

ARIEL QUARTET



"A blazing, larger-than-life performance..."

— *Washington Post*



Ariel Quartet
2018-2019 Biography
Alexandra Kazovsky, violin; Gershon Gerchikov, violin;
Jan Grüning, viola; Amit-Even-Tov, cello

Distinguished by its virtuosity, probing musical insight, and impassioned, fiery performances, the Ariel Quartet has garnered critical praise worldwide over the span of nearly two decades. Formed in Israel as teenagers at the Jerusalem Academy Middle School of Music and Dance, the Ariel was named recipient of the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award, granted by Chamber Music America in recognition of artistic achievement and career support. The ensemble serves as the Faculty Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, where they direct the chamber-music program and present a concert series, in addition to maintaining a busy touring schedule in the United States and abroad.

Following appearances at leading festivals in the United States, Canada, and Italy, the Ariel Quartet begins the 2018-2019 season at the Newport Music Festival, followed by Music Mountain in Lakeville, CT, where they are joined by clarinetist Oskar Espina Ruiz for an all-Mozart program. Additional fall engagements include programs in New York and Washington, DC, and concerts with Calgary Pro Musica, where the Ariel Quartet gives the Canadian premiere of John Harbison's String Quartet No. 6. In November, the quartet embarks on a European tour, with dates in Basel, Paris, and Berlin. Highlights of 2019 are performances at the University of California, San Diego, and Mannes School of Music in New York. The Ariel Quartet is presented by Music Toronto and Chamber Music Society of Utica, where they are joined by pianist Orion Weiss for the Schumann Piano Quartet and the Brahms Piano Quintet. At the Linton Chamber Music Series in Cincinnati, the Ariel gives the U.S. premiere of the Quintet for Piano and Strings by Daniil Trifonov, with the composer as pianist.

During the 2017-18 season, the Ariel Quartet performed at the distinguished Shriver Hall Concert Series at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Schneider Concerts at the Mannes School, and the New England Conservatory, in addition to chamber-music series in Kansas City, Portland, OR, and Calgary, and on tour in Israel and Europe. The ensemble has dedicated much of its artistic energy and musical prowess to the powerful Beethoven quartets, and has performed the complete Beethoven cycle on five occasions throughout the United States and Europe. The Ariel Quartet is the first group to have played the complete Beethoven quartets in New York's alternate music venue SubCulture, which included a performance of the Grosse Fuge at midnight.

The Ariel Quartet regularly collaborates with today's eminent and rising young musicians and ensembles, including pianist Orion Weiss, violist Roger Tapping, cellist Paul Katz, and the American, Pacifica, and Jerusalem String Quartets. The Quartet has toured with cellist Alisa Weilerstein and performed frequently with pianists Jeremy Denk and Menahem Pressler. In addition, the Ariel served as Quartet-in-Residence for the Steans Music Institute at the Ravinia Festival, the Yellow Barn Music Festival, and the Perlman Music Program, as well as the Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Festival.

Formerly the resident ensemble of the Professional String Quartet Training Program at the New England Conservatory, from which the players obtained their undergraduate and graduate degrees, the Ariel was mentored extensively by acclaimed string quartet giants Walter Levin and Paul Katz. It has won numerous international prizes in addition to the Cleveland Quartet Award: Grand Prize at the 2006 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition and the Székely Prize for the performance of Bartók's String Quartet No. 4, and Third Prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition. About its performances at the Banff competition, the *American Record Guide* described the group as "a consummate ensemble gifted with utter musicality and remarkable interpretive power" and noted, in particular, their playing of Beethoven's monumental Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, as "the pinnacle of the competition."

Avie Records has recently issued the Ariel's debut recording which features the Brahms String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2, and Bartók's String Quartet No. 1. About the recording, *Gramophone* enthuses, "Here, on their debut recording, the precision and tonal polish they've honed over two decades is on proud display...elucidating the often meaty textures of Brahms's A-minor Quartet without sacrificing any of its warm luxuriance. And in Bartók's First, they negotiate the rhythmic intricacies of the finale with such deftness that I had the distinct (and delightful) sense of the composer glancing back across the 19th century to Haydn."

The Ariel Quartet has received significant support for its studies in the United States from the American-Israel Cultural Foundation, Dov and Rachel Gottesman, and the Legacy Heritage Fund. Most recently, they were awarded a grant from the A.N. and Pearl G. Barnett Family Foundation.

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AUGUST 2018 - PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS



Ariel Quartet
2017-2018 Individual Biographies
Alexandra “Sasha” Kazovsky (Violin); Gershon Gerchikov (Violin);
Jan Grüning (Viola); Amit Even-Tov (Cello)

Originally from Moscow, **Alexandra “Sasha” Kazovsky** began playing the violin at the age of six under the guidance of the late Victor Legoshin. Two years later, her family immigrated to Israel where she continued her studies with Ludmila Feldman at the Rubin Conservatory and the Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. As she continued her work in Israel, and then eventually in the United States, she has received ongoing scholarship support from both the Veron Foundation (since 1993) and the America-Israel Cultural Foundation (since 1997). Ms. Kazovsky is a graduate of the "Young Musicians Unit" (now the David Goldmann Programme for young artists) of the Jerusalem Music Centre.

In addition to her extensive performance experience with the Ariel Quartet, Ms. Kazovsky has performed with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra and the Yad Harif Chamber Orchestra, and was a prizewinner at the “Kol Ha Musica” (Israel Broadcasting Authority) Young Artists Competition. Having received her Master's degree from the New England Conservatory while studying with Miriam Fried, Ms. Kazovsky graduated from NEC's Professional String Quartet Studies program, during which she continued her violin studies with Donald Weilerstein. Ms. Kazovsky currently plays on a 17th century violin by Francesco Rugeri on loan from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation

Israeli cellist **Amit Even-Tov** started studying cello at the age of six with Sabina Frankenberg. Among her many honors and awards, Ms. Even-Tov won first prize at the Paul Ben-Haim Competition in 2001, third prize at the “Kol Ha Musica” (Israel Broadcasting Authority) Young Artists Competition in 2002, and first prize in the special Jerusalem Academy Competition in 2003, resulting in a solo appearance with the Academy Orchestra and conductor Ilan Schul. In addition, she has performed as a soloist with the Israel Stage Orchestra, and in a live broadcast on Israel Radio with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Even-Tov is a graduate of the "Young Musicians Unit" (now the David Goldmann Programme for young artists) of the Jerusalem Music Centre.

Ms. Even-Tov was the yearly recipient of scholarships from both the Veron Foundation (since 1993) and the American-Israel Cultural Foundation (since 1997). Previous teachers have included Uzi Weisel, Hillel Zori, the late Michael Homizer, and Zvi Plessner. Having previously studied with Paul Katz at the New England Conservatory in Boston, Ms. Even-Tov graduated from NEC's Professional String Quartet Studies program, during which she continued her cello studies with Laurence Lesser. Ms. Even-Tov plays on a 1743 Giovanni Battista Guadagnini Cello on loan from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

Israeli violinist **Gershon Gerchikov** began his violin studies at the age of five, under the guidance of Daniel Fradkin. He later worked with the late Moshe Gershovitz and from 1994 until moving to the United States has been studying with Ludmila Feldman at both the Rubin Conservatory and the Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. Since 1994, Mr. Gerchikov has received ongoing scholarship support from both the Veron Foundation and the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. While still in Israel, Mr. Gerchikov performed with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Yad Harif Chamber Orchestra and the St. Petersburg Radio Orchestra, and was a prizewinner in the Violinists-Composers Competition in St. Petersburg, Russia (2001). Mr. Gerchikov is a graduate of the "Young Musicians Unit" (now the David Goldmann Programme for young artists) of the Jerusalem Music Centre.

Mr. Gerchikov received his Bachelor's degree from the New England Conservatory while studying with Lucy Chapman as well as Miriam Fried, and graduated from NEC's Professional String Quartet Studies program, during which he continued his violin studies with Miriam Fried, and Donald Weilerstein. Mr. Gerchikov plays on a Petrus Guarneri violin on loan from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation.

Jan Grüning was born in Munich in 1984. Following private education from Gerd Michael Herbig, he studied at the Musikhochschule Lübeck in the class of Barbara Westphal from 2003 to 2008. In 2010 Jan enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music as a student of Kim Kashkashian's. Jan has participated and performed at various festivals and master classes both in Europe and North America - such as Sarasota/Florida,

Bowdoin/Maine, Orford/Canada, the Verbier Festival, the IMS Prussia Cove and the International Tibor Varga Academy in Sion. On such occasions he had the chance to gain experience in working with internationally distinguished artists like Yuri Bashmet, Robert Levin, Lars Anders Tomter and Jean Sulem. Private studies with Ferenc Rados have had a great impact on his musical development.

Jan was first prize winner of several youth competitions in the categories of violin solo, viola solo and string quartet and in 2005 he was awarded the Marie-Luise Imbusch foundation prize. A prestigious scholarship of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) enabled him to study in Boston. An avid chamber musician, Jan has collaborated with musicians such as Claudio Bohorquéz, Adrian Brendel, Isabel Charisius (Alban Berg Quartet), Markus Groh and Daishin Kashimoto (Concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic); concerts of his have been broadcasted on both TV (Phoenix TV) and Radio (NDR, Deutschlandradio Kultur).

JUNE 2017 - PLEASE DESTROY ALL PREVIOUSLY DATED MATERIALS



Ariel Quartet

Critical Acclaim



“A blazing, larger-than-life performance...”

Washington Post

“Their confident unanimity allows them to convey ferocity without ever seeming to break a sweat.”

Gramophone

“From the first notes, it was thrilling to witness their effortless communication, whether in formidable technical passages or in some of the most sublime music that Beethoven ever wrote. It was all played with a blend of youthful passion and absolute integrity for the music.”

Cincinnati Enquirer

“The Ariel Quartet has the tools to become one of our finest quartets.”

American Record Guide

“They bring to the music starkly individual tone colors, terrific unisons all the more striking because of their individuality of voices, an original approach to tempi, a strategic use of silences and skillfully elaborated cadences.”

Boston Musical Intelligencer

“This is a high-energy quartet... All the members of the quartet gave their best, their flat-out style of performing evidently a joy for them and for the audience: it was impossible to not be swept along by the youthful verve of it all.”

Calgary Herald

ARIEL QUARTET



October 1, 2018

Ariel Quartet took audience along on a thrill ride

By Kenneth Delong

The Calgary Pro Musica season opened last weekend with a pair of concerts by the Ariel Quartet, a group that is also the resident faculty quartet at the large and prestigious Cincinnati College-Conservatory in Ohio.

Given their youthful appearance and manner, it is hard to imagine these are 20-year veterans of the concert circuit. Following numerous competition successes, including The Banff International String Quartet Competition, the group has gone on to establish itself as a significant actor in the world of touring string quartets — a significant accomplishment in a highly competitive business.

“A blazing, larger-than-life performance” is how The Washington Post described one of their concerts, and to judge from this concert the description of the quartet’s performing persona is apt.

This is a high-energy quartet, even in the wider context of North American professional quartets. And in music that is written in an in-your-face fashion, this mode of delivery works well. This made the Mendelssohn Quartet in D major, Op. 44, No. 1, that concluded the concert the most compelling work on the program, at least as performance.

The breathless speed of the opening, with its frantic scrubbing from the lower strings, gave the performance a wonderful sense of being on a thrill ride, where one exciting thing after another happens. All the members of the quartet gave their best, their flat-out style of performing evidently a joy for them and for the audience: it was impossible to not be swept along by the youthful verve of it all.

The concert also contained the Canadian premiere of the sixth (and presumably last) quartet by the distinguished American composer John Harbison, now roughly 80 years old. Harbison is rooted in “tradition,” at least as it concerns his string quartets, the mantle of the six Bartok quartets clearly on his mind. This final quartet, rather like the final quartet of Bartok, is really a meditation on the world of the string quartet, concerned with its distinctive textures, with complex thematic writing, and an internality in its emotional world.

For those drawn to extended meditations, this quartet has much to offer, the melodies and harmonies not experimental but deeply considered within the conventional language of modern music. In the hands of a



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composer with genuine ideas and a fine compositional technique, this can still produce worthy scores — as was the case with the Bartok in its time. For those wishing music of greater contrasts, the music tended to stay with emotions of darkness and stress.

I would need more hearings to be able to plumb the richness of this music, but on one hearing I know I will be keeping my eye out for the recording, whenever it should appear. Harbison is not a superficial “effects” composer, but rather a composer who challenges the listener with many nuances in texture and, especially, the musical ideas themselves. I was glad to have had a chance to hear this work, especially in the committed, searching performance given by the Ariel Quartet.

Mozart’s final quartet was the first item on the program, a rather difficult work to play successfully, with its mixture of surface charm and textural complexity. As before, there was much to enjoy here, and the group certainly can play the piece. But there is a special alchemy that happens, or doesn’t happen, in performances of Mozart. For me, this was a perfectly fine, professional account of the piece, but perhaps not more. The music itself is more stable, more at peace with itself than was the performance, once again marked with overt energy and strength. The Olympian Mozart was buried beneath the flurry of notes and only appeared now and then.

ARIEL QUARTET



November 4, 2018

BEETHOVEN INTIMATE LETTERS at Italian Academy At Columbia University

By Joanna Barouch



Your standard classical music concert usually proceeds as follows: 1) the ensemble enters 2) if there's a conductor, he or she enters with the concert master or soloist and 3) the concert begins and ends without anyone having spoken a word. The music is supposed to speak for itself. If you don't understand what just happened, you either read your program notes, ask someone, or just forget about the whole thing.

ASPECT Foundation for Music and Arts has other ideas about concert presentation. Using a combination of well-chosen visuals, fascinating descriptions of composers' lives and musical motivations, together with stunningly played music, the standard

concert format is nowhere in evidence. The audience is engaged. It learns. It's a brilliant concept.

"Beethoven: Intimate Letters", was presented in the jewel box of an auditorium at the Italian Academy of Columbia University on November 1, 2018. The Ariel String Quartet, consisting of violinist Alexandra Kazovsky, violinist Gershon Gerchikov, violist Jan Grüning, and cellist Amit Even-Tov, paired one of Beethoven's first string quartets, Op.18 No.1 in F major with one of his last, Op.131 in C# minor. The contrasts between the two quartets were, to put it mildly, striking. Ms.Kazovsky and Mr.Gerchikov first presented sections of letters from Beethoven's contemporaries. These intriguing accounts were not exactly flattering, describing a short-tempered, ill-mannered young man whose dislike for formality seemed to keep him apart from the society for which he paradoxically seemed to yearn. An early love interest did not go the way he wanted because of his anger issues. Perhaps as a way to compensate, at the age of thirty he threw himself into the writing of his first six string quartets, commissioned by the same nobleman



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who commissioned chamber music from Haydn.

The Ariel Quartet then gave a cheery rendition of the first movement (*Allegro con brio*). Sitting in the position of first violin, Mr. Gerchikov demonstrated his outstanding technique with fine articulation of complicated turning figures and scale-like passages. The second movement, (*adagio affetuoso ed appassionato*) was said to have been influenced by the final scene of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. A slide of a painting depicting this scene had been displayed during the pre-performance discussion. Performed with great emotion by all four players, the focus was on the musical anguish of the scene. Here was a prime example of what was coming in the so-called Romantic period; music which wore its heart on its sleeve.

The op.131 quartet was one of the last of the sixteen Beethoven ultimately wrote. There were many years and experiences between op.18 and this piece. Whereas the first quartets were written in proper Classical style (eg.fast-slow-fast), op.131 was a piece in which Beethoven broke the mold. Since he had already done so to the symphonic form, Beethoven had no problem taking a sledgehammer to the traditional and expected pattern and created a string quartet of seven stylistically different "movements", played without pause, and dabbled in new melodic and rhythmic sounds.

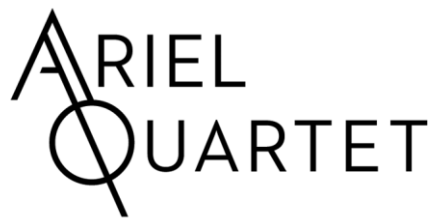
Ms.Kazovsky switched places with Mr. Gerchikov for this quartet. Before the performance (and before the intermission so they could just sail into playing the lengthy piece), the two

detailed the tragic turn Beethoven's life was starting to take by discussing the 1802 letter written to his brother, now known as the "Heiligenstadt Testament." While his hearing and his health slowly declined and he seemed to be sinking into dementia, his creative output was still as strong as ever. He devoted the last years of his life to the string quartet genre, and op.131 was a masterpiece of invention. It was finally ready during the summer of 1826, near the end of his life.

The Ariel took the audience on a wild roller-coaster ride of emotions during this piece, particularly in the final movement. Played with extreme passion and fantastically coordinated mood swings, the intensity of the playing left listeners breathless at the end.

The quartet has been playing together for almost twenty years, since they all were in their early teens, and it shows in the tightness of ensemble, their non-verbal communication, and their ability to musically breathe together. Entrances seemed to come out of thin air and much thought. Each instrument had a moment to sing out. Each player was an equal partner. It was exciting and wonderful to hear.

This was an evening that appealed to the listener's head as well as the heart. The superb execution of the presentation made the concert more than just a special musical experience. The next concert/illustrated talks presented by the ASPECT Foundation will showcase the music of Mozart, Schumann, and Classical Vienna. They will be performed by different groups in December and January at the Bohemian Hall.



The Millbrook Independent

VOICE OF THE MILLBROOK REGION

September 23, 2018

ALL-MOZART AWESOME AT MUSIC MOUNTAIN

By Kevin T. McEneaney

As cooling weather has rolled in autumn clouds, Music Mountain has concluded its season of Chamber Music concerts with a program of buoyant, late Mozart (1757-1791) masterpieces at Gordon Hall that left the full-house audience with the savory taste of anticipating next summer's program—what a delightful way to conclude the season and induce concert attendees to commit to next summer's series!

The Ariel Quartet, which in an emergency late last year was recently called up to substitute for the Borromeo Quartet, opened with *String Quartet in B-flat major*, K. 589 (1790). This was one of the quartets Mozart composed for Prussian King Frederick II who was an able cello player (Mozart played viola as well as keyboard). Yet Maynard Solomon's massive 1995 biography casts austere doubt on this royal commission story as being, most likely, a fanciful invention of Mozart, since he says in a letter that he was forced to give the quartets away in June "for a song" to have cash in hand while there is no dedication attached to the publication, nor was there ever any attempt to complete the cycle of six, nor the simple viola exercises Mozart had mentioned a commission for.

At the opening Allegro, all four instruments opened at full tilt, then

Amit Even-Tov's cello lead with authority and dominated the second slow Larghetto with resonant pathos. Alexandra Kazovsky on first violin then lead the lengthy Menuetto with impressive power and startling eloquence. In the concluding Allegro, there was more of a radiant role for Jan Grüning on viola and Gershorn Gerchikov on second violin. The finale was delivered with such exquisite unity and passion that one was awed at Mozart's ability to conjure optimism that summer when both he and his pregnant wife Constanza were in poor health.

The companion *String Quartet in F-major*, K. 590, Mozart's last quartet, was an even more marvelous treat. From Haydn, Mozart learned the humor of teasing pauses in the flow of chamber music; this trick of Haydn's genial humor becomes both more dramatic and momentarily shocking in the jesting hand of Mozart who demands more zestful panache on the part of players to resume the flow, an aspect of the music that the Ariel Quartet was a suspenseful, polished master of. The concluding Allegro movement had all players surging fiercely in unity and reaching sonic textures that I have never heard in a quartet before. Kazovsky played with heightened virtuosity while Grüning



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produced a robust roundness that catapulted the trajectory into empyrean air currents anchored to earth by the strings of Even-Tov's cello. These final two quartets were first performed at Mozart's house.

Clarinet Quintet in A-major, K. 581 (1789) broke new ground for the clarinet as Music Mountain director Oskar Espina-Ruiz, who joined the quartet with his instrument, explained as Mozart not only set new standards but explored lower notes with the bass clarinet. The composition was dedicated to Anton Stadler whom Mozart admired. Two years earlier in a letter wherein Mozart was making up silly names for his touring entourage, Mozart nicknamed Stadler as Nàtschibinitschibi. (Mozart called himself Punkitititi.)

This quintet highlights the clarinet, most often with the lead violin, played with finesse by Gerchikov, and the clarinet responding with repetition, amplification, or ornamentation. On the centenary of Mozart's death, Brahms produced his own clarinet quintet as a homage to Mozart's quintet, beginning his new quintet with the same three notes. Oskar played with mellow fluidity and charming intimacy as the Ariel ensemble surrounded him with musical queries, answers, and sprightly speculation.

The only question the standing audience had was what marvels await Music Mountain next year as they applauded the players, demanding three long bows, for this memorable season closer.

ARIEL QUARTET



July 26, 2018

Friendship (and even the occasional fight) gird Ariel Quartet's passionate playing

By Peter Hum

When violist Jan Grüning auditioned to join the Ariel Quartet in 2011, socializing came before setting bows on strings.

"I came the night before and we started by having dinner and hanging out and playing board games and starting to get to know each other," Grüning says. "The next morning we started reading music.

"So it started from a social component. It kind of took the pressure off," he says.

"You see that there's stuff to talk about, you get along. And then ... well, you hope and pray that it musically fits, too." Seven years later, there's no question that Grüning fits in, both socially and musically. He went on to marry Ariel's cellist Amit Even-Tov, and the couple's daughter was born this year. The quartet, which plays in Ottawa on Monday, receives rave reviews that frequently cite its intensity — a 2014 New York Times critic referred to the ensemble's "gift for filling the pristine structures of classicism with fire."

By the time Grüning came on board, replacing the founding violist who was moving to Japan, the Ariel Quartet had already been together for more than a decade, despite the youthfulness of its members.

The quartet's violinists Alexandra Kazovsky and Gershon Gerchikov and cellist Amit Even-Tov first met in the late 1990s while attending the Academy of Music and Dance in Jerusalem. They were scarcely teenagers.

"Their teacher ... he gave them pretty amazing pieces," says Grüning. "The repertoire is so vast and so captivating that he knew very well how to give them pieces that were just out of their reach and have them grow with them. They got hooked, and pretty soon, they say they were skipping school to rehearse.

"The genesis of this quartet is pretty unique," Grüning says. "They spent all of this time together, every minute of every day except when they were asleep, basically from the age of 12 or 13 on ... These are the most formative years, because our identity, it's so influenced by who we spend time with and how that time is spent. Spending so much time together, that forms a very special kind of core, and a very special relationship that is so strong.

"This deep, deep friendship, which is basically really like family, it's deeply ingrained in our music. It's totally inseparable, it melds together at the



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core, and I think that goes into our sound, into our interpretation.”

That said, Grüning candidly adds that the quartet members, whom he describes as four “very strong and distinct personalities,” aren’t above the occasional heated argument.

“I can’t remember the last time we had a fight where we were really, really screaming at each other, but it’s not like it didn’t happen,” he says. “I think it happens in every good quartet. It happens in every family.

“Fights are mostly born from very, very strong emotional convictions and involvement in a musical issue,” Grüning says. “It’s gotten less, as age and wisdom kick in. But I think actually that’s a good thing, that people need to go through that ... Out of the conflict is born a solution which is not his or hers. It’s a solution which truly is a result of overcoming an issue and coming to a larger solution.”

Soon after Grüning joined the quartet, the group moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, to become the quartet-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati’s College-Conservatory of Music, a position that they continue to hold.

In addition to teaching and giving concerts, the quartet is spearheading a community outreach program that sees students perform and speak at seniors homes, hospitals and even prisons.

“It makes what they do relevant,” Grüning says. “I remember very well just standing in my own practice room and practicing scales all day long. Always there was this nagging question, ‘Why am I doing this?’”

The outreach program, he continues, “gives you a much bigger understanding of the difference that music can make in people’s lives.”

The quartet maintains a busy touring schedule, especially when school is out. Last spring, the group gave concerts in Victoria, B.C., Israel, Germany, and in Lunenburg, N.S. In August, the group performs in New York and then Italy.

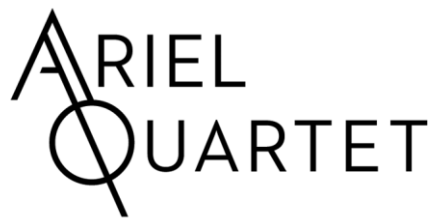
In Ottawa, the quartet is to play three pieces — Schumann’s String Quartet in F major, Op.41, No. 2, Ravel’s String Quartet in F major and Mendelssohn’s Octet for strings in E flat major, Op. 20.

The Schumann piece, Grüning says, is infrequently heard and is “a lot more difficult to play and to pull off than most of the other repertoire.” But, he says, it’s worth the effort. “It’s such poetic music and it’s so intimate and so directly connecting with the audience that we love playing it,” he says.

In contrast, the Ravel quartet is one of the staples of the repertoire, Grüning says. “It’s an audience-pleaser and it’s a player-pleaser, I think. It’s not always the case that the two overlap.”

For the Mendelssohn piece, Grüning’s group will join with the Rolston String Quartet, the young and prize-winning Canadian ensemble. “I know of them and I’m excited to play with them. It will be fun,” Grüning says.

Although string players have played and read through the Octet “millions of times,” the piece has not become overplayed, Grüning says. “When you come together, it’s always so much fun. It’s like the first time you read it. It’s impressive. And that’s just purely because the piece is so damn good.”



May 17, 2018

The Montana Wilderness Is the Perfect Setting for a Brahms Quartet

By James Bennett, II



Click to watch or visit <https://bit.ly/2OlF1WW>

Earlier this spring, the Ariel String Quartet released an album of Brahms and Bartók. Concerning the former, the ensemble shot a video for the first movement of the String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2. As composer Misha Donat writes in the liner notes for a different Hyperion recording of the work, the first notes of Brahms's theme for the piece are F-A-E, which is an allusion to friend and collaborator Joseph Joachim's personal motto, translated into English as "free, but lonely." For this music video, the Ariel couldn't have chosen a more fitting location, playing the emotionally searching first movement of the quartet atop The Domo at Montana's Tippet Rise Arts Center — musical freedom in the vast wilderness of Big Sky Country.



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ARIEL QUARTET



May/June 2018

BRAHMS: *Quartet 2*;
BARTOK: *Quartet 1*
Ariel Quartet
Avie 2384—66 minutes

The Ariel Quartet is a youthful group, but they boast a 20-year history since they came together in middle school in Israel; a bit later they all passed through New England Conservatory. They are now quartet-in-residence at the Cincinnati Conservatory. This is their first recording and the first in a series that will pair Brahms and Bartok.

This may be a debut recording, but the Ariel sounds like a seasoned, mature group. In the Brahms they take opportunities to pull back and allow a variety of moods to take over. (Younger quartets will often push in order to make a splashier impression.) The Bartok is a rather romantic piece, lacking the spice of later Bartok. The Ariel again finds possibilities for warmth in the music, while not sparing energy and drive when needed in the final movement.

It may be a little early for predictions, but the Ariel has the tools to become one of our finest quartets. An impressive debut.

ALTHOUSE



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ARIEL QUARTET

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

September 25, 2017

Ariel Gardners for Borromeo

By Leon Golub



Prior to the start of Sunday's ISG concert, Sarah Whitling announced that the Borromeo would not be able to perform as scheduled and that we would be hearing instead the Ariel String Quartet, graduates of NEC and currently Quartet-in-Residence at University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. With the Borromeo's genial first Nick Kitchen present in the audience, we quickly exchanged disappointment for expectation. Ariel is an ensemble worth watching, as they bring unique

perspectives to their performances, thoughtfully giving familiar works a new cast. They bring to the music starkly individual tone colors, terrific unisons all the more striking because of their individuality of voices, an original approach to tempi, a strategic use of silences and skillfully elaborated cadences

Beethoven's Op. 18, No. 2 string quartet, probably the third in order of composition, is the shortest of the six Op. 18 works; the influence of Haydn's



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Op. 33 quartets is clearly in evidence, the work being filled with Haydnesque humor and incongruities that Beethoven made his own. Ariel took the opening allegro at a moderate tempo, with careful coordination and tight control. Complex textures soon emerged, conveying a sort of suppressed sadness under the light-hearted surface. Sharp accents in the development gave it a threatening, mysterious feel. Alexandra Kazovsky's first violin infused the recapitulation with jovial wit. The leisurely adagio cantabile felt elegiac, the individual voices of the ensemble singing together as a single enhanced voice. The contrasting brisk and scurrying trio section evoked rustic peasant squabbling, at the antipodes of elegy, so that the adagio as a whole ranged from eternity to the here and now and back to eternity. In the scherzo, as throughout the entire piece, Amit Even-Tov's cello provided unobtrusive but firm grounding as we were led on a romp through a dazzling soundscape. The "unbuttoned" finale came as a kaleidoscope of shifting moods, from boisterous to reflective, from jocose to angry, from earthy to wistful. The development brought Jan Grüning's furious sandpapery viola sound to the fore, somehow enhancing the tone colors of the other three voices.

Schumann composed his three Op. 41 string quartets in a manic burst of activity in June and July of 1842, dedicating the set to Mendelssohn. The first half of the year had seen unusual marital strife, the apparent cause being Clara's successes on a concert tour, overshadowing the composer's career. Unable to handle the role of second fiddle, he returned to Leipzig while she continued on to Copenhagen. Back home, he fell into a long depression, unable to work during her absence and only slowly returning to composition after her return, producing the trio of string quartets, Op. 41, followed by the piano quintet, Op. 44.

Taking over as first violin in the Op. 41, No. 3, Gershon Gerchikov led the

andante espressivo first movement with a sweet and tender exposition, the whole effectively sung as if an aria, tempered by manliness in Even-Tov's firm cello voice. The movement overflowed with Romanticism, pulsing and throbbing background, cantabile foreground. The recapitulation was marked by pleading. In the second movement Assai Agitato, Ariel conveyed how a deeply dejected soul struggles with phases and stages of abandonment, in turn rebelling, then attempting to brace itself against attacks of loneliness, then sinking into sorrow with a pierced heart before becoming completely unraveled. At this stage of fragmentation, the ensemble achieved marvelously modern dissonances. Only at the very end did hope and calm return, as a light at the end of a frightening tunnel.

Ariel gave the ensuing adagio molto movement the character of a hymn of supplication, achieved by having the viola take a dominant role, with its tone color evoking a narrowly escaped tragedy. Inner turmoil and fragmentation lurked again, full of magnificent dissonance. Implicitly reminding us that the state of separation and anguish for Schumann, thrown back on his own resources, the movement also found a place of emotional outpouring. The beating heart motif pulsating in Even-Tov's cello provided the key to Ariel's interpretation.

Rather than delivering the finale as sprightly and upbeat, Ariel found extraordinary complexity and darkness. They took the rondo theme at a rapid, unmelodious tempo, in abrasive defiance. In the episodes, strong dynamic shifts emphasized manic, carnivalesque and even grotesque features, tinged with terror. At the end, even the rondo theme was overwrought with anxiety, nearly atonal. Finally, the driving coda was filled with an almost Stravinsky-like rhythmic dissonance.

The audience responded positively to an original, thrilling, and really quite persuasive reading.



August 18, 2015

Acclaimed Ariel Quartet to stay at CCM till 2022

By Janelle Gelfand

The University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music has announced that the Ariel Quartet will continue to serve as the college's string quartet-in-residence for another seven years.

Ensemble-in-residence since 2012, the Ariel will now remain at CCM through the 2021-22 academic year and concert season.

The Ariel Quartet – Alexandra Kazovsky, violin; Amit Even-Tov, cello; Gershon Gerchikov, violin; and Jan Grüning, viola – formed in Israel in 1998. The group was awarded the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award in 2014, and as part of the agreement, they will continue to perform four concerts per year in CCM's Corbett Auditorium.

The quartet directs CCM's chamber music program as part of the residency. Besides coaching 20 to 25 string quartets, the quartet members will expand their teaching roles at CCM with one-on-one coaching.

CCM's new agreement also provides a fund for guest artists who will perform with the Ariels and provide

masterclasses for students, along with funding to support an annual student string quartet competition.

CCM Dean Peter Landgren praised the donors who have made the residency possible, saying that the young quartet "revives a proud tradition initiated by the LaSalle Quartet." The LaSalle, string quartet-in-residence from 1953-1988, was world renowned.

With international performances, awards and two recent record-setting Beethoven cycles – performed before the members of the quartet turned 30 – the Ariel has already begun establishing its own reputation.

The group will open its new season at 8 p.m. Sept. 1 in Corbett Auditorium with quartets by Mozart and Tchaikovsky, as well as Alban Berg's Lyric Suite. Highlights of their series will include a collaboration with CCM artist-in-residence Awadagin Pratt in Dvorák's Piano Quintet No. 2, Op. 81 on Nov. 10. The other concerts will take place Jan. 26 and March 1.



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January 24, 2014

Ariel Quartet launches Beethoven cycle brilliantly

By Janelle Gelfand

The Ariel Quartet has begun a feat that few string quartets have ever attempted. On Thursday, the Ariel – quartet-in-residence at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music – performed the first installment in a complete survey of all 17 of Beethoven’s String Quartets.

The Ariel will be the first ensemble to perform “The Cycle” in Cincinnati. And they are doing it all in eight weeks, before its members turn 30.

Last fall, the award-winning group, which formed in Israel before coming to the United States, won the distinguished Cleveland Quartet Award, which will include a performance in Carnegie Hall.

As they took their chairs on Thursday, you could feel the electricity in the hall. For any musician, such a challenge is like climbing Mount Everest. Beethoven’s quartets, like his symphonies, revolutionized Western classical music and remain one of its greatest achievements. But there were no butterflies as these players – violinists Alexandra Kazovsky and Gershon Gerchikov, violist Jan Grüning and cellist Amit Even-Tov – began their ascent before a large audience in CCM’s Corbett Auditorium.

Beethoven’s quartets parallel his other musical monuments, the symphonies and piano sonatas, written during early, middle and late periods of his life. Rather than tackle them in chronological order, the Ariel is presenting one quartet from each period in their programs.

For the first, they played Quartet in F Major, Op. 18 No. 1; Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, “Serioso”; and Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127. From the first notes, it was thrilling to witness their effortless communication, whether in formidable technical passages or in some of the most sublime music that Beethoven ever wrote. It was all played with a blend of youthful passion and absolute integrity for the music.

Beethoven’s F Major Quartet, Op. 18 No. 1, begins a survey of six in that group that are in homage to Haydn and Mozart. With Gerchikov sitting in the first violin chair, the quartet caught its combination of fire and humor, and played with bracing vigor. One could marvel at their pinpoint attack and cutoffs, performed for maximum dramatic effect, sometimes with flinging bows. The slow movement was phrased with profound beauty, and the players breathed



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together as one. They smiled through the light, humorous scherzo, and soared through the finale with chameleon-like changes in color and mood.

Beethoven wrote his Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, which he subtitled "Serioso," at a desperate time of poor health, hearing loss and unlucky love. Here, the musicians communicated the inner turmoil of this piece with remarkable timbre and ferocity of attack. Vivid emotion projected to the listener. The audience didn't breathe through breathtaking pianissimos and moments of stunning blend. The finale's coda was lightning quick, and the effect was electrifying.

After Intermission, with Kazovsky in the first violin chair this time,

Beethoven's Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127, summoned a world of more lyrical beauty, but no less intensity. The heart of this work is its slow movement. Here, the profoundly beautiful melodies unfolded with gentle warmth, and the musicians' communicated with depth of feeling. The quartet ended on a genial note. Kazovsky's phrasing was a thing of beauty, and the players seemed to be having fun.

Despite the subzero temperatures, a large crowd turned out, recalling those that flocked to hear the legendary LaSalle Quartet during its residency at CCM, 1953-88. It is clear that barely two years into its residency, the Ariel is continuing that legacy and beginning its own.







