



**2009-2010 Season
Program III**

The Afiara String Quartet:

Valerie Li, violin

Yuri Cho, violin

David Samuel, viola

Adrian Fung, cello

Stevan Cavalier, piano

Grace Presbyterian Church

January 31, 2010 3pm





Aleksandra Vrebalov
(b. 1970, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia)

Pannonia Boundless for string quartet
(1997)

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy
(1809 - 1847)

String Quartet No. 4
in E Minor, Op. 44, No. 2 (1837)

- I Allegro assai appassionato
- II Scherzo: Allegro di molto
- III Andante
- IV Presto agitato

Intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op.57
(1940)

- I Prelude, Lento
- II Fugue, Adagio
- III Scherzo, Allegretto
- IV Intermezzo, Lento
- V Finale, Allegretto

The Afiara String Quartet:

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Aleksandra Vrebalov (b. 1970, Novi Sad, Yugoslavia)
Pannonia Boundless for string quartet (1997)

Serbian born, Aleksandra Vrebalov is currently an active participant in New York City's contemporary music scene; a co-founder of South Oxford Six, a composers collective in New York City. She has attended an impressive number of institutes of higher learning, including the Novi Sad University, Belgrade University, The San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and The Prague Academy of Music. She received her Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Michigan. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and has received numerous fellowships, awards and commissions.

Pannonia Boundless was commissioned by the Kronos Quartet in 1997. In this, *The Internet Age*, the composer has both a website and a Facebook page where one can find information about the composer and her works. In addition there are videos on www.youtube.com of performances of some of her works, as well as sites with recordings of some of her current pieces. On her website, www.aleksandravrebalov.com, the composer wrote the following about this work;

“Kronos asked me to do six minutes of virtuosic music that would be based on Gypsy tunes and would employ specific techniques of these nomadic musicians.”

“After the research in Novi Sad radio archives and many visits to Gypsy taverns in Vojvodina, I wrote this piece as an homage to those musicians who from the margins of the society, as much as from the well known concert halls, have the power to touch our hearts.”

Pannonia was the name of a Roman province located over the territory of the present-day western half of Hungary with parts in Austria, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bosnia and Herzegovina . In the liner notes by Ken Hunt, to the recording by the Kronos Quartet the composer states; “Pannonia is a completely open and wide land of many crossroads that connect the Mediterranean with Northeast Europe and the Orient. There are no mountains or hills as far as the eye can see. It is a special limitless place.”

For some reason, people think that music must tell us only about the pinnacles of the human spirit, or at least about highly romantic villains. But there are very few heroes or villains. Most people are average, neither black nor white. They're gray. A dirty shade of gray.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1959)

The people do not need music which they cannot understand.

Andrei Zhdanov (1947)



Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809 - 1847)
String Quartet No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 44, No. 2 (1837)

Felix Mendelssohn is surely one of music's most celebrated child prodigies. His precocity manifested itself in both performance and composition. He appeared successfully as a pianist at age seven, and by twelve had composed sonatas, songs, cantatas, operas and symphonies.

Mendelssohn came from an upper-middle-class family. And while this meant that Felix never had to "work" for a living, he nevertheless drove himself to an early grave in an attempt to fulfill all of his many assumed musical responsibilities. It is said that he made the profession of music "respectable." He was by all accounts a remarkable person. He possessed considerable talents as both a visual artist and writer. Languages came easy to him. His administrative and organizing talents were also considerable. Along with Robert Schumann and Ferdinand David, he founded the Leipzig Conservatory in 1843.

He helped promote his contemporaries, among them Chopin, Berlioz and Schumann, whose symphonies he was the first to conduct, and was regarded as one of the finest conductors of his time. It is also to Mendelssohn that we owe the "modern" approach to performing the works of Bach and Handel. Mendelssohn was adamant about sticking to the score – well almost, compared, that is, to the liberties then regularly taken. In this respect he ran afoul of most of his contemporaries who believed they could improve the scores of these past masters.

He was also one of the great pianists of his day. Clarity, nuance, lack of mannerism, and again, fidelity to the score marked his playing. His style of playing eventually won out over the empty virtuosity, charlatanism, and showboating of many early 19th Century pianists. He also kept the keyboard works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven alive when they were eclipsed, much to his disgust, by those of Field, Hummel, and Kalkbrenner. In his work *The Great Pianists*, Harold Schonberg asserts that Mendelssohn was probably "one of the greatest improvisers of musical history."

Mendelssohn was no less a master in writing for string quartet. His Opus 44 consists of three string quartets, composed between 1837 and 1838, and dedicated to the Crown Prince of Sweden. They were composed in between performing and conducting tours, at a time when Mendelssohn was at the top of his game. Aside from being a much sought after performer and conductor, he was an internationally recognized composer whose newest works were eagerly anticipated.

Though designated as the second in a set of three quartets, the E Minor quartet was actually the first one in the series to be composed. It might be characterized as "front-loaded" as the first movement is both the longest and weightiest of the four movements. Marked "appassionato", it is indeed a passionate and high energy



movement from start to finish, with its opening rising motif recurring throughout the musical discourse.

The second movement is one of those skittering “elfin” scherzi that continue to be a hallmark of Mendelssohn’s style; though at times these sprites seem somewhat less than benevolent. Yes? No?

The third movement Andante affords program annotators the fall back position of comparing its singing style to the seven volumes of *Lieder ohne Worte* (Songs Without Words); salon or character pieces composed by Felix, with a few by sister Fanny thrown in, for solo piano. So, why over-think this? The third movement Andante is reminiscent of Mendelssohn’s Songs Without Words; pieces characterized by a song-like melody (in this case with a tip of the hat to Schubert in some spots) with subordinate, but varied accompaniment.

The finale Presto, which features the interplay of two themes, one vigorously rhythmic, the other, not surprisingly as these things go, more lyrical, provides, in addition, a great cardiovascular workout for the performers.

Postlude for the Curious

What’s with the “Bartholdy” in Mendelssohn-Bartholdy?

Abraham Mendelssohn Bartholdy (nee Mendelssohn), himself a prosperous banker, once quipped about his fate; being the son of a famous father and the father of a famous son. He was, of course referring to his being sandwiched between his father, Moses Mendelssohn, the famous Jewish philosopher and sage, and his son Felix, the brilliant composer and performer. Abraham, being influenced by both the Enlightenment and the newly emerging nationalism, believed that the best course for German Jews was total assimilation into German culture. He felt that having a famous Jewish philosopher for a father, was an obstacle toward that end; ‘there can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius’. On the advice of his brother-in-law, Jakob, he, along with bro-in-law, changed their names to Bartholdy, after a property acquired by bro-in-law. He urged son Felix to drop the name Mendelssohn altogether, and go by the surname Bartholdy. Felix chose not to accede to father’s wishes, but honoring both father and grandfather, chose the middle road and became a hyphenator. As it happened, the name Bartholdy never really stuck. To his contemporaries and to this very day he was, and is, known as Felix Mendelssohn.

As for Abraham’s dream of total assimilation, we all know how well that turned out.

Notes by Joseph Way



Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Piano Quintet in G minor, Op.57 (1940)

From the opening measures of the Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op. 57 we realize that we are listening to a grand chamber work by a facile and mature composer. But the Quintet is actually an early chamber music work by Shostakovich. Completed in 1940 after the First String Quartet, Op.49 (1938), several film scores and the Sixth Symphony, Op.54 (1939), the Piano Quintet is the fourth work in the composer's chamber music catalog. Fourteen more string quartets (out of a projected 24), a piano trio, a violin sonata, and a viola sonata follow it.

In 1940 most of Europe had already plunged into war. The Soviet Union, though ostensibly protected by a non-aggression pact signed by both Stalin and Hitler, was already beginning to face the certainty of conflict, though no one could imagine the actual brutality of the Great Patriotic War which was to come. Yet the country was quiet, like the proverbial calm before the storm. The Red Terror of the early years after the revolution of 1917 had passed. The collectivization of the peasants in 1929 and 1930 had been completed (albeit at the cost of famine and starvation and the death of millions). The purge trials of 1935 and 1936 and the mass arrests that engulfed the entire country in 1937 and 1938 were complete. Shostakovich himself had almost succumbed to personal political terror in January of 1936 when Stalin and his minions walked out of a performance of the opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District*. After an article entitled "Muddle Instead of Music" was published in Pravda ("things could end very badly for this young man"), Shostakovich withdrew public performances of his work. The Fifth Symphony, Op.47 (1937) rehabilitated him in the stern eyes of the regime, i.e.: Josef Stalin, or "Uncle Joe" as FDR and Churchill referred to him.

As with much of Shostakovich's music, the Piano Quintet is an historical reflection of its time. It is a gravely serene piece marked by a simplicity of texture, especially in the piano writing: lines are doubled two octaves below, and there is little complex inter-part composition. All of this provides clarity, and an ample accessibility reflected in the popularity of the work immediately after its premiere. Rostislav Dubinsky, original first violinist of the Borodin Quartet recalls in his book, *Not By Music Alone*: "For a time the Quintet overshadowed even such events as the football matches between the main teams. The Quintet was discussed in trams, people tried to sing in the streets the second defiant theme of the finale. War that soon started completely changed the life of the country as well as the consciousness of the people. If previously there was the faint hope of a better life, and the hope that the 'sacrifices' of the revolution were not in vain, this hope was never to return. The Quintet remained in the consciousness of the people as the last ray of light before the future sank into a dark gloom."

The work is cast in five movements. The Prelude opens in the style of a Bach prelude, and foreshadows the remarkable preludes that Shostakovich was to write



in the Preludes and Fugues for Piano, Op.87 (1950-51). The stirring entry of the piano is answered by the quartet, after which the mood changes and a related idea is developed until the opening reasserts itself. The Fugue begins gently and slowly and builds to a furor of lyricism. The Scherzo returns to Shostakovich's irrepressible sense of irony and humor, and is utterly brilliant. This side of the composer's personality is never restrained; there are dazzling and profound scherzos scattered throughout his work. This one is reminiscent of the Polka from the *Age of Gold*, or moments from the *Cello Sonata*, Op.40 (1934). The Intermezzo, tinged with regret and tranquility, leads to a finale in which triumph is flung in direct opposition to darkness. This is the theme that Dubinsky recalls, and it appears before and after a thunderous, descending group of onrushing chords on the piano, the emotional core of the work. The Quintet finishes with wit and whimsy, contrary to the opening, in which the music spins off to a quiet conclusion.

Shostakovich and the Beethoven Quartet premiered the Quintet on November 23, 1940 at the Moscow Academy of Music. Shostakovich was an accomplished pianist and performed the piece many times with the Beethoven and later, the Borodin Quartet. Incidentally, Dmitri Dmitreyvich was an anxious performer and his resulting fast tempi are recognizable in recordings of his performances. Valentin Berlinsky, cellist of the Borodin Quartet, recalls in Elizabeth Wilson's book, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* that the composer would say "Let's play it fast, otherwise the audience will get bored." He would particularly rush the fast movements. The player's would beg him to slow down, saying "but your metronome mark is such and such!" The composer replied, "Well, you see my metronome at home is out of order, so pay no attention to what I wrote."

Note by Richard Gylgayton

The Musicians

The all-Canadian **Afiara String Quartet** takes its name from the Spanish *fiar*, meaning "to trust". It has been said that chamber music is a conversation between friends. Within the support of friendship, the Afiaras found that trusting each other, in rehearsal and on stage, was vital to the depth and joy of their music-making. The Afiara String Quartet is the Juilliard School's Graduate Resident String Quartet. As recipients of Lisa Arnhold Fellowships, the Afiara String Quartet is presented in a full Lincoln Center recital during the season, and Afiara members have lessons with members of the Juilliard String Quartet. They assist the JSQ with their ensemble and chamber music instruction, as well as the School's first-year string quartet survey course. The Quartet consists of:

Valerie Li, violin, received her Bachelor's from the Peabody Conservatory and her Master's from the New England Conservatory. She has performed at the Kennedy Center, Carnegie, Jordan and Strathmore Halls. Ms. Li won first prize in



Chamber Music at the National Music Festival of Canada and was the recipient of a British Columbia Arts Council Award to study at Peabody, where she won the Marbury Prize and the Hulsteyn Award. Ms. Li has been named a fellow at Tanglewood Music Center and Aspen Music Festival, and has performed at Taos School of Music in New Mexico and the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts. She has played with the Baltimore and Singapore Symphonies and served as Concertmaster of the New England Conservatory Philharmonia, the Peabody Symphony Orchestra and with the National Youth Orchestra of Canada. Ms. Li has studied violin with Miriam Fried, Herbert Greenberg, and Gwen Thompson and chamber music with members of the Takacs, Juilliard, Vermeer, and Borromeo String Quartets.

Yuri Cho, violin, received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Dorothy Delay, Naoko Tanaka, and Masao Kawasaki as a recipient of the Dorothy Starling Violin Scholarship and the Jean Doyle Loomis Award. Hailed by the San Francisco Classical Voice as a musician with virtuosity, she was a featured soloist with the Seoul Royal Symphony in Korea and Japan, the Concordia Symphony Orchestra in Canada, and has given concerts in New York's Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, and in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Ms. Cho has performed with Norman Fischer, Jean-Michel Fonteneau, Paul Hersh, Jodi Levitz, and Ian Swensen. She was named an Osher Scholar at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Ian Swensen.

David Samuel, viola, received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School under the Nathan Gordon Scholarship and the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship. He has studied viola with Karen Tuttle, Michael Tree, and Paul Hersh, and chamber music with Emanuel Ax, Joseph Kalichstein, and members of the Juilliard String Quartet. He has performed in Canada, the U.S., and more than a dozen countries in Europe. His concerts have taken him to the Berlin Konzerthaus, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center. As an orchestral musician, Mr. Samuel has been the principal violist of the Juilliard Orchestra and the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival Orchestra. As a chamber musician, he performed with Robert Mann, Bonnie Hampton, Norman Fischer, Martha Katz, and Pinchas Zukerman. Mr. Samuel has been a teaching assistant to Michael Tree.

Adrian Fung, cello, has given solo recitals in New York's Carnegie Hall, the Goethe Institute, Montreal's Pollack Hall, the Toronto Centre of the Performing Arts, the Living Arts Centre, and Taiwan's National Concert Hall. He has been soloist with Ensemble 212, and the Columbia Chamber Players. Mr. Fung was awarded an Artist Grant from the New York Foundation of the Arts and received the Goodrich Award from the National Arts Centre of Canada. He has performed



at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center and the Orford Music Festival's "Musicians On Tour" and premiered several works, including pieces by Huck Hodge and the International Society of Contemporary Music. A graduate of McGill University and Mannes College, Mr. Fung studied cello with Fred Sherry, Antonio Lysy, David Hetherington, and Susan Gagnon.

Stevan Cavalier, piano, studied with Maryan Filar, himself a pupil of Walter Giesecking, at the Settlement School in Philadelphia, as well as with harpsichordist Lori Wollfisch and pianist Robert Miller. He has attended the Interlochen Summer Music Festival, and appeared in chamber ensembles in many Bay Area venues, including Davies Symphony Hall. Dr. Cavalier is Director of the Sierra Chamber Society.

Ticketing

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Rimsky-Korsakov used to say that he refused to acknowledge any complaints from composers about their hard lot in life. He explained his position thus: Talk to a bookkeeper and he'll start complaining about life and his work. Work has ruined him, it's so dull and boring. You see, the bookkeeper had planned to be a writer but life made him a bookkeeper. Rimsky-Korsakov said that it was rather different with composers. None of them can say that he had planned to be a bookkeeper and that life forced him to become a composer.

If they cut off both hands, I will compose music anyway holding the pen in my teeth.

Dmitri Shostakovich



**Sierra Chamber Society 2009-2010 Season
All concerts at 3PM**

Sunday March 21, 2010

Boccherini String Quintet "Nights in the Streets of Madrid"
Faure/Duparc Songs with special guest
Donna Bruno, mezzosoprano
Cherubini String Quartet No 6 A minor

Sunday May 16, 2010

Martinu - Serenade H 216 No 2 for 2 Violins and Viola
Ries - Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano
Dvorak - Sextet No 1 Op 48 A min

Programs Subject to Change

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