

Julie Himmelstrup Music in the Park Series

Modigliani Quartet

Sunday, November 12, 2023

Saint Anthony Park UCC



Welcome to the Schubert Club!

As nightfall starts ever earlier and temperatures drop, we offer you a warm welcome to today's concert. In this issue of *An die Musik*, we cover the International Artist Series debut recital of one of the world's most celebrated guitarists, MILOŠ. The excellent acoustic and acute silence of the Ordway Concert Hall make this room an ideal space to hear a solo guitar recital. French ensemble, the Modigliani Quartet return to our Music in the Park Series for a program with a distinctly Italian flavor.

Later in November, Schubert Club partners with the Walker Art Center in a presentation of the Sandbox Percussion playing *Seven Pillars* by American composer Andy Akiho. Featuring four musicians, dozens of instruments, a light show and choreography, this work is truly theatrical in nature.

Also, you are welcome to join us at Landmark Center on Thursdays at noon for the free Courtroom Concert series. Recorder virtuosa Cléa Galhano performs on November 16 and we celebrate the Holidays on December 14 with a program of *Songs of the Season*, curated by composer Abbie Betinis.

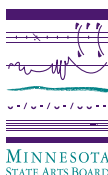
With our new free tickets policy for students and under-18s and other promotional activities, we are especially excited to welcome new friends to Schubert Club concerts. To those of you who have been part of the Schubert Club family for many years, thank you! And to those of you who are experiencing the Schubert Club for the first time, a very warm welcome!



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Sunday, November 12, 2023, 4:00 PM

Saint Anthony Park United Church of Christ

Pre-concert conversation one hour before the performance

MODIGLIANI QUARTET

Amaury Coeytaux, violin • Loïc Rio, violin
Laurent Marfaing, viola • François Kieffer, cello

String Quartet No. 3 in G major, K.156/134b (c. 1772) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Presto

Adagio

Tempo di Menuetto

Lui e loro (Him and Them) Op. 22 (2023)

Élise Bertrand (b. 2000)

Italian Serenade in G (1887)

Hugo Wolf (1860–1903)

Intermission

Crisantemi (Chrysanthemums), SC 65 (1890)

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)

String Quartet in E minor (1873)

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

Allegro

Andantino

Prestissimo

Scherzo fuga. Allegro assai mosso

PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

String Quartet No. 3 in G major, K.156/134b (c. 1772)
W. A. Mozart
 (b. Salzburg, Austria, 1756; d. Vienna, 1791)

All the music on today's program has Italian roots, including the opening quartet by a precocious 16-year-old Austrian, who composed it while visiting Milan in late 1772. Wolfgang and his father were in Italy where the finishing touches were being applied to his opera *séria Lucio Silla*. Following the successful premiere, their expected return to Salzburg was delayed due to contrivances that Leopold invented while awaiting word about a hoped-for new appointment in Tuscany. Although the job never materialized, the extra weeks spent in Milan were put to good use by Wolfgang, who composed 6 short string quartets that are known today as the Milanese Quartets.

All six have only three movements and tend to be lighter in character than his more mature quartets, often with finales that are more lightweight, cast as minuets or rondos. But you will also hear a notably carefree, innocent quality to these quartets that show not a composer at work, but a gifted teenager at play.

The opening Presto, in buoyant three-quarter time, initially suggests a waltz (though not yet invented!). Mozart is generous in spreading the counterpoint among all four voices, avoiding the "violin concerto" approach to quartets that had been the norm, especially in Italy. Mozart also abides by another convention of the era in all three movements, indicating that every section should be repeated. The resulting structural roadmap is A-A¹-B-B¹-C-C¹ etc., although some performers may choose to omit select repeats.

The Adagio becomes a bit more dramatic, in the darker key of E minor, with melodic lines that evoke Mozart's operatic writing. Again, Mozart indicates that the two halves of this movement should be repeated (A-A¹-B-B¹)

For the vigorous finale, Mozart returns to both G major and three-quarter time, setting it as an old-style Minuet, with its typical A-B-A structure. As before, Mozart suggests that the material in each of the three sections gets repeated. By this point, you would not be wrong to conclude that without all the obligatory repeats, this quartet would be a significantly shorter work! Fortunately for the listener, the quality of Mozart's material holds up well upon every second hearing.

Lui e loro (Him and Them) Op. 22 (2023)

Élise Bertrand

(b. Toulon, France, 2000)

The multifaceted musician Élise Bertrand, at just 23, has earned distinctions and prizes as both a violinist and composer. She began piano lessons at age five, the violin by eight, and started composing seriously at age eleven. By age 14, Élise was enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire, where she is currently pursuing a master's degree in chamber music with pianist Gaspard Thomas, her regular collaborator. In addition, she serves as artist-in-residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel, the Belgian academic institution for artistic training of young musicians created by Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. Ms. Bertrand has won numerous awards and distinctions as a violinist, chamber musician and composer, and recently released her first recording (*Lettera Amorosa*) that has been highly acclaimed in the European press.

Commissioned by the Modigliani Quartet, *Lui e loro* was inspired by the ancient Abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy, which dates from the year 529. During World War II, the building was destroyed by Allied bombing during the Battle of Monte Cassino, but it was rebuilt after the war. Ms. Bertrand has offered these thoughts about the work:

"Among the pines and cypresses that surround, the remains of the war, shrapnel and soldiers; the inhabitants are on the ground. In the midst of all this annihilation, the white statue of Christ remains immaculate. He is looking up to the sky, and his curls are intact. Preserved from human violence, it carries a message of hope and resilience alongside the smoking ruins."

"Through a musical narrative in several sections, we can hear the bombings, with the fear, the march, the processions, a rain of hell around the Abbey of Monte Cassino, in Italy. And this unscathed statue of Christ, teaching us, consoling us, urging us to stop this violence. The quartet ends in a pure, consonant harmonic fabric, as if soothed by this message of hope."

— Élise Bertrand

Italian Serenade in G (1887)**Hugo Wolf**

(b. Slovenia, 1860; d. Vienna, 1903)

Most music lovers are only dimly aware of one of the great art-song composers in music history. Wolf's legacy is almost entirely associated with his extraordinary gift for setting poetry to music. He wrote hundreds of songs for voice and piano. But the biggest reason for his low profile was his chronic ill health from a syphilis infection contracted at 17, after a visit to a brothel. Somehow, during intermittent lapses from his illness, Wolf managed to maintain a brilliant career as a composer, before advanced syphilis rendered him hopelessly insane. He died in an asylum at just 43.

Sidebar: Although syphilis was not uncommon back in the pre-antibiotic era, it seems that a larger than average number of musicians met a syphilis-related end. In that respect, Wolf joins a long list of his composer brethren: Franz Schubert, Gaetano Donizetti, Mikhail Glinka, Robert Schumann, Alexander Scriabin, Bedřich Smetana, Frederick Delius and Scott Joplin were all known to have incurable syphilis when they died. That Johannes Brahms avoided the same fate is something of a miracle, given that his sexual activity was confined chiefly to brothels, but I digress...

Completed at age 26, the single movement Serenade ("Italian" was added in a later revision) has a light-hearted buoyancy that belies the grim reality of Wolf's painful life and death. It opens with a jaunty, carefree theme that bounces along in 6/8 time. Midway, the music changes pace when the cello takes charge with a somber-yet-passionate solo. The others don't seem to know what to make of this outburst, but after some fits and melodramatic starts, the jocular main theme takes charge again.

For a seven minute work, this single movement has the reputation of being fiendishly difficult to bring off (a "high maintenance" piece, according to a professional quartet player), due to its contrapuntal complexity and daring chromaticism. Wolf moves the material through the ensemble quite democratically, giving the impression of four tightly enmeshed gears, yet a good performance will sound "tossed off," with a cavalier shoulder shrug that belies its

difficulty. Wolf had originally planned this to be the opener of a three-movement suite, but his subsequent sketches were never completed, interrupted by his commitment to the asylum.

In addition to his health problems, Wolf struggled in other areas as well. He was notably expelled from three schools, including the great Vienna Conservatory. He fought frequently and bitterly with his father, who eventually kicked him out of the house. Wolf seemed temperamentally unable to hold a steady job and worked mostly as a freelance critic and music teacher in Vienna. He was an outspoken partisan in the bitter battle between supporters of Brahms and Wagner, becoming a fierce disciple of Wagner's "new" German school, who loathed Brahms. (And the feeling was mutual.)

The Italian Serenade has carved out a unique place in the string quartet repertoire where a shorter piece is required, as it makes both a perfect curtain-raiser and a "closer," as it does on this occasion.

Crisantemi (Chrysanthemums)*, SC 65 (1890)*Giacomo Puccini**

(b. Lucca, Italy, 1858; d. Brussels, Belgium 1924)

Giacomo Puccini spent a lifetime devoted almost exclusively to the operatic medium, much like his mentor and countryman Giuseppe Verdi. However, Puccini's career as an opera composer was not preordained, as he came from a family of church musicians that stretched back five generations in Lucca. As a young church organist, he once walked 18 miles to Pisa to see a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, a transformational experience that inspired him to become a composer of opera. In addition to ten operas, Puccini composed a small number of instrumental works that are less well known, including four for string quartet: three Minuets and the elegy *Crisantemi (Chrysanthemums)*.

Crisantemi was written in memory of his friend the Duke of Savoy, formerly King Amadeo I of Spain, who died in 1890. (In Italy, the chrysanthemum has always been the flower associated with solemn events and funerals.) Puccini said he wrote *Crisantemi* in a single night after he heard the news.



Giacomo Puccini by his piano (c. 1910)

One can almost conjure the image: a man too troubled to sleep, hunched over a table by candlelight, putting to paper his sorrow and grief. What resulted is a single movement that unfolds in less than six minutes. It is poignant and beautiful, an unbroken single thought comprised of two melancholy, elegiac themes. Puccini liked *Crisantemi* so well, he reused it in the last act of his opera *Manon Lescaut*.

String Quartet in E minor (1873)

Giuseppe Verdi

(b. Le Roncole, Italy 1813; d. Milan, 1901)

You would be forgiven if you didn't know that Giuseppe Verdi wrote a string quartet. By the time he wrote his only surviving chamber music work at age 60, he was universally regarded as the King of the Opera House, owing to the success of such masterpieces as *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Forza del Destino* and *Aida*. Like many Italian composers, Verdi preferred the operatic medium, not the instrumental, so his string quartet is the sole entrant in the latter category.

The motivation to write a quartet may have come chiefly from boredom, written during a delay in the premiere of *Aida* in Naples in the spring of 1873. The production was on hold due to the sudden illness of the leading soprano. Verdi was apparently never one to be idle and used the three weeks to work on the quartet. It was first performed two days after *Aida* opened in Verdi's hotel.

Verdi commented on the work, saying "I've written a Quartet in my leisure moments in Naples. I had it performed one evening in my house, without attaching the least importance to it and without inviting anyone in particular. Only the seven or eight persons who usually come to visit me were present. I don't know whether the Quartet is beautiful or ugly, but I do know that it's a Quartet!"

There are several things to unpack in that quote, not the least of which is that Verdi typically had 7-8 people just milling about. (It's great to be King!) Verdi also seems oddly cavalier regarding the effort required to compose a substantial string quartet nearly 25 minutes long, calling it a product of his "leisure moments" in Naples. However, it is no surprise that his single quartet shows the sure hand of one already familiar with the medium. His correspondence indicates that he was well acquainted with the quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven and he was said to keep those scores among the volumes kept near his bedside.

The first movement opens in a somber, minor key, with the 2nd violin introducing a rich, robust melody in the lowest register that hints of turmoil below the surface. A nervous scale motive, first heard in the cello, adds to the sense of urgency. Verdi uses several techniques that add intensity to the most dramatic bits, such as the strategic uses of silences, and the brilliant passagework played by all four players in unison.

The second movement is a charming intermezzo with a theme that Verdi indicates should be played "with great elegance". It is at turns playful, tender, and occasionally gruff, as Verdi introduces various episodes of new material between the three reappearances of the opening theme.

In the short-but-intense third movement, Verdi's operatic side emerges, in a fleet-footed romp in three quarter time. A tenor aria for cello forms the middle section that is shamelessly operatic, with its plucked accompaniment in the upper three voices. The movement ends with a repeat of the opening music.

The Scherzo-Fuga Finale is an impressive construct, a brilliant display of Verdi's mastery of string quartet counterpoint. This four minute, action-packed finale will engage you completely, and is a satisfying conclusion to the entire quartet. For a first attempt, Verdi could hardly have done better!

Program note © 2023 by Michael Adams

MODIGLIANI QUARTET

The Paris based Modigliani Quartet, founded in 2003, is celebrating their 20th anniversary in 2023. The quartet is a regular guest at the world's top venues and finest String Quartet and Chamber Music series. In 2017 it was a special honor for the quartet to be the first string quartet ever performing in the big hall of the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. In 2020, the quartet became artistic director of the string quartet festival "Vibre! Quatuors à Bordeaux" as well as the renowned "The Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition." In addition, the quartet are the founders and artistic directors of the Saint-Paul-de-Vence Festival. Beginning in the fall of 2023, they will teach the first string quartet class at École Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot.

The 2023/2024 season will revolve around one big theme: Italy. Composer Élise Bertrand, born in 2000, has been commissioned by the quartet to write a work on an Italian theme, which will be premiered in October 2023 at Concertgebouw Amsterdam. Other performances of the piece will follow, including at Rockefeller University in New York, Kölner Philharmonie, Heidelberger Frühling, Konzerthus Stockholm and, of course, in Italy. In addition, the Quartet will perform Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*: three concerts in Paris, Hohenems and Ludwigshafen are planned, two of them with Veronika and Clemens Hagen, one with Marie Chilleme and Antoine Lederlin.

Other highlights of the new season include a tour of Japan in September 2023, where Modigliani Quartet will perform the Chausson Concerto with violinist Sayaka Shoji and pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, as well as a major

project at the String Quartet Biennale in Paris in January 2024: various young string quartets, such as the Leonkoro Quartet, Barbican Quartet or Quatuor Arod, have accepted Modigliani Quartet's invitation to perform Grieg's String Quartet in an arrangement for chamber orchestra. The Quartet will also perform in Zurich, Los Angeles, Brussels, Cologne, Istanbul, and Monaco.

The quartet has been recording for the Mirare label since 2008 and has released 12 award winning CDs since. Their 9th album, "Portraits" was featured in the bestseller list 2019 (category chamber music) at the "Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik." In January 2022, Modigliani Quartet released its newest album: a recording of all 15 string quartets by Franz Schubert, which was received enthusiastically by the international press. In April 2022, *FonoForum* wrote: "In the steep crescendos, in the jagged major-minor conflicts or the wildly driving-out gestures glows an extraordinary intensity, the music sometimes reaches a point where something seems to tear apart."

Thanks to the generosity and support of private sponsors, Modigliani Quartet plays on four outstanding Italian instruments:

Amaury Coeytaux plays a 1715 violin by Stradivari. Loïc Rio plays a 1780 violin by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini. Laurent Marfaing plays a 1660 viola by Luigi Mariani. François Kieffer plays a 1706 cello by Matteo Goffriller.

Modigliani Quartet thanks SPEDIDAM for its help.

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