered critical praise worldwide for more than 25 years. Formed when the members were just teenagers studying at the Jerusalem Academy Middle School of Music and Dance in Israel, the Ariel received the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award from Chamber Music America in recognition of their artistic achievement and to support their ongoing career. Now in their 26th year, the Quartet serves as the Faculty Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), where they direct the chamber music program and present a concert series, in addition to their busy touring schedule.

Recent highlights include the Ariel Quartet's sold-out Carnegie Hall debut, performances at Lincoln Center with pianist Inon Barnatan and the Mark Morris Dance Group, and the release of a Brahms and Bartók album for Avie Records. In 2020, the Ariel gave the U.S. premiere of Daniil Trifinov's Quintet for Piano and Strings, with the composer as pianist, in Cincinnati.

The Quartet has dedicated much recent artistic energy to Beethoven's groundbreaking quartets, performing the complete cycle six times around the United States and Europe. The Quartet regularly collaborates with today's eminent and emerging young musicians and ensembles. The Ariel has served as Quartet-in-Residence for several music festivals.

The Ariel was mentored extensively by string quartet giants Walter Levin and Paul Katz. It has won many international prizes and received support from several foundations.

The Ariel Quartet is represented by MKI Artists.

Programme

String Quartet in F Major

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Allegro moderato – Tres doux

Assez vif - Tres rythme

Tres lent

Vif et agite

At 14 years old, Ravel entered the Conservatoire in Paris and studied under Fauré and Debussy, to whom he dedicated this quartet. Ravel's consuming artistic drive was a quest for "l'objet juste", a pursuit of musical imagery that was refined to correspond with his poetic and dramatic conceptions. Ravel's "objet", whether delicate or massive, was to give the feeling of a beautifully sculpted solidity. His frequent recourse to small-scale constructions and his adherence to classical forms led some to consider him a miniaturist. Stravinsky called him "A Swiss watchmaker". A sophisticated harmonist and experimenter in musical form, Ravel used images in fascinatingly new and unfamiliar ways, reflecting in part his interest in exotic and Eastern music.

This is Ravel's only string quartet. An early work, it is remarkable for its freshness, melodic charm and technical maturity. Written in 1902-1903, it was performed first at the Société Nationale on March 5, 1904, by the Heymann Quartet. While the quartet received mostly enthusiastic notices, some critics suggested that Ravel should revise the work. Debussy responded to this suggestion, "In the name of the Gods of Music, and in mine, do not touch a single note."

The Allegro is suave and melodious, opening with a rich, warm melody scored for the entire quartet followed by a theme for the first violin set over rapid figures in the second violin and viola. The music quiets, and a second soaring theme is played by the violin and viola, scored two octaves apart, creating a striking tone colour. A powerful climax ends the movement.

The pizzicato opening of the second movement helps Ravel conjure the sound of a Javanese gamelan orchestra. Trills and tremolos give a beautiful sheen to the instrumental writing of this Scherzo, replete with elaborate cross-rhythms and imparting an orchestral sense to the sound.

The third movement is a slow rhapsody with shifting tempi. The opening melody of the quartet is skillfully interwoven with new melodies in a profusion of fresh and imaginative musical colours.

The Finale is by turns stormy and calm. Contrasting lyrical and expressive melodies are interrupted by vivid splashes of colourful sound. Agitated and dramatic, this movement brings the quartet to an exciting close.

Four Ladino Songs for String Quartet

Matan Porat (1982-)

Born in Tel-Aviv, pianist and composer Matan Porat studied with Emanuel Krasovsky, Maria João Pires, and Murray Perahia, obtaining his Master's degree from the Juilliard School. His composition teachers were Ruben Seroussi and George Benjamin. Among his works are two operas, 4 string quartets, a Requiem, and a mandolin concerto.

The Judeo-Spanish language, also known as Ladino, was spoken originally in Spain but after the Edict of Expulsion in 1492 spread across the Balkans, Turkey, and Morocco with the expelled Sephardic Jews. These "Four Ladino Songs" were chosen from a rich heritage of folksongs, almost all of which deal with the themes of love and pain. The quartet is in three contrasting movements. The first movement consists of two songs, "Los Bilbilicos" and "Yo Era Ninya", depicting the yearning of a faraway loved one. The second movement, a scherzo, is full of humour and wit, based on the humorous text of "mi suegra, la negra", about an evil stepmother who makes the bride's life miserable. The final movement is a theme with seven variations on "Durme, Durme", ending with the quartet singing the theme and nursing a baby to sleep. "Four Ladino Songs" was commissioned by the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music for the 20th Anniversary of the Ariel Quartet.

Intermission

String Quartet in C Major, Opus 59, No. 3 "Hero"

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Introduzione: Andante con moto; Allegro vivace

Andante con moto quasi Allegretto

Menuetto; Grazioso

Allegro molto

This quartet, the last of three commissioned by Count Razumovsky, was written in 1806. From 1806-1808, Beethoven wrote his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Leonora Overture, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Violin Concerto. This was one of the few happy times of his life. In this quartet, with an assurance and felicity never encountered before, Beethoven extracted an orchestral sound from the four instruments. These three quartets so massively strained the medium of the string quartet as it was understood at the time that they originally received a harshly negative reaction. The quartet's subtitle, "Hero" (Eroica), refers to the grand conception of the last movement.

The quartet opens with an eerie introduction that seems to be suspended in time. The jaunty first theme begins with a short up-beat and long arrival note – a rhythmic figure that remains important throughout the movement. The exuberant second theme starts with the first violin and then is imitated in order by the viola, cello, and second violin. The development provides flashy virtuosic passages for all the instruments.

The Andante, with its pizzicato base, has a tinge of Slavonic melancholy. The first theme is a heavy, poignant violin line over repeated cello pizzicato notes, making a perfect foil for the warm second theme. After that, both themes are developed and brought back in reverse order.

The Menuetto has the charm and grace of a traditional 18th Century minuet. The first part is gentle and languorous despite an inner drive, followed by a brilliant fugal subject. A sharp Trio leads directly to the final Allegro that follows without pause. It opens softly in a fast tempo with the viola playing the theme alone. The second violin, cello, and first violin join in sequentially to bring this section to a climax. Tremendous tension builds as the movement drives to a climax of elemental splendour. Just as the Eroica Symphony expanded the scope of symphonic writing, the Finale of this quartet makes all previous quartets seem modest by comparison.

* * * * *

Next Concerts, both at the Vancouver Playhouse:

Pražák Quartet

Sunday, November 10, 2024 - 3:00 pm

Milhaud: String Quartet No 1, Opus 5

Smetana: String Quartet No 2 in D Minor

Dvořák: String Quartet No 12 in F Major, Opus 96 "American"

Takács Quartet

Sunday, December 8, 2024 - 3:00 pm

Haydn: String Quartet in C Major, Opus 54, No 2

Britten: String Quartet No 2 in C, Opus 26

Beethoven: String Quartet No 16 in F Major, Opus 135