

presents...

Shenson Piano Series

GARRICK OHLSSON | Piano

APOLLON MUSAGÈTE QUARTET

Paweł Zalejski | Violin
Bartosz Zachłód | Violin

Piotr Szumieł | Viola
Piotr Skweres | Cello

Friday, October 7, 2022 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

BACH

The Art of the Fugue, BWV 1080

No. 1 Contrapunctus I

No. 4 Contrapunctus IV

No. 9 Contrapunctus IX à 4 alla Duodecima

DVOŘÁK

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 51

Allegro ma non troppo

Dumka (Elegie): Andante con moto; Vivace

Romanze: Andante con moto

Finale: Allegro assai

INTERMISSION

SHOSTAKOVICH

Piano Quintet in G Minor, Opus 57

Prelude: Lento

Fugue: Adagio

Scherzo: Allegretto

Intermezzo: Lento; Appassionato

Finale: Allegretto

**The Shenson Piano Series is made possible by Fred M. Levin,
The Shenson Foundation.**

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Garrick Ohlsson is represented by Opus 3 Artists

470 Park Avenue South, 9th Floor North, New York, NY 10016 opus3artists.com

Apollon Musagète Quartet is represented by Arts Management Group

130 West 57th Street, Suite 6A, New York, NY 10019 artsmg.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

For Tickets and More: sfperformances.org | **415.392.2545**

ARTIST PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents Garrick Ohlsson for the tenth time. His first recital for us was in May 2004.

Apollon Musagète appears for the second time. The quartet made their SF Performances debut in a February 2018 subscriber gift concert.



Pianist **Garrick Ohlsson** has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although long regarded as one of the world's leading exponents of the music of Chopin, Mr. Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire ranging over the entire piano literature and he has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. To date he has at his command more than 80 concertos, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st century.

A frequent guest with the orchestras in New Zealand and Australia, Mr. Ohlsson accomplished a seven city recital tour across Australia just prior to the closure of the concert world due to COVID-19. Since that time and as a faculty member of San Francisco Conservatory of Music he kept music alive for a number of organizations with live or recorded recital streams and since the re-opening of concert activity in summer 2021 has appeared with the Indianapolis, Atlanta, Dallas, Seattle, Toronto and Cleveland orchestras, in recital in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston; Ravinia and Tanglewood summer festivals and a tour in the US with colleague Kirill Gerstein. The 2022–23 season includes orchestras in Boston, Detroit, Minneapolis, San Diego, Spain, Poland, and Czech Republic.

An avid chamber musician, Mr. Ohlsson has collaborated with the Cleveland, Emerson, Tokyo, and Takács string quartets and will begin the 22/23 season with a US tour with Poland's Apollon Musagète Quartet. Together with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio. Passionate about singing and singers, Mr. Ohlsson has appeared in recital with such legendary artists as Magda Olivero, Jessye Norman, and Ewa Podleś. Mr. Ohlsson can be heard on the Arabesque, RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, Hyperion, and Virgin Classics labels.

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Garrick Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of 8, at the Westchester Conservatory of Music; at 13 he entered The Juilliard School, in New York City. He has been awarded first prizes in the Busoni and Montreal Piano competitions, the Gold Medal at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw (1970), the Avery Fisher Prize (1994), the University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor, MI (1998), the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music (2014), and the Gloria Artis Gold Medal for cultural merit from the Polish Deputy Culture Minister.



Winner of first prize and several other awards at the International Music Competition of the ARD in 2008, **Apollon Musagète Quartet** has rapidly become an established feature of the European musical scene, captivating public and press alike. The quartet studied with Johannes Meissl at the European Chamber Music Academy and was inspired by the musicians of the

Alban Berg Quartet at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.

The quartet was nominated ECHO Rising Stars 2010, followed by highly successful performances at prestigious European venues. It was also named BBC New Generation Artist in 2012, leading to extensive touring in the UK and a number of recordings for the BBC. In 2014 the musicians received the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award.

Recent engagements have taken the quartet to The Chopin and His Europe International Music Festival in Warsaw, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Konzerthaus in Vienna, Les Grands Interprètes concert series in Geneva, Heidelberger Frühling, and Nymphenburger Sommer in Munich. Since 2019 the quartet has been performing a Schubert cycle for the Schubertiade in Austria and a Dvořák cycle at the Kasseler Musiktage—one of the oldest music festivals in Europe.

Apollon Musagète Quartet collaborates with renowned chamber musicians such as Gabriela Montero, Garrick Ohlsson, Kevin Kenner, Martin Fröst, Nils Mönkemeyer, István Várdai, Angelika Kirchschlager, and Jörg Widmann. They appeared in several symphonic series with BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Dresden Philharmonic, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice, and the Nordic Symphony Orchestra of Estonia.

They welcome collaborations that integrate chamber music into other performing art forms and were part of projects such as a staged concert by the Berlin based performance group Nico and the Navigators, a ballet production at the National Theatre in Nuremberg, and a world tour with the pop singer Tori Amos. Their own compositions *Multitude* for String Quartet and *A Multitude of Shades*, both published by the Viennese publisher Doblinger, are often included in the quartet's concert repertoire.

Since the debut CD by Oehms Classics in 2010 followed by recordings for the labels such as Decca Classics and Deutsche Grammophon, their discography has grown extensively. In 2018 a disc containing quartets by Andrzej Panufnik was released by the Fryderyk-Chopin-Institute and subsequently the latest recording with works by Karol Szymanowski and Roman Palester by Universal Poland.

Piotr Skweres plays an ex-André Navarra cello by Gennaro Gagliano dated 1741. The instrument has kindly been provided by Merito String Instruments Trust Vienna. Furthermore, the quartet thanks the

Thomastik Infeld for the generous support and the enterprise Stoffwerk for the exclusive and custom-made concert clothes.

PROGRAM NOTES

The Art of the Fugue, BWV 1080

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685–1750)

On a visit to Berlin 1747, Bach played before Frederick the Great, who in turn gave Bach a theme and asked him to extemporize a six-part fugue on it. Bach improvised a three-part fugue for Frederick on the spot and then—back in Leipzig—took that “royal” theme through 13 further contrapuntal extensions, which he presented to the King as *A Musical Offering*. But Bach’s interest in exploring the contrapuntal possibilities of a single theme extended well beyond the famous visit to Berlin in 1747. Evidence suggests that around 1740 Bach had begun a lengthy work consisting of a series of fugues and canons based on one theme. His work on this project continued across the decade, even during the years of his increasing blindness, and in fact the project would remain unfinished—at the time of his death, Bach was working on a triple fugue that was left incomplete. Bach had prepared the first 11 fugues for publication, and after his death all of the pieces based on this one theme were gathered by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel and published in the fall of 1751 under the name *The Art of the Fugue*, a title the composer probably never heard or imagined.

The fact that the work was left unfinished has created a number of problems. Principal among these is Bach’s failure to indicate the instrumentation he had in mind for this music, and some have wondered whether he intended the work to be performed at all. Its complexities—and the lack of indicated instrumentation—have led some to believe that these works were unplayable, intended only as cerebral exercises on the lofty plain at which Bach had finally arrived. *The Art of the Fugue* has been performed by harpsichord, piano, organ, string quartet, chamber orchestra, and full symphony orchestra and has also been recorded by such unexpected ensembles as brass quintet and saxophone quartet.

In *The Art of the Fugue* Bach preferred the title *Contrapunctus* (counterpoint) to *Fugue*, and he arranged the fugues in a sequence

of increasing complexity. Bach’s fundamental theme seems simplicity itself: in D minor, it is only four measures long, and—even at its steady tempo—it gives the impression of increasing speed, as the half-notes of the opening measures give way to quarters in the third and to eighths in the final measure. *Contrapunctus I* introduces Bach’s fundamental fugue subject in its simplest form, worked out here without countertheme. *Contrapunctus IV* has the subject in inversion, here developed with unusual harmonic freedom. The brief *Contrapunctus IX* is a spirited double fugue on a new theme; as it progresses it incorporates as its second subject the original fugue theme, combined at the interval of a twelfth, hence *alla Duodecima*.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 51

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

Dvořák’s sudden burst to fame in his late thirties was the result of help from powerful friends. Brahms recognized the Czech composer’s talents and did much to get him launched, including getting his own publisher—Simrock of Berlin—to publish Dvořák’s music. There were others—critic Eduard Hanslick and violinist Joseph Joachim among them—who promoted and performed Dvořák’s music, and the young composer found himself in debt to a number of prominent German musicians. Dvořák was not entirely comfortable in the new world that he seemed to be conquering, for his new German friends wanted him to move from Prague to Vienna, give up his Czech identity, and use his talents to write music in the mainstream German tradition. Dvořák was grateful for their help, but he refused to surrender his past or his identity, and when Simrock suggested that Dvořák change his first name from the Czech Antonín to the German Anton because it would make him more attractive to German audiences, Dvořák exploded and insisted on maintaining his Czech identity.

The *Quartet in E-flat Major* makes clear how Dvořák found himself trapped between these two worlds at this moment in his life. It was commissioned by the German violinist Jean Becker, and it was first performed privately at the Berlin home of Joachim; the first public performance was in Magdeburg, and the Hellmesberger Quartet performed it in Vienna before it

was heard in Prague. All this suggests how completely Dvořák had conquered the German musical establishment, but the music itself remains unmistakably, adamantly Czech. Even as he writes for German performers and audiences, Dvořák insists on using Czech rhythms, sounds, and forms—it is as if he is declaring his place in both musical worlds at once.

Dvořák began this quartet on Christmas Day 1878 and completed it three months later on March 28, 1879. This is exceptionally lovely music, one of those hidden treasures that leave one wondering how they could ever have been neglected. From the first instant one knows that this will be relaxed music, content to make its way on the beauty of its material and the quality of its craftsmanship rather than through conflict or exploring the dark places of the soul. After a couple of tentative gestures, the opening theme of the *Allegro ma non troppo* unfolds upward. Dvořák’s biographer John Clapham hears an echo of the beginning of the Mendelssohn *Octet* here, but more striking is the little rocking three-note tag at the end of the phrases in this theme. This figure outlines the shape of the polka rhythm, and Dvořák builds the dancing second subject on that rhythm. A further theme feels more animated, but happy spirits will prevail in this movement, and in the development Dvořák deftly presents the opening theme with accompaniment from the polka rhythm.

The second movement is in one of the most Czech of forms, the *dumka*, though Clapham points out the Dvořák had little clear sense of the formal meaning of that term. For him, a *dumka* was simply melancholy, lamenting music from which brighter moods would suddenly flash out. This one demonstrates that perfectly: it opens with a grieving melody in the first violin (Dvořák marks it *dolce*) and even introduces a singing second subject of similar character. But suddenly the music leaps ahead and dances furiously. The sudden change to G major makes it seem all the more sunny, and the impressive thing is that Dvořák has derived this theme from the opening *dumka*—they share the same shape and many of the same notes. The dark opening returns, but Dvořák ends with a return of the fast material, and this wonderful movement—full of such different kinds of music—trails off into nothing.

The *Romanze* can seem a little more conventional—it is the one movement in the quartet without a specifically Czech

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element—but it is still notable for its harmonic freedom and melodic shading: this music hovers delicately between keys. The energetic finale zips along on an opening violin theme that seems made to order for a rondo-finale, but the theme quickly begins to develop and change. This theme appears to be derived from an old Czech leaping dance for men, and Dvořák really lets it fly. This is the most extroverted and virtuosic of the four movements, and in its closing moments Dvořák pushes the tempo ahead faster and faster to the ringing final chords.

Piano Quintet in G Minor, Opus 57

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH
(1906–1975)

Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet*, one of his most appealing and straightforward works, has come in for a hard time from certain critics, and perhaps for strange reasons. Written in 1940, several years after the *Pravda* attack on Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*—an attack that nearly destroyed his career—the *Piano Quintet* received the Stalin Prize. That fact alone has been enough to destroy it for some Western critics, who feel that any music associated—however remotely—with Stalin's name and the approval of the Soviet government must be

without merit, must represent a capitulation to inferior artistic ideals.

A very different sort of criticism came from another source. Serge Prokofiev said of Shostakovich's *Piano Quintet*: "What astounds me about the Quintet is that so young a composer, at the height of his powers, should be so very much on his guard, and so carefully calculate every note. He never takes a single risk. One looks in vain for an impetus, a venture." One might note here that a composer who regarded the young Shostakovich as a rival may not be the most impartial of critics and also that a composer whose career had nearly been iced by the Soviet government might well be "very much on his guard."

Whatever the critical reactions to it, the *Piano Quintet* has proven quite popular with one important faction of musical life: audiences. While it is true that the *Piano Quintet* is conservative in its musical language, it is also unfailingly melodic, fresh, and good-natured, and—despite the reaction of some of its critics—it remains one of Shostakovich's most frequently performed and recorded works.

Some have claimed to hear the influence of Bach in the first two movements: a *Prelude* and a *Fugue*. The piano alone plays the broad-ranging *Prelude* theme and is soon joined by the strings. The *Poco più mosso* second theme is also first heard in the piano, which has a very prominent role throughout the *Quintet* (Shostakovich himself played the piano at the first performance, on November 23, 1940, in Mos-

cow). The beginning of the *Fugue*, however, belongs to the strings, which introduce the muted and somber main subject. The music rises to a great climax, then falls back to end very quietly. By contrast, the *Scherzo* explodes with life. In a hard-driving 3/4, this music powers furiously ahead, its rhythm pounding into one's consciousness. The movement is also full of brilliant color: glissandos, pizzicatos, left-hand pizzicatos, instruments playing in their highest registers. Particularly effective is the ending, which rushes ahead without the slightest relaxation of tempo to the sudden, surprising cadence.

The final two movements are connected. The *Intermezzo* opens with a pizzicato line over which the first violin sings a long cantilena of unusual beauty. Gradually the other instruments enter, the music rises to a dramatic climax, then subsides, and out of that calm emerges the *Finale*. The last movement is the gentlest of the five. Far from storming the heavens, this music remains sunlit and rhapsodic. It is based on two themes—the piano's gentle opening melody and an angular second theme first heard in the piano over the strings' powerful triplets. Shostakovich develops both these ideas before bringing the *Quintet* to a conclusion that is pleasing precisely for its understatement: the music grows quiet and suddenly vanishes on three quiet strokes of sound derived from the *Finale's* opening theme.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger