

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society
presents
The Adaskin String Trio

Emlyn Ngai, violin

Steve Larson, viola

Mark Fraser, cello

with guests

Pascal Archer, clarinet

Annie Trépanier, violin

Golijov • Beethoven • Mozart

Sunday Afternoon

April 19, 2015 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

PROGRAM

The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind (1994)

Oswaldo Golijov

Prelude: Calmo, Sospeso

I. Agitato – Con Fuoco – Maestoso – Senza Misura, Oscillante

II. Teneramente – Ruvido – Presto

III. Calmo, Sospeso – Allegro Pesante

Postlude: Lento, Libermente

Serenade for String Trio in D Major, Op.8

Ludwig van Beethoven

I. Marcia (Allegro)

II. Adagio

III. Menuetto (Allegretto)

IV. Adagio - Scherzo (Allegro molto) - Adagio

V. Allegretto alla Polacca

VI. Andante quasi Allegretto

VII. Marcia (Allegro)

INTERMISSION

Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K.581 ("Stadler")

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

I. Allegro

II. Larghetto

III. Menuetto – Trio I – Trio II

IV. Allegretto con Variazioni

Notes on the Program

Osvaldo Golijov (b. 1960)

The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind (1994)

(~30 minutes)

Three of the most notable composers of the twentieth century were born in Buenos Aires, Argentina: Alberto Ginastera (1916-1983), Ástor Piazzolla (1921-1992), and Osvaldo Golijov. All of them are represented in this year's Red Bank chamber music series: Ginastera's first string quartet last November, two Piazzolla works last April and next month, and now Golijov's work for clarinet and string quartet, *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*.

Relatively unknown just a few years ago, Golijov seemed to burst full-grown onto center stage, first at the 2005-2006 Lincoln Center "Great Performers" series, then in the New York Philharmonic's September 2013 Opening Gala performance of his 2005 work *Azul* for cello and orchestra.

The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind was Golijov's first major success, premiered in an ancient church on a remote island in the North Sea between Germany and Denmark. It is a work in five movements for string quartet and klezmer clarinet, including clarinets of three different sizes and ranges.

Here is what Golijov wrote about the work:

I have this image of my great-grandfather, who shared my bedroom when I was seven. I'd wake up and see him by the window, praying ... in the early light. I think of him always praying, or fixing things, his pockets full of screws. I remember thinking, three of his children are dead; why does he still pray? Why does he still fix things? But we were taught that God had assigned that task of repairing the world to the Jewish people – *Tikkun Olam*. Incomprehensible.

About eight hundred years ago, Isaac the Blind – who was the greatest Kabbalist rabbi of Provence – dictated a manuscript saying that everything in the universe, all things and events, are products of combinations on the Hebrew alphabet's letters.

The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind is a kind of epic, a history of Judaism. It has Abraham, exile and redemption. The movements sound like they are in three of the languages spoken in almost 6,000 years of Jewish history: the first in Aramaic, the second in Yiddish, and the third in Hebrew. I never wrote it with this idea in mind, and only understood it when the work was finished. But while I was composing the second movement, for example, my father would sit out on the deck with the newspaper – the sports pages, and every once and a while he would shout, "There you go! Another Yiddish chord!"

In the prelude, the music is like a celestial accordion, rising and falling like breathing, like

praying... like air...then the air is transformed into a pulse and heart.

The whole first movement is a heartbeat that accelerates wildly, becoming frantic. It's built on a single chord, rotating like a monolith. The Quartet obsesses in eighth notes, the clarinet starts a huge line in long notes, but zooms in and is caught up in the gravitational spin. The forces of God and man, they never unite, but they do commune, you can hear the *dybbuk* and the *shofar*, searching for a revelation that is always out of reach.

The second movement opens with a hesitating, irregular pulse – a skipping heartbeat, the rhythm of death. The violin and the clarinet hold forth in monologue at the same time, like those Bashevis Singer stories told in a poorhouse on a winter night. The same four notes, the same theme, playing in endless combinations.

The String Quartet is an accordion in the prelude, a klezmer band in the second movements; now, in the third movement, it's a shepherd's magic flute. The last movement was written before all the others. It's an instrumental version of *K'Vakarot*, a work that I wrote a few years before for the Kronos Quartet and Cantor Misha Alexandrovich. In this final movement, hope is present but out of reach. There is a question woven into the hardening, inescapable pulse: why this task? Repairing a world forever breaking down, with pockets full of screws. The question remains unanswered in the postlude.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) **Serenade for String Trio in D Major, Op.8 (1797)**

(~30 minutes)

Among Beethoven's early works are five string trios published between 1794 and 1798, of which this "Serenade" is the second. After composing these five trios, he began work on his first of sixteen monumental string quartets in 1798, and he never returned to the string trio format. It is sometimes said that his trios were warmups for his quartets, but the truth is that good string trios are in many ways harder to compose, owing to their thinner instrumental texture and sonic resources.

This Serenade is a gem, light and tuneful in a style reminiscent of the serenades and divertimenti of Mozart and Haydn. While we associate the word "serenade" with evening songs, balconies, guitars, and young men in love, it comes from the Italian *serenata* meaning "serene, calm". In the course of time, classical composers used the term as a title for works intended for an evening's light entertainment; Beethoven would later arrange this serenade for a piano/viola duo and title it *Notturmo*, clearly identifying it as a nocturnal piece. But the classical repertoire contains almost no other string trios bearing the title "serenade" – most classical serenades were written for larger instrumental groupings including string orchestras and wind ensembles.

Beethoven's Serenade opens and closes with a march, suggesting the arrival and departure of a troop

of musicians who have come to serenade us. In between he alternates between slow and fast tempi in predominantly major keys, keeping the work bright and engaging. Humorously he interjects a brisk scherzo in the middle of the slow fourth movement, and he suggests a Polish mazurka in the next movement. He follows that with a theme and variations as the sixth movement (*Andante quasi Allegretto*), then closes the work with a reprise of the opening march.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K.581 (“Stadler”) (1789)

(~30 minutes)

By any standard, 1789 was a momentous and tumultuous year in the history of Western civilization: our American Constitution went into effect in March; French revolutionaries stormed the Bastille in July and demolished it in November; and Fletcher Christian led a successful mutiny on *HMS Bounty* in April. It must have seemed to everyone in those days that, in the blink of an eye, the world was truly turned upside-down.

But Vienna in 1789 was prosperous and at peace with most of the world, although the Austrian and Ottoman Empires had been at war since 1787 and the Viennese economy was suffering. Vienna was home to the 67-year-old Joseph Haydn and the 33-year-old Mozart. With barely two years left to live, Mozart had already completed all of his 41 symphonies, 20 of his 23 operas and oratorios, all 27 piano concertos, and practically all of his chamber music compositions, including 20 of his 23 string quartets. The major works remaining of his output would include three of his most celebrated operas and his last work, the incomplete *Requiem* (1791).

Mozart had been an internationally celebrated piano virtuoso from the age of six, so most of his instrumental compositions prominently feature the piano, which he was expected to play himself in both public and courtly performance. During his first five years in Vienna he had performed frequently at public concerts, premiering several new piano concertos each season; income from these allowed him to live for a time in high style. But by 1787 his attention had turned away from the piano and towards opera, and he rarely wrote or performed keyboard works thereafter. The consequent reduction in his income was compounded by inflation and scarcities that resulted from the war with the Ottoman Empire, and the Mozart family found their means greatly reduced.

The classic string quartet – two violins, a viola, and a cello – employed three members of the string family that had been relatively unchanged for centuries before Mozart’s time. The clarinet, in contrast, was a fairly new instrument, appearing in roughly recognizable form only around 1700, and was not fully domesticated in the lifetime of Bach (1685-1750), who favored the oboe, bassoon, and reedless recorder. Like all European composers from the 1750s onwards, Mozart and Haydn had used the clarinet in large-scale choral and symphonic works and in smaller-scale wind-only instrumental works called “serenades” and “divertimenti”. But Mozart’s idea of adding the unique sound of clarinet to a string quartet was a novel one, and probably owed much to the virtuosic

abilities of the famous clarinetist Anton Stadler, a close friend and contemporary of Mozart, to whom he dedicated this quintet. There are remarkably few clarinet quintets in the standard repertoire; the other one of note was written by Johannes Brahms a hundred years later in 1891.

The work is in four movements. The opening *Allegro* (lively) is rather more mellow than lively, more wistful than gay. There is no more perfect example of classical *sonata form*: two contrasting themes are introduced in turn (the first by the strings, the second by the clarinet) and repeated, then developed through a middle section, and finally recapitulated with harmonic and melodic variations of great elegance and charm. The second movement *Larghetto* (quite slow and broadly) is one of Mozart's most memorably melodic works, with the clarinet more in the spotlight, its singing melody supported by the long bass line of the cello and the slow rocking of muted violins and viola in the inner voices. The *Menuetto* (a minuet in 3/4 time) starts off in standard minuet-trio-minuet typical of the stately court dance, although the *trio* section is notable for having the clarinet absent for its entirety; but then a second *trio* is introduced, with the clarinet leading, with much more the style and tone of a German country dance than of the court.

The final movement is one of the most unforgettable in all of Mozart's *oeuvre*, a catchy little theme with five variations that cover a wonderfully wide range of moods and textures, from a light-hearted major-key skipping *Allegretto* to serious minor-key broad *Adagio* and back again, all the while displaying virtuosic playing by the clarinetist.

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ARTISTS

The **Adaskin String Trio** has won over audiences internationally with exuberant and stirring performances. Their playing has been hailed for “vigor, precision and stylistic certitude” (Charleston Gazette) as well as “spontaneity, intensity and charm” (Peninsula Review) and the Boston Globe praised them for “directing the listener to the heart of the matter.” Formed in 1994, the trio performs extensively throughout the United States and Canada, and has appeared at Merkin Concert Hall in New York, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and in Boston, Los Angeles, Montreal, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Santa Barbara and Chicago. In addition, the trio's concerts have been regularly recorded for broadcast by CBC Radio, Radio-Canada, and National Public Radio.

This dynamic ensemble commands a large string trio repertoire ranging from Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven to Dohnanyi, Rozsa, Villa-Lobos, Schnittke, and composers of today including commissioned works by Murray Adaskin, Robert Carl and David Macbride among others. In addition, the trio enjoys collaborations of the highest level with various artists. The trio and pianist Sally Pinkas have established themselves as powerful interpreters of numerous masterpieces from the piano quartet literature. Other collaborators have included oboist Thomas Gallant, guitarist Eliot Fisk, bassist Robert Black, and accordion virtuoso Joseph Petric with whom they commissioned Raymond Luedeke to write a spectacular new work entitled Tango Dreams.

The trio's recordings include the complete Beethoven String Trios on Musica Omnia which won critical acclaim in American Record Guide – “Highly desirable...strongly recommended” and Gramophone – “Superb playing... a flexible command of flow and phrase with instrumental power and eloquence and a nutty tonal richness. ...the Trio savours the sensuality of Beethoven's string writing and the intoxicating profusion of tunes while plumbing the emotional depths that lie beneath.” In 2008 MSR Classics released a recording of the Adaskin String Trio and pianist Sally Pinkas performing the two piano quartets of Gabriel Fauré.

Although the Adaskin String Trio is currently based in New England, the members of the trio are all originally from Canada. They met in Montreal where they each studied chamber music with founding Orford Quartet cellist Marcel Saint-Cyr. They later completed two years as ensemble-in-residence at The Hartt School under the guidance of the Emerson Quartet. The trio is named in honor of Murray Adaskin, one of Canada's most loved and respected composers, and two of his brothers, violinist Harry Adaskin and producer and music educator John Adaskin.

Clarinetist **Pascal Archer** leads an active career as a performer and teacher. He is the founder and artistic director of Exponential Ensemble, a mixed chamber music ensemble creating music and math educational programs. He is currently Principal Clarinet and board member of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic and a former member of the New World Symphony. Mr. Archer is on faculty at the Manhattan School of Music Precollege Division, the Hunter College (CUNY), Fordham University and the New York Summer Music Festival.

Violinist **Annie Trépanier** is a founding member of the acclaimed Avery Ensemble, co-Director of the Connecticut-based chamber music collective Cuatro Puntos, and has performed throughout Canada, the United States and Europe. She has been heard regularly in national broadcasts on Radio-Canada, CBC and NPR and has recorded for the CRI, New World, Ongaku, & Zephyr labels. She is a former member of the New World Trio and the Diabelli String Quartet. Ms. Trépanier is on the faculty of The Hotchkiss School and also performs and teaches each summer at the Wintergreen Festival in Virginia.