

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

“Exemplary technique and intonational purity.”

– *The Strad*





Quartetto di Cremona
2025-2026 Biography
Cristiano Gualco, violin; Paolo Andreoli, violin
Simone Gramaglia, viola; Giovanni Scaglione, cello

Quartetto di Cremona, founded in 2000 and winner of the 2019 Franco Buitoni Award, are among the world's preeminent string quartets, noted for their lustrous sound, refined musicianship and stylistic versatility. According to *The Strad*, the Quartetto's Lincoln Center debut in 2022 "was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements."

The 2025-2026 season for Quartetto di Cremona brings a North American tour with clarinetist David Shifrin, including performances in San Diego, Phoenix, and Northampton, and they also appear in concert at the University of Florida. In Europe, they visit Milan and Rome, Italy, Vaduz, Lichtenstein, and Salonica, Greece, as well as Beirut, Lebanon. As the Quartetto make their way around the world, they perform in exquisite tuxedos designed by the renowned Italian designer Brunello Cucinelli. The Quartetto di Cremona wish to express their deepest gratitude to the Cucinelli family for their generous support and for creating this marvelous stage attire.

Quartetto di Cremona were established in 2000 at the Accademia Walter Stauffer in Cremona, Italy, and have toured extensively in Europe, the United States, South America and Asia; appeared at leading festivals; and performed regularly on radio and television broadcasts, including RAI, BBC, ORF, Westdeutscher Rundfunk and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Quartetto di Cremona's extensive repertoire encompasses key masterworks from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms; essential late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature; and contemporary works by Golijov, Lachenmann, Fabio Vacchi, Silvia Colasanti, Nimrod Borenstein, Kalevi Aho and Maxwell Davies. They are also known for their performances of work by Italian composers, including Verdi, Respighi and Boccherini.

In the 2024-2025 season, Quartetto di Cremona marked their 25th season with an ambitious new recording of Bach's *Art of the Fugue* (Orchid Classic, November 1, 2024), and a world tour that took them to Music Toronto, the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, FL, Friends of Chamber Music Denver, Aspect Chamber Music Series in New York and Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania. In Europe, they appeared in Prague, Pully (Switzerland), Madrid and

Rome. In January 2025, they toured Taiwan and China and in December 2025, return to Asia with stops in Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan, to perform and to teach.

To celebrate their 25th season, the Quartet took on the challenge of recording Bach's seminal *Art of the Fugue*, adding instruments to bring Bach's original score to life. Bach's manuscript was not written for string quartet, and it includes several passages that go beyond the ranges of violin and viola, so the Quartetto came up with an audacious solution: second violinist Paolo Andreoli learned the viola in order to play these passages and violist Simone Gramaglia had a tenor viola made to accommodate the score.

Their 2020 recording *Italian Postcards* (Avie Records), features music inspired by Italy and written by non-Italian composers, including the world premiere recording of *Cieli d'Italia* by Nimrod Borenstein. Previous recordings include an all-Schubert disc with cellist Eckart Runge (Audite, 2019) and a box set of the complete Beethoven quartet cycle (Audite, 2018), including a quintet with Lawrence Dutton, violist of the Emerson String Quartet; several of the seven individual discs in this set received widespread and immediate recognition upon their release, including a five-star rating in *BBC Music Magazine*, International Classical Music Awards, the Supersonic Award from the German magazine *Pizzicato* and the Echo Klassik 2017 prize.

Quartetto di Cremona lead a renowned string program, currently in its thirteenth year, for professional and advanced string quartets at the Accademia Walter Stauffer, now part of the Stauffer String Center, opened in Cremona in 2021. They also regularly participate in masterclasses while on tour throughout Europe and the United States. Awarded the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship in 2005, Quartetto di Cremona subsequently received the prestigious Franco Buitoni Award in 2019 in recognition of their contribution to promoting and encouraging chamber music in Italy and throughout the world. The quartet are supported by the Kulturfond Peter Eckes which provides the musicians with three superb instruments: violin Paolo Antonio Testore, viola Gioachino Torazzi and cello Dom Nicola Amati. Cristiano Gualco plays his own violin by Nicola Amati (Cremona, 1640). In 2015, the musicians were awarded honorary citizenship by the city of Cremona, and in 2016, were awarded a loan of the famous Paganini Quartet of Stradivarius instruments from the Nippon Music Foundation.

“The Cremona's performance was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements.”

– *The Strad*

“It’s a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble has the players sounding absolutely of one voice... Nothing less than life-affirming.”

– *Gramophone*

“The Cremona Quartet completes its Beethoven series with a fine coupling, combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely ‘historically informed’.”

– *The Strad*

“Quartetto di Cremona’s magnificent survey of Beethoven’s Complete String Quartets moves securely and unquestionably into mastery... such warm playing; such perfection on a silver disc; what a glory this is.”

– *The Herald*

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Quartetto di Cremona

Critical Acclaim



“The Quartetto di Cremona exude phenomenal energy and momentum.”

BBC Music Magazine

“It’s a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble has the players sounding absolutely of one voice... Nothing less than life-affirming.”

Gramophone

“Internationally renowned for their extremely mature and lyrical sound.”

The Strad

“From him and the four gentlemen of Cremona, it was a first-rate evening, bordering on the transcendent.”

New Criterion

“The quartet are magnificent, with playing of such spirit, precision and understanding...it is the individual voices of these players that are so beautiful as well as they way they interact so naturally.”

The Classical Reviewer

“My goodness, here is something special. The group sound reminds me in some ways of that of the great Quartetto Italiano.”

The Herald Scotland

“The Cremona Quartet completes its Beethoven series with a fine coupling, combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely ‘historically informed’.”

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“The Quartetto di Cremona’s magnificent survey of Beethoven’s complete String Quartets moves securely and unquestionably into mastery... such warm playing; such perfection on a silver disc; what a glory this is.”

The Herald

“This is the most exciting new disc of string quartet playing that I have come across for a long time... Altogether a revelation.”

Michael Tanner, BBC Music Magazine

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

the Strad

October 31, 2024

50 per cent viola: Quartetto di Cremona shuffles instrumentation for Bach's 'The Art of Fugue'

The ensemble's newest release sees second violinist Paolo Andreoli taking up the viola and violist Simone Gramaglia playing a tenor viola, in order to capture the essence of Bach's contrapuntal writing



How many string quartet pieces require half the ensemble playing unfamiliar instruments - or in extreme cases, learning a new instrument completely?

The Quartetto di Cremona's new release *The Art of Fugue* sees the ensemble using an innovative instrumentation to create a new interpretation of the work that has been several years in the making, coinciding with the group's 25th anniversary.

Bach did not write *The Art of Fugue* with the string quartet instrumentation in mind. Several movements of the work see the inner lines going beyond the ranges of the second violin and viola.

To solve this issue, the group substituted in places a viola for the second violin, and a tenor viola in place of a standard instrument. Elsewhere, the violist takes up the recorder, with no less than eight instruments on stage lending a pioneering chorus-like nature to the

work while preserving the original writing.

Of his foray into playing the viola, second violinist Paolo Andreoli said it was both an exciting educational experience and a challenge for him. He borrowed a viola named 'Delfino' from a luthier friend Salvatore Scalia for the recording and gradually felt more comfortable playing the viola once he overcame the initial difficulties.

Andreoli highlights two aspects of studying and preparing *The Art of Fugue*: 'The first concerns reducing the adaptation time necessary to switch from a small and light instrument like the violin to the much larger and heavier viola. The exercise was especially useful for concerts where, unlike recordings, time is very tight, and there is no way to warm up on the instrument before performing.'

'The second aspect concerns understanding how to approach individual practice and adapt to the balance with the other instruments in the quartet, which in *The Art of Fugue* are very delicate and often fragile depending on the counterpoint.'

While Andreoli adopted the viola for the recording, violist Simone Gramaglia used a tenor viola that was made for him in 2012 by Pietro Gargini in Pistoia. He describes the instrument as 'very big,'



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measuring 45.7cm long, based on a model by Gasparo da Salò.

The tenor viola has four strings, tuned to D, G, C, F. Using a baroque bow on the instrument, Gramaglia says he initially tried to play the viola using gut strings, 'but the result wasn't exactly the best on this instrument, so I just kept the gut D and switched on steel for G,C and F.'

Gramaglia spent plenty of time exploring the sound, articulation and resonance of the tenor viola, describing the sound capabilities of the instrument as 'almost limitless.'

'It is a new world for me and I really wanted to understand it more and getting inside it.' He credits intense talks with conductor and recorder player of Il Giardino Armonico, Giovanni Antonini, as well as cembalist Robert Hill, as a huge help to understand how to approach and play *The Art of Fugue*.

'The colour the tenor viola brings to the quartet is unique and makes the ensemble sound totally different. Personally, I can't wait to play it again.'

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

THE VIOLIN CHANNEL

World's Leading Classical Music Platform

November 4, 2024



Quartetto di Cremona's New Album, "The Art of Fugue"

The **Quartetto di Cremona** was formed in 2000 and will celebrate its 25th anniversary during the 2024/25 season with several concerts in Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands, North America, Taiwan, Japan, and China. The quartet comprises violinists **Cristiano Gualco** and **Paolo Andreoli**, violist **Simone Gramaglia**, and cellist **Giovanni Scaglione**.

Their latest release on **Orchid Classics**, *The Art of Fugue*, brings an innovative instrumentation to J.S. Bach's *Art of Fugue*. The work was originally written for keyboard with two staves, later expanding to four staves. The work was essentially an exercise in complex counterpoint with several voices imitating and exchanging musical ideas. Bach did not live to see the whole publication in print, and the scores were not of interest to the public. Today, the work is cherished as a masterpiece and serves as a wordless instruction manual that demonstrates how to write several different kinds of counterpoint.

The Quartetto di Cremona scored the work for string quartet and since the inner lines of many movements go beyond the range of the second violin and viola, violinist Paolo learned the viola for several movements, and violist Simone had a tenor viola made. In total, the quartet uses 7 instruments throughout the entire piece.

To purchase and listen to the album, click [here](#).

"If you study Bach as a child," **Cristiano Gualco** shared. "You come to think it's very strict. But actually there's a lot of freedom. This became apparent too from speaking to many excellent Baroque specialists: there is space to find your own tempo, dynamics, and articulation."

"We tried to make it more captivating, let's say," he added.

The **Quartetto di Cremona** frequently presents masterclasses in Europe, Asia, and North and South America. The members of the quartet have been Professors at the Walter Stauffer Academy in Cremona since 2011. In 2019, the quartet won the "Franco Buitoni Award" by the Borletti Buitoni Trust for their constant contribution to the promotion of chamber music in Italy and around the world. Since 2015, they have been ambassadors for the international project "Friends of Stradivari" and honorary citizens of Cremona. They also endorse "Le Dimore del Quartetto" and Thomastik Infield Strings.



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April 10, 2024

Quartetto di Cremona brings life and beauty to Chamber Music Society's Winter Festival

By Daniele Sahr



As part of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Winter Festival, the Quartetto di Cremona paid New York a memorable visit that evoked 'not happiness but life...and beauty', as violist Simone Gramaglia succinctly noted. The quartet was marvelous at presenting both – through their excellent playing and firm hold on signature interpretations of great works, and through a palpable sensitivity to the complexities of the human condition that often only music can portray.

With no timidity, they opened with Shostakovich's Quartet No.8 – known for its inextricably linked identity to the dangers of totalitarianism. Originally, the work was practiced in secret by early members of the Borodin Quartet in the Soviet Union. Here, on the Alice Tully stage before a rapt audience, Quartetto di Cremona played it with an easy, adept, unyielding style that combined a sense of historical context and present meaning. Notably, the opening four-note motif set the tone for the quiet depths. Tempos throughout the *Largo* and into the *Allegro molto* were carefully planned and implemented zealously. In the *Allegretto*, a crisp tone was counteracted

by passages of ironic sweetness that left behind a memorable tension.

As they continued, No.8 began to gleam like a beautifully refurbished heirloom – perfect yet accented with character. The players served the music with fervor, playing unison passages with unfettered expression and taking on duets in balanced partnership. Accompaniment passages by the second violin and viola lent a poetic rhythm that ranged from a gentle touch to pounding ferocity. This provided the first violinist and cellist with a palette over which melodies and motifs conversed intrepidly and with elegance.

In the closing *Largo* movement, the cellist pulled the melody through with a surreal-like expression that locked together the sense of present and past which are so special in the Quartet No.8. Quartetto di Cremona's superb musicality and craftsmanship prove that Shostakovich's 1960 work not only stands the test of time but remains a relevant reminder of how we must not forget what matters in life. One must always hold firm to what is right.

Before going on to Schubert's 'Death and Maiden', the quartet performed the brief 'Tenebrae' by Osvaldo Golijov, a light work in comparison to the others. Even for those who might not be Golijov fans (as I am not), in the hands of the Quartetto di Cremona there was a transformative power to this ethereal piece. It served well as a space in which to unwind and reflect upon the emotional and political aspects of the Shostakovich.

To close out the evening, Quartetto di Cremona continued with the theme of life and beauty in a show-stopping performance



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of Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden'. It confirmed the outstanding strengths of the ensemble – exquisite endings to phrases; a deep variety of tonal textures that match perfectly to the imagery embedded in the music; clear and convincing tempo changes; and unhindered personal expression of the melody that is simultaneously precise and gestural. The elegant *Andante* compelled the audience to clap between movements. And my favorite – the *Scherzo* – was played

as if they were on a trampoline, bouncing between heaven and hell.

This could be described as an evening of real music and generous playing. I can't help but feel that Quartetto di Cremona would have played just as fantastically in a small rehearsal room because they revere the music. Maybe that is precisely why it was so memorable: we listeners were simply fortunate to be here.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ConcertoNet.com

October 27, 2023

Italianate Cries and Whispers

By Harry Rolnick

"I shall hear in heaven."
Ludwig van Beethoven, his last words.

The reputation of Quartetto di Cremona is worthy of their residence. After all, the rather commonplace town of Cremona was home to the greatest of all violin-makers, Antonio Stradivarius. The woods surrounding the town still have ascendants of the original spruce wood. And while the Quartetto di Cremona do not play one of the 600 remaining original violins (the closest is a 1640 Amati), they have a beauty, a resplendent color which reflects their name.

At the start of an American tour, they played in one of the great small concert halls, Weill Recital Hall. And their first two pieces could have come from Italy itself.

That wasn't quite true. The first half was Mediterranean in atmosphere, but the creators were German and French-Basque. Still, the opening of Hugo Wolf's pseudo-folk-tune *Italian Serenade* easily belied its origin.

German, yes. But this is an easygoing one-off masterpiece from the *lieder* composer, and the *Quartet* romped through its joyous paeon to life in Tuscany and beyond. Was it made for an Italian quartet? No. But this group gave it not only pure virtuosic playing but an insouciance of feeling.

With the start of the Ravel *String Quartet*, one realized why Italy produced no major 19th Century

symphonic or chamber composers. Others—Wolf, Ravel, Tchaikovsky, even heavy-handed Richard Strauss—created

the *al fresco* Mediterranean countryside and joy and made it there own.

Granted, Ravel's *Quartet* is in a class—an environment—of its own. Yet one could easily shoehorn the folkish theme from Wolf into the first movement, and nobody would blink.

The Cremona group know how to bring that mysterious Ravelian joy into the forefront. Much was due to the First Violin's Cristiano Gualco, with a tone that for pure uncloying sweetness was like a musical kiss. Equally important was how the Quartetto di Cremona both sang and danced even in its transformations.

I used the word "mysterious" not for a mysterious atmosphere, but for how Ravel cryptically created a metamorphosis of themes. I had heard the work dozens of times, but only last night, in the 18th Century atmosphere of Weill Concert Hall, did I realize how both the plucked pizzicato opening to the second-movement scherzo and the main idea of the third-movement adagio actually changed the first *first* theme of the whole work.

Perhaps it was the clarity of these players, perhaps the gorgeous string tone (no, none of the players used a Strad from the forests



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around Cremona, but they could well have!) and the rhythmic bite. Most surprising, its 1902-1903 date of composition was a mere two years before Schoenberg's *First String Quartet*. That post-Wagnerian essay sounded, yes, well put together. It overlooked what the Cremona group offered to the Ravel: both joy and spirituality.

That's a hefty combination. And besides this, Ravel didn't need any dodecaphonic finagling wangling or theories to play hide-and-seek with the music. Quartetto di Cremona played with the music as if they were playing with a basket of diamonds, picking and choosing, and holding up each radiant musical jewel with musical delight.

Whatever the Elysian happiness of the first half was scratched out by the second half Beethoven *Opus 132*. Yes, it was deep, complex, and it needed concentration to absorb all 44 minutes. Even the third movement "Hymn of Thanksgiving" was thanks that the composer had overcome a bout of bowel inflammation.

(Had Haydn written it, the subtitle might have been "The 'Rectum' Quartet".)

Yet if the work was initially

inappropriate for such a sunny opening, the Quartetto di Cremona shed an eternal-style light on the chthonic atmosphere.

Perhaps too much light. That first four-note motif should have the inaudible enigma of the *9th Symphony* start. They took it as an introduction to a movement played with such loveliness that it just missed the utter desolation. In fact, I could hear Mr. Gualco's melismatic solo over and over again. Of course the second and fourth movements, without the agony of the first, were played to perfection, and the finale, veering between triumph and wonderment showed just the perfection of this group.

Still, the centerpiece was the Thanksgiving to Beethoven's Proctologist. One didn't have to know this. The care of articulation, the dynamics, the use of vibrato and voicing of the four assured consuming poignancy.

The only grievous error is that after this monument to greatness they decided to give it an encore. The original *Art of the Fugue* is great music. But one would like to have memories of the complete Beethoven *Quartet* remain in the mind, rather than surrendering to the "Encore!" of the well-dressed well-educated eternal *Hoi Polloi*.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Cadenza

October 26, 2023

Quartetto di Cremona at Weill Recital Hall

By Brian Taylor



Hailing from Cremona, Italy, once home to legendary violin maker Antonio Stradivarius, the award-winning [Quartetto di Cremona](#) has been honing their craft as an ensemble for nearly two decades. They finally made their Carnegie Hall debut in an impressive concert of significant repertoire in the perfect venue, Weill Recital Hall.

The evening's program was an inspired progression from light to dark. They began with the purely enchanting, innocent, and free: Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*. Maurice Ravel's *String Quartet in F Major*, which gazes through a gem-like, crystalline clockwork followed. Then, looking inward, Ludwig van Beethoven's *String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132* probes soulful depths through struggle and prayer. Finally, with an encore from J. S. Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, we arrive at music

reduced to its absolute essence — raw and theoretical.

This thrilling string quartet plays with a well-sculpted, unified interpretation; they have studied the ins and outs of each phrase, as well as the vertical texture. They work as a team, while allowing each individual immense freedom to bring his full self to each moment.

Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, a single-movement charmer from 1887, opens at a driving tempo. First violinist, Cristiano Gualco, tosses off a long unspooling melody with a windswept, pastoral character, over a scampering accompaniment. On his spectacular 1640 Amati — made in Cremona — Gualco immediately defines the character of the piece, bringing a distinctly casual air to the decorative tune. The piece quickly becomes more



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contrapuntal, with second violin, viola, and cello taking turns introducing themselves, chiming in with little melodic questions and answers.

Together they infuse the piece with effervescence. Wolf's harmonic language (closer in vocabulary to Richard Strauss than Schumann or Brahms) is full of harmonic surprises and clever chromaticism, but the Quartet simply allows it to speak. In their hands, the *Serenade* almost conjures a bird soaring over the Mediterranean landscape, taking in the colors and aromas.

Ravel's Quartet, from 1902-3, also trades in effervescence, and the Cremona whips it up like a Champagne cocktail they've poured a few times. Settling nicely into the Recital Hall's intimate environs, the foursome dove into Ravel's tautly constructed jewel box with an insouciance, an almost carefree approach, that belies the subtle complexity of the composition.

The Quartetto's interpretation finds a visceral thrust aiming toward the piece's architectural peaks, toward the sweet-and-sour poignancies in Ravel's harmonic poetry. Especially beautiful is the seamless handing off of the musical line from one player to another, as in the exquisite build in the first movement's development section.

The way they allow each player to stir the pot, when given the melody, gives the ensemble a jostling camaraderie, and makes the performance feel fresh and spontaneous. The magic is that each has unique qualities. Second violin, Paolo Andreoli, technically hand-in-hand and equal to Gualco, has a malleable timbre, melting into the texture, or rising to the top with a plush singing tone.

Simone Gramaglia's color palette on the viola is especially beguiling — raspy and brooding, or tender and sweet, depending on the music's needs. Cellist Giovanni Scaglione's rhythmic infallibility forms a sturdy foundation, such as in the scherzo-like second movement's snappy pizzicato opening. And he watches over the proceedings with ears like antennae, actively

listening and making space for the music.

The mood and spirit turned more serious in the program's second half, but the Quartetto still avoided ponderousness in a bracing, urgent rendition of [Beethoven's Op. 132](#), the first to be composed of his profound, prophetic "late quartets." The first movement's alarming changes of tempo, and the first violin's outbursts of expression, suggested the Romantic era bubbling beneath the surface of Classicism, nearing its boiling point. Here again, the Quartetto di Cremona, without sacrificing rhythmic detail, focuses on the big picture, keeping the long line driving forward. The second movement, a melancholy sort of scherzo, was heady and breezy, like an apparition, thanks to exceptional dynamic control, ever so rarely rising above a *pianissimo*.

The group had wisely been pacing the evening to allow for the heart of the piece, Beethoven's "Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity, in the [Lydian mode](#)." Their tempo was not uncomfortably slow (as it has occasionally been performed), but the journey of healing and renewal was well-earned. The fourth movement's rustic and rowdy march was suitably gritty, and the finale brimmed with a sense of adventure and arrival.

They brought a similar knack for transcending technical demands and getting to the core of the music in the encore of Bach. During ovations, they acknowledged the influence of members of the recently retired Emerson Quartet in the audience. It felt like a passing of the torch.

A Debut 20 Years in the Making

The Quartetto di Cremona comes to the Chamber Music Society this February

By Nicky Swett



© Nikolaj Lund

The Quartetto di Cremona (l-r): Paolo Andreoli, Cristiano Gualco, Simone Gramaglia, and Giovanni Scaglione

In advance of the Quartetto di Cremona's Chamber Music Society concert, founding violist Simone Gramaglia reflects on two decades of repertoire and relationships.

How did the four of you start playing together?

SIMONE GRAMAGLIA, *violinist of the Quartetto di Cremona*: Violinist Cristiano Gualco and I studied at the same conservatory growing up in Genoa and met again in Cremona at the Stauffer Academy. In 2000, during the interval of a chamber orchestra concert, Cristiano

asked if I would like to play in a quartet and I said yes because of our great friendship. Since we were studying in Cremona, we gave our quartet the name Quartetto di Cremona. It was an homage to the town, to Stradivarius, and to the great violin tradition. At the end of 2001, the second violinist and cellist left and so during Christmas, we were the Duo di Cremona. Then we decided to ask violinist Paolo Andreoli and cellist Giovanni Scaglione, who actually lived in Genoa, so it's funny—we are the Quartetto di Cremona, but we are all from Genoa.



Are you looking forward to returning to New York in February?

SG: In New York, the atmosphere and the love for music is incredible, and you can play things that you wouldn't play in other places. We are going to debut at Lincoln Center playing Prokofiev's First Quartet and Schoenberg's First Quartet. We played the Schoenberg a couple years ago, and it's a string quartet that we really love. Sometimes promoters, when you say "Schoenberg," they say "thank you very much, next." But in New York, it's no problem.

What makes the Schoenberg quartet on your program challenging for players and for listeners?

SG: There is this intensity, this presence of a lot of elements all together. At the

beginning, all four parts seem to be very important—they have the same dynamic. But if you play all four parts with the same importance, you won't understand anything.

When you look at the score, it's complex, but it's so beautiful. You immediately feel these unique themes that are so emotional, so sweet, and they are not difficult to understand. Even if you don't know classical music very well, you can get this music, because it's simple in a way. It's a journey: there is passion, there is sadness, there is desperation, there is happiness. And when we arrive at the finale, something happens, I don't want to say what—it's unbelievable.

You immediately feel these unique themes that are so emotional, so sweet, and they are not difficult to understand.

Why did you decide to program Prokofiev's B minor Quartet?

SG: We have to thank the Emerson Quartet when we play this Prokofiev. It's one of my favorite pieces, I listened to it since I was a kid, and the best recording of this piece is the Emerson one. I asked my colleagues to play it many times and after 20 years, we finally decided to learn it. It's fantastic: the dialogue between the voices is so well balanced. The way Prokofiev uses the harmony—it's another world. He brings your ear to expect something, but then he suddenly changes, and you are surprised by the elegant harmonic solutions that he finds.



© Nikolaj Lund

You'll also be performing Weber's Clarinet Quintet with David Shifrin. Have you collaborated with him before?

SG: We performed the Weber quintet recently with David in Houston on tour. We really were astonished by his playing. I discussed it with my colleagues after the concert—it was probably one of the first times that we had no difficulties mixing our sound with a wind player. Weber, he's a great composer in many ways; this quintet is so well written, such natural music, that it wasn't that difficult to play it beautifully. Though, in the last movement, there are so many recitatives. We are Italian, so we are used to opera, but recitatives are not always easy to play together. Yet David is so flexible, so musical, and so clear in what he does, that it is very easy to follow him. We really look forward to playing with him again in February at Lincoln Center.

What do you do outside of quartet playing together or individually?

SG: Paolo is a certified, professional cook. He also loves driving cars. He is

the main driver when we travel—he brings us to concert appointments on time, if not early, because he likes to go fast. Giovanni is a fantastic jazz pianist. He can improvise anything on the piano. During the pandemic, Cristiano became an astrophotographer. NASA published one of his photographs in a blog! I've got a passion for golf, so when we are on tour, often I try to see if there is some place where I can go and play. Together, we love food, we love to find the best restaurants wherever we are. I have to say that even after 22 years, we are happy to spend time together, we are always happy to travel together, and we talk a lot.

Cellist, writer, and music researcher Nicky Swett is a program annotator and editorial contributor for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center presents the Quartetto di Cremona at Alice Tully Hall on February 1. For more information, visit ChamberMusicSociety.org.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

the Strad

April 20, 2022

Cremona Quartet, David Shifrin (clarinet)

By Dennis Rooney



Founded in 2000, the Cremona Quartet displayed outstanding tonal refinement in its local debut, sponsored by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. The programme presented two quartets composed in 1930 and 1904–5 respectively, interspersed by Weber's Clarinet Quintet with David Shifrin.

The first of Prokofiev's two string quartets dates from close to the end of his decade-long Paris residence, and was commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, doyenne of American patrons of new chamber works in the mid-20th century. The first performance was by the Brosa Quartet in the Coolidge Auditorium in Washington DC's Library

of Congress in 1931. Each of the quartet's three movements is replete with lyricism, alternating with scherzando elements and an exceptionally contemplative, expressive finale.

The Cremona's performance was distinguished by splendid balance, abundant colour and a relaxed mastery of all the musical elements. In Weber's quintet (completed in 1815) the dedicatee Heinrich Baermann was very much the star turn; but Shifrin's clarinet was supported with sympathy, even when the string textures became merely accompanimental.

Schoenberg's First Quartet op.7 was always beautifully played, with understanding and sympathy. No matter how dense the texture, no hint of effort entered into the performance. Nearly a quarter-century of existence ensured a constant focus on expression and the ceaseless evolution of the musical materials. Shifrin rejoined the quartet for the Adagio from Mozart's Clarinet Quintet K581, where equal partnership prevailed.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ClassicalSource

February 1, 2022

David Shifrin & Quartetto di Cremona at Alice Tully Hall – Prokofiev, Weber & Schoenberg

By Susan Stempleski



Under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society (CMS) of Lincoln Center, the Quartetto di Cremona made its Lincoln Center debut. Violinists and viola-player performed while standing, with the cellist seated on a box that brought him up to their eye level.

The evening opened with a stunning performance of Prokofiev's somber First String Quartet. Propelled by Cristiano Gualco's powerful lead, the players delivered an intense and achingly melancholic account. The deep, plush sound of Simone Gramaglia's viola and his ardent playing constantly impressed, with Giovanni Scaglione's cello providing a solid foundation and producing soaring lines of his own, especially in the sweeping melodies of the highly affecting slow Finale. The

playing was marked by admirable unanimity and blend.

In Weber's overtly virtuosic and sparkling Clarinet Quintet, David Shifrin (also standing) delivered a performance that was as much fun as it was dazzling. He produced a warm, eloquent sound in the lyrical moments and made the more bravura passages appear completely effortless. He was superb as he emphasized dramatic elements, shaping the clarinet line with an elegant vocal quality that floated gracefully over the always radiant strings. But it was his pianissimo rendering of the ascending line at the end of the second movement Fantasia that made the performance irresistible.

After intermission came Schoenberg's epic Quartet No.1, composed in a single



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45-minute span in the hyper-expressive style of the composer's early period and received a passionate, vivid and highly virtuosic performance, gleaming even in its most chilling passages. The intricately structured score, with echoes of medieval pageantry, courtly dances, and even folk tunes, sometimes gives the impression of meandering, as passages of bustling activity are followed by much

more hesitant stretches, but this rapturous performance managed to be admirably tight, capturing the work's assurance as well as its ambiguity. For an encore, Shifrin returned and the players delivered a weightless and bittersweet rendition of the Larghetto from Mozart's Quintet, K581, a gentle ending to an evening full of splendid music-making.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

The New Criterion

March 2022

New York Chronicle

By Jay Nordlinger

I have a smidgeon of space left for the Quartetto di Cremona—which deserves more than a smidgeon of space. This string quartet from Italy was formed in 2000. “Cremona” is a proud name for string players—the home of Antonio Stradivari, Giuseppe Guarneri, and other immortal luthiers. The Quartetto di Cremona appeared in Alice Tully Hall under the auspices of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

They began with a rarely heard work of Prokofiev (known for various genres of music, but not chamber music): the String Quartet No. 1 in B minor. The Cremonese players showed themselves a sensible and adept group. They did nothing false, demonstrating only honest musicianship.

For their next piece, they called on a ringer: David Shifrin, the veteran American clarinetist. He joined them for the quintet of Carl Maria von

Weber, that great friend of clarinetists. Shifrin has been wowing audiences for—could it be?—fifty years. He can still do it. As I have argued in these pages for many years, he is one of the outstanding instrumentalists—outstanding musicians—of our time.

On the second half of the concert, the Cremonese played a single work: the Quartet No. 1 in D minor by Schoenberg. It takes a special ensemble to play this long, brainy, and soulful work. Otherwise, ensembles should leave it alone. The Quartetto di Cremona did the work justice.

For their encore, they called back Shifrin to the stage. Their selection: the Larghetto from the Mozart quintet. Shifrin played in impossibly long and beautiful breaths. From him and the four gentlemen of Cremona, it was a first-rate evening, bordering on the transcendent.



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December 2, 2020

Classical Album Reviews: “Italian Postcards”

By Jonathan Blumhofer



The Quartetto di Cremona's (QDC) new album, *Italian Postcards*, is nothing if not overflowing with

Mediterranean personality: that aspect of their playing is impossible to miss.

The group's account of Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, for instance, which opens the disc, is as warmly engaging and playfully sensuous as one might want. The QDC tackles the music's unpredictable chromatic turns with *brio*, their lissome ensemble is bracing, and the carefree energy of their reading palpable.

Similar direction and purpose marks the QDC's performance of Nimrod Borenstein's *Cieli d'Italia*. A seven-minute homage to the Italian sky, it's a packed essay: brimming with rhythmic and melodic layering, atmospheric figures (like arpeggios and swift scalar runs), and subtly-developed gestures, the score sounds a bit like a 21st-century update of the Wolf. And, with its marriage of familiar and strange sitting so closely side-by-side, maybe it is. At

any rate, the QDC executes it all with brio.

Filling out the recording is Mozart's String Quartet no. 1 and Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*.

The Mozart, written during the teenaged composer's visit to Italy, is a largely forgettable work, though the QDC's performance is lean and directed, with the second movement's bravura passagework standing out for its precise realization.

Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir*, on the other hand, is a masterpiece; here the QDC is joined by the Jerusalem Quartet's violist Ori Kam and the Artemis Quartet's cellist Eckart Runge.

Interpretively, their reading doesn't lack for breadth or clarity in the big opening movement. The lovely second sings with winning fluency while the lithe central section of the third dances with balletic vim. The group's lyrical take on the finale undercuts some of that movement's natural exuberance, though the coda drives energetically enough.

Throughout the Tchaikovsky – and to a lesser degree in the Wolf – there's a periodically chilly edge to the ensemble's tone. Whether it's an engineering issue or something else is unclear. Either way, that's the only blemish on this smartly-programmed, stylishly-played disc.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



January 12, 2021

Italian Postcards (CD review)

Music of Wolf, Mozart, Borenstein, and Tchaikovsky. Quartetto di Cremona, with Ori Kam and Eckart Runge. Avie AV2436.

By John J. Puccio

Italy has long been a favorite destination of travelers, vacationers, history buffs, music lovers, composers, and, well, just about everyone. From Lake Como, Venice, Milan, and Verona to the North through Rome and Sicily farther south, the country has offered artists a wealth of material to work with. Such is the case with Hugo Wolf, W.A. Mozart, Nimrod Borenstein, and Pyotr Tchaikovsky, all of whom were inspired by the merits of the country. On the present disc, the Quartetto di Cremona and friends present four selections by the aforementioned composers in as sunny, Italianate performances as you could want.

For those of you unaware, the Quartetto di Cremona is an award-winning Italian string ensemble founded in Cremona, Italy in 2000. Their members are Cristiano Gualco, violin; Paolo Andreoli, violin; Simone Gramaglia, viola; and Giovanni Scaglione, cello. On the Tchaikovsky piece, they are joined by Ori Kam, viola, and Eckart Runge, cello. The quartet has appeared practically everywhere in the world and has recorded well over a dozen record albums.

The program begins with the *Italian Serenade* (1887), a short work (about seven minutes) by the Austrian composer Hugo Wolf (1860-1903). It is a favorite of string quartets worldwide, often played as an encore but here used as a curtain raiser. It works no matter

how people use it. Wolf heard the melody while on holiday, and the Quartetto di Cremona play it with an appropriately sunny zest.

Next up is the *String Quartet No. 1 in G*, K. 80, "Lodi" (1770) by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). Mozart wrote it at age fourteen while touring in Lodi, Lombardy. You may remember Lodi, California having a similar effect on the young John Fogarty some 200 years later. Something about the name, I suppose. Anyway, it was Mozart's first string quartet, with a finale he composed a few years later. The Cremona Quartet provide a lovely poignancy to the opening *Adagio*, which, unusual for a string quartet, is a slow movement. Then they add their aforementioned zest to the second, *Allegro*, movement and a regal presence to the *Minuetto*. Which is where it should have ended, but Mozart felt the need to be conventional and added a fourth movement, a closing *Allegro*. The Quartetto di Cremona have an uncanny knack for sounding like more than just four players, their sound rich, vibrant, and resplendent.

Following the Mozart piece is the only modern work on the agenda, *Ciel d'Italia*, Op. 88 by the British-French-Israeli composer Nimrod Borenstein (b. 1969). Despite being modern, it fits in nicely with the older classical and Romantic material. While its single



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movement is brief (about seven minutes), it manages to catch a lot of varying moods and a good deal of Italian charm. The composer describes it as having an “ethereal beauty and magical peacefulness...with episodes of great despair, courageous protest, and even playfulness.” He wrote it on a commission from the Quartetto di Cremona, who play it, one assumes, with authority.

The final selection on the album is the most substantial in terms of timing, the *String Sextet in D minor*, Op. 70, “Souvenir de Florence” (1890) by the Russian composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893). Tchaikovsky wrote the piece while sketching one of its themes in Florence, Italy. On the present recording, Ori Kam, viola, and Eckart

Runge, cello, sit in with the Cremona Quartet. Together, they produce a sound that comes close to seeming like a small chamber orchestra of strings, which is apt in that the piece works for the most part like a miniature symphony. The performance is wholly delightful, with plenty of emotional impact as well as sheer artistry and elegance.

Producer and engineer Michael Seberich recorded the music at Palazzina Banna, Tenuta Banna, Poirino (Torino) in December 2019. As with so many chamber recordings, this one is recorded somewhat closely. It’s great for clarity, detail, and dynamic impact but spreads out the players across the speakers a bit too wide. No matter, the recording sounds fine, with an especially welcome ambient bloom from venue

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

Audiophile Audition

March 14, 2021

Italian Postcards – Quartetto di Cremona – AVIE

By Gary Lemco

The Mediterranean sensibility defines this celebration of the ensemble Quartetto di Cremona's 20th anniversary, in which four foreigners to Italy express their colorful and often visceral impressions of the country. The group expressly commissioned French-Israeli composer Nimrod Borenstein's 2019 *Italian Skies* for this release. For the Tchaikovsky sextet, two esteemed instrumentalists join the group: Ori Kam, violist with the Jerusalem Quartet, and Eckart Runge, one of the founding members of the Artemis Quartet.

The program opens with Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade in G Major* (1887), the product of three days' inspiration. The concise rondo form peppered with recitativo elements provides a dazzling sense of varied color, especially with the likes of Giovanni Scaglione at the cello part in this rendition. The alternation of bowed and plucked strings in 3/8 eventually cedes to a more passionate section in the minor mode, 6/8. Second violin Paolo Andreoli makes his presence felt before the music gleefully returns to its final announcement of the rondo theme.

Mozart wrote his first string quartet during his initial sojourn into Italy (to the town of Lodi, in particular in a tavern) in March 1770. Mozart admired the city's famed porcelains, and he felt inspired to adopt some of the town's ancient folk melodies. In four movements, its opening, extensive *Adagio* features significant

drone elements under an expressive first violin part, intoned with sweet fervor by Cristiano Gualco. The shifts in duple and triplet figures already reveal a fine level of musical development for a fourteen-year-old composer. The

ensuing *Allegro* has an aggressive, pseudo-fugal character, biting and brisk. The third movement – in the original edition the last – presents a *Menuetto* in G Major contrasted with a *Trio* in C Major. The last movement *Rondeau: Allegro* appears to have been added by Mozart later, c. 1775. The Quartetto di Cremona casts this movement in warmly graduated motion, building up the motor power of the work that pauses dramatically to allow a chordal passage that adds to the clever charm of the whole.

Nimrod Borenstein (b. 1969) receives a world premiere in this performance of his *Cieli d'Italia* especially commissioned by this ensemble. The soaring tessitura of the initial impulse, sweetly harmonized and accompanied by plucked strings, evokes the clarity of Italian skies. The playful aspects turn to a more melancholy affect, agitated and featuring some impassioned riffs from the viola (Simone Gramaglia). The strong rhythmic shifts suggest a largesse in a rather compact piece, lasting seven minutes but packed with lyrically attractive and learned effects in a tonal style that maintain our attention.

Tchaikovsky's grand sextet of 1886, his *Souvenir de Florence*, may owe debts to the examples of the form by



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Johannes Brahms, but Tchaikovsky's sense of balanced phrase nods to his beloved Mozart. From start to finish, the expansive writing for six strings swells to a symphonic and rhapsodic series of impassioned gestures, despite its fidelity to sonata form in movement one. The coda of the *Allegro con spirito* virtually melts your CD player!

The Quartetto di Cremona, assisted by Ori Kam and Eckart Runge, deliver a sweeping rendition, fervent even in the intimate innocence of the D Major *Adagio cantabile e con moto* second movement. Each

instrument individually has an opportunity to sing the ardent melody. Two Russian melodies, respectively, inform the latter two movements, an *Allegro moderato* followed by a concluding *Allegro con brio e vivace*. In the third movement, pairs of instruments realize some potent and exotic unison passages. The diversely emotional tenor of the last movement suggests the composer's anxious desire to complete music in a form both alien and attractive to his uniquely honed sensibility. This entire disc comes highly recommended.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

theStrad
VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

March 18, 2019

Quartetto di Cremona wins Franco Buitoni Award 2019

The Italian ensemble receives £25,000 and a specially commissioned glass sculpture



The Italian ensemble Quartetto di Cremona has won the Franco Buitoni Award 2019, receiving £25,000 and a specially commissioned glass sculpture, entitled Suono, made by Venice-based artist Ritsue Mishima. The presentation will take place on 16th April when the quartet is in Milan for a performance at Società del Quartetto.

Created by Borletti-Buitonni Trust founder Ilaria Borletti Buitoni in honour of her late husband Franco (1934-2016), the Award is

for Italian musicians who promote and encourage chamber music at home and throughout the world. The inaugural Franco Buitoni Award was given two years ago to Marta and György Kurtág in recognition of their lifelong contribution to music.

‘I decided to create this award in memory of my husband who loved music so much and who founded BBT with me in 2002,’ commented Ilaria Borletti Buitoni. ‘Lieder and chamber music were his special passions that he also promoted in the role of director of Amici della Musica in his home town of Perugia. So I wanted to focus on Italy for this second award – with Italian musicians who promote and encourage chamber music in Italy and throughout the world. I very much admire Quartetto di Cremona and all they do. They have developed a wonderful reputation worldwide since 2005 when we awarded them a BBT Fellowship.’

The Quartetto di Cremona’s viola player Simone Gramaglia commented: ‘We are so honoured to receive this recognition thanks to Ilaria’s enlightened sensitivity and vision.’ He continued, ‘We know how much Franco did for music and how he loved it. It will be a special pleasure for us to honour Franco’s passion for chamber music as we continue to promote and encourage it in Italy and throughout the world.’



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



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April 28, 2019

OUT NOW | Quartetto di Cremona's New CD: 'Schubert String Quintet & Quartet'

Audite Records has announced the release of the Quartetto di Cremona's new album: 'Schubert String Quintet & Death and the Maiden String Quartet'



Audite Records has this month announced the release of the Italian-based Quartetto di Cremona's new album: *Schubert: String Quintet & String Quartet 'Death and the Maiden'*.

Recorded with cellist Eckart Runge, the disc features Schubert's String Quintet in C Major – coupled with Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor.

"I can say that love is what inspired the repertoire on this disc ... our love of Schubert's passion for life, love and art ... and for his very personal way of looking at both illness and death ..." violist Simone Gramaglia has told The Violin Channel.

"These two masterpieces together are an intense summary of Schubert's entire life ... and after almost 20 years of playing together as a quartet it is only now that we felt it was perhaps now the right time for us to record them ..." he has said.

"This music is pure beauty ... it speaks directly from the heart and is a consolation for the soul ... our only hope is that listeners will too take away the love."



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



October 17, 2019

Quartetto di Cremona celebrates Italian music in debut Houston concert

By Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

Within a country of fine wine, there is a city of violins, and just as the world-class vino from the regions of Piedmont, Veneto and Tuscany are an intrinsic part of Italian culture, so too is the craftsmanship of Amati, Stradivari and Guarneri in the history of Cremona.

The small city in northern Italy was home to the stringed-instrument makers from the mid-16th century to the mid-18th century. Yet, their influence is still felt today, particularly in the work of the preeminent Quartetto di Cremona, which was named for the distinguished city in which the string quartet was founded in 2000.

Now based in Genoa, the ensemble's four musicians - violinist Cristiano Gualco, violinist Paolo Andreoli, violist Simone Gramaglia and cellist Giovanni Scaglione - play antique instruments made by the famous European ateliers, sharing the passionate tradition of their musical forefathers and garnering international recognition along the way.

On Monday, the award-winning quartet will make its Houston debut, performing rarely heard gems by Italian composers Boccherini, Puccini, Verdi and Respighi in a program at the Menil Collection, presented by Da Camera. In a second concert the following evening, the pieces written by the latter two men will be joined instead by the works of Austrian composers Mozart and Wolf.

"For us, it's very nice to play composers who are not from Italy, but who tried to write with an Italian style," said Gualco,

who established the small ensemble while studying at Cremona's Accademia Walter Stauffer, where the group now leads a yearly specialization course for string quartets. "Then, you can compare with the real Italian style of Respighi and Verdi, which are two bigger, more substantial pieces."

Unlike Boccherini, a classical composer who influenced the development of the string quartet, Verdi was known for his operatic compositions. In fact, "String Quartet in E Minor," which he premiered in a private concert for friends in his Naples hotel room in 1873, was his first and only venture into chamber music and was not originally intended for publication.

Born 45 years after Verdi, Puccini was also a famous opera composer, but he wrote "Crisantemi," which translates to Chrysanthemums, in memory of his friend Amadeo di Savoia, a former King of Spain who died in 1890. Interestingly, the beautifully poetic, yet sorrowful melodies in the piece were later reused in his opera "Manon Lescaut," Gualco explained.

In comparison to the others, Respighi was somewhat of a "one-hit wonder," and while primarily known for his trilogy of orchestral tone poems, Gualco is fond of his "String Quartet in D Major" for its sophisticated simplicity.

"If you discuss the character of the piece, it really does sound Italian and the music is very natural," he said. "I must say that in some respect, this quartet is



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even stronger than the Verdi quartet because it has more symphonic quality to it that makes it really big and important, whereas Verdi had more of a dry style. The character is more dramatic and more tragic. The Respighi is just beauty.”

Until recently, the Quartetto di Cremona had the opportunity to play four Stradivari instruments that belonged to the celebrated violinist Niccolò Paganini, who was also from Genoa, as a recipient of the Nippon Music Foundation’s Instrument Loan Project.

“For me, it was really a dream,” Gualco said. “It was something really exceptional to have in my hands, the same violin that Paganini played for so many years in concert. It’s like the background of the instrument came to life every day.”

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



November 13, 2018

Quartetto di Cremona at the Frick

By John Sobel

Italian string quartet Quartetto di Cremona closed out its North American tour with a sold-out concert at the Frick Collection on 11 November. The invigorating program focused on Italian composers from the 18th century right through to modern times.

Formed in 2000, the quartet has developed a tight, fluid ensemble sound as comfortable with the avant-garde as with Boccherini. They opened with the latter's String Quartet Op. 2 No. 6. The assertive accents, emotional dynamics, and overall good cheer of the first movement; the placid "Largo" with its fluid cello lines; and the stately finale all shone with the warm, woody, almost animal sound of the historic instruments these musicians have the good fortune to play. For the past year they have been loving caretakers of a quartet of Stradivarius instruments once owned by Paganini. It's a fitting match - the Quartetto di Cremona's four musicians are from Genoa, hometown of Paganini, and they are also honorary citizens of their namesake city, Stradivari's hometown.

A leap to the late 20th century took us to Lorenzo Ferrero's Tempo di Quartetto. Its contemplative first movement is layered with slightly unexpected harmonies, contrasting whole tone and semitone lines, and melodic quirks. The musicians attacked the salty, rhythmic "Allegro," a kind of angry waltz, with utter conviction. They made the third movement, designated "Slow Rock," a

romantic ride tilted with occasional blue notes.

Equally appealing was the "Italian Serenade" of Hugo Wolf, the lone non-Italian composer on the program. A countryside romp opening with fast triplets, it has moments of peril and stormy weather that resolve into a delicate dance of pizzicatos and syncopations. The varied colorations the musicians drew from their instruments benefited from the excellent acoustics of the mansion-museum's Music Room.

So did Fabio Vacchi's "Movimento di Quartetto," an avant-garde late-20th-century work that recalled abstract expressionism (a style of art you won't find on this museum's walls). Muted, misty dissonant chords erupted into explosive tutti outbursts, the musicians wielding their skill and conviction in an expression of great artistry.

They devoted the second half to music by composers best known for opera. Puccini's 1890 "Crisantemi" came across as romantically Italian with moments of Beethovenian angst. It served as an appetizer for Verdi's rich 1903 Quartet in E minor. The musicians gave the piece's melodic first movement, with its fugue-like passages, operatic momentum. They went on to infuse the ballet-like second with lush feeling, their instruments sounding especially beautiful in rhythmic unison passages.

Through years of playing together the Quartetto di Cremona has developed the feel of a single voice, and remarkably so. But individual parts shine too, as with



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the charming cello melody in the trio section of the Verdi's fiery third movement. More fireworks followed in the "Scherzo Fuga" finale. The audience had the musicians back for two encores. The Quartetto di Cremona has a busy concert schedule. They are in Europe for the remainder of this year. I hope they cross the Atlantic again soon. You can

find several of the works on this concert program on their album Italian Journey. They have also recorded a complete Beethoven cycle.

The Frick Collection presents many fine artists in its long-running concert series. This was my first visit to the Music Room at the Frick. It won't be my last.

QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

ConcertoNet.com

November 12, 2018

Italian Chambers

By Harry Rolnick

"To copy the truth can be a good thing, but to invent the truth is much much better."

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

If God (or this writer) had to select the most appropriate music for a crispy cloudless Manhattan autumn afternoon, with pigeons cooing and dogs jumping and babies smiling, well...it would have to be Luigi Boccherini's *C Major Quartet*. So miracle of miracles, that was *exactly* how the young deft lyrical Quartetto di Cremona started their recital this afternoon at the Frick Museum.

Not that I had heard that particular work previously. But every single work of Boccherini has that lithe ease, that balance of color and shade, of Iberian pictorialism (most of his creative life was in Spain) and Italian song.

In fact, some years ago, rather than visiting Lucca for the churches of the Puccini family, this writer made a beeline to the house where Boccherini was born. Puccini came second.

Yes, this was lightweight stuff, but to the Quartetto di Cremona, it was lifted up like a Raphael angel. True, the Quartet resides now in Genoa. But all four of them play Stradivariuses—and Cremona, with its unique forests, was where Stradivarius and his student made their great fiddles.

The Quartetto di Cremona is not a Quartetto Italiano, which was at

the top of the Western European chamber music pantheon until a few years ago. But the Quartetto di Cremona, created 18 years ago, is equally diverse (their complete Beethoven quartets was given rave reviews), has the same splendid technical prowess. And, perhaps because of their choices yesterday, their personalities are penetrate into all their music.

The choices were 100 percent Italian (save for Hugo Wolf, whose *Italian Serenade* makes him an honorary citizen). While loath to say this, the satisfaction of all this music eschewed the depth and heavyweight quartet-playing of a Brahms or Beethoven. Yet in each work, the four players (three of them standing) showed the joy of lyricism at its finest.

Yes, that Boccherini *C Major Quartet* was a short three movements, but each movement was special. The opening *Allegro spiritoso* could have been pleasant minor Mozart, save for some unexpected Spanish slashing of the fiddles at unexpected moments. The final *Minuet* was gossamer-thin, stopping just when it was starting.

A bijou, a glistening bijou.

Two contemporary short works followed. The 68-year-old Lorenzo Ferrero wrote a three-movement *Tempi di Quartetto*, the first movement dedicated to the memory of publisher-editor David



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Huntley. It was slow, yet never doleful. The melody was engaging, the performance a tribute to simple inspiration. The following *Allegro* had the rollicking six-eight meter of a square dance. A complicated square dance played with simple joy. Finally *Slow Rock* did not sound like any "rock" I ever heard. And while not minimalist, the modulations were definitely Philip Glass.

Far more moody was 70-year-old Fabio Vacchi, whose *Movimento di quartetto* was the only sheerly emotional work on the program, varying from funereal to riotous, with a complicated structure, yet always accessible measures.

The most familiar work on this first half was Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*. Its popularity is perhaps due to quasi-schmaltzy tunes played with excess retards, coming unhappily close to Tchaikovsky's similar work.

The Quartetto di Cremona didn't fall for that. Perhaps because they *are* Italian, perhaps because they are as much products of German-Austrian music as Italian, their was literal rather than light. Not that I was nonplussed by its relatively serious performance. In fact, where one usually feels like dancing, this time I realized just how wonderfully lyrical was Hugo Wolf, a post-Schubert melodist.

That first half was unexpected and for the most part, showed four players with lovely colors. No excesses. (in fact the only solo legerdemain was First Violinist Cristiano Gualco's solos in the final work, Verdi's *Quartet*), simply splendid playing.

The second half started with Giacomo

Puccini's *Chrysanthemums*, which he wrote in one night. While Puccini wrote more than operas (his religious music is very touching, giving due credit to his three generations of church composers), not even the Quartetto di Cremona could make this more than a short sentimental bagatelle. Never, though, saccharine. The Cremona artists played it with more aplomb than it deserved.

The last work was Verdi's only string quartet. He wrote it because he was bored. (His *Aida* premiere was postponed, and he was stuck in a hotel room with nothing to do.) Verdi never took it seriously, didn't want it to be published, but modestly allowed a few friends to play it.

The Quartetto di Cremona had no problems with the first two movements, nor did we. It simply was comfortable. The third *Prestissimo* showed exactly how much power this ensemble has. They let it explode like a *perpetuum mobile*.

But the finale was a tribute to Verdi himself. Offhand, I can recall only two of his fugues: one from *Falstaff*, the other the eight-part *Sanctus* from the *Requiem*.

The last movement here was a fugue/scherzo and the most exciting music of the afternoon. Granted, all the work of the Quartetto di Cremona was splendid, but for those who think of Verdi as an operatic melodist, this finale showed a man—and a quartet—as masters of their craft. And for our sakes on this hallowed Fall afternoon, maestros of their art.

January 2018

Cremona Quartet: Beethoven String Quartets, vol. VIII

By Julian Haylock



The Cremona Quartet completes its Beethoven series with a fine coupling, combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely ‘historically informed’. In the early D major Quartet the players convey an affectionate sense of playfulness with a deft cantabile touch and subtly inflected vibrato that ensure phrases tingle with vitality. The composer’s penchant for sudden dynamic change is signalled appropriately yet is never allowed to interrupt the musical flow. If the general tendency in op.18 no.3 is to emphasise the music’s earthy Haydn inheritance, the Cremona tends

more towards Mozartian grace with captivating results.

Whereas in op.18 no.3 tempos are generally on the relaxed side, in the ‘Harp’ Quartet – most notably in the opening movement and scherzo – the Cremona keeps things moving. The scherzo, with its stabbing Sturm und Drang sforzandos, even suggests a hint of breathlessness as the music hurtles along with a seemingly unstoppable surge. Other ensembles may have infused the theme-and-variations finale with more overt warmth and charm, although in context the Cremona’s refusal to gild the lily feels entirely authentic and appropriate.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

theStrad

VOICE OF THE STRING MUSIC WORLD SINCE 1890

January 18, 2018

Sol Gabetta and Cremona Quartet among winners of International Classical Music Awards



Sol Gabetta's recording of the Elgar and Martinu cello concertos and the final two instalments in the Cremona Quartet's complete Beethoven series have picked up awards in the concerto and chamber music categories respectively of the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA).

The ICMAs, now in their eighth edition, are voted on by a jury of 17 editors of European classical music magazines and websites.

The Cremona Quartet's recording was reviewed in The Strad as 'combining exemplary technique and intonational purity with an interpretive acuity that strips away 19th-century rhetoric while avoiding the pitfalls of sounding merely "historically informed".'

Gabetta's 'exhilarating Martinu and melancholy Elgar concertos' – as reviewed in The Strad – were recorded live with the Berlin Philharmonic under Krzysztof Urbanski and Simon Rattle respectively.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



May 17, 2018

A Record-setting Display of Antonio Stradivari Instruments at the Library

By David Plylar



Library of Congress photographer Shawn Miller captured this stunning shot of *ten* Stradivari instruments—and the Quartetto di Cremona—during a special “Strad Shoot” in the glorious Great Hall of the Library of Congress Thomas Jefferson Building.

The occasion was an exciting prelude to a May 11 concert by Italy’s esteemed Quartetto di Cremona, co-presented by the Library and the Embassy of Italy and Italian Cultural Institute Washington DC. As the Quartetto performs regularly on four beautiful instruments made by

Antonio Stradivari—the “Paganini Quartet”—this concert offered a unique opportunity to bring them together with the Library’s six priceless Strads, for a record-setting display of the great maker’s art.

LC instrument curator Carol Lynn Ward Bamford noted that the afternoon united not only ten of these remarkable instruments under one roof, but also three of his violas, an impressive showing from a slim number of only 12 still in existence.



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Arrayed on the table are instruments from the Library's collection of rare Cremonese bowed string instruments: in the front row, from left to right: the "Castelbarco" violin (1699); the "Ward" violin (1700); and the "Betts" violin from Antonio Stradivari's "Golden Period" (1704). In the second row, the "Tuscan-Medici" viola (1690) on loan to the Library from the Tuscan Corporation and the "Cassavetti" viola (1727). At the back is the "Castelbarco" cello (1697). These instruments, donated to the Library in 1935 and 1936 by Gertrude Clarke Whittall, are pristine and superbly maintained, in peak playing condition. Each year since 1936, they have been heard in the Library's Antonio Stradivari Memorial Concert—to our knowledge, the longest-running commemoration by an institution—and visiting musicians often have the enviable pleasure of playing them in performance.

The Quartetto di Cremona members are holding the "Paganini Quartet" instruments once owned by the virtuoso violinist Nicolò (as he spelled it) Paganini, and currently made available to the ensemble by the Nippon Music Foundation.

Simone Gramaglia is at the left front, with the Stradivari 1731 Viola "Paganini," and Giovanni Scaglione is at the left rear, with the Stradivari 1736 Cello "Paganini." At the right front, Cristiano Gualco holds the Stradivari 1727 Violin "Paganini," and Paolo Andreoli, at the right rear, holds the Stradivari 1680 Violin "Paganini".

The artists were delighted to be able to try out the Library's instruments briefly before rehearsing for their 8 pm concert. Hearing these magnificent instruments in the equally magnificent environment of the Great Hall was a memorable moment for the small group of Library and Embassy staff taking photographs—and three members of the U.S. Capitol Police providing discreet security.

To open the concert that evening, Music Division Chief Susan Vita welcomed the audience with the Ambassador of Italy to the U.S., Armando Varricchio. For the Ambassador, the concert and the Library's special Stradivari photo op were "an amazing tribute to Italian music and creativity and to the strong cultural bond with the U.S." The Quartetto di Cremona played works by two Italian masters who rarely ventured in the realm of chamber music, Giacomo Puccini's *Crisantemi* (Chrysanthemums) and Giuseppe Verdi's Quartet in E minor, as well as Ludwig van Beethoven's transcendental String Quartet in A minor, op. 132.

To honor the connection to Nicolò Paganini, a few fascinating items from the Music Division's huge collection of Paganiniana, also the gift of Gertrude Clarke Whittall, were on display in the Coolidge Auditorium foyer cases. Manuscripts of works by Paganini were on display, as well as iconography—images and playbills—and his "secret red book," documenting tour expenses, travel notes, and his personal pasta recipe.

September 28, 2017

Quartet of Stradivarius instruments once owned by Paganini back in action

Quartetto di Cremona takes on full set of Strads
previously played by the Hagen and Tokyo Quartets



In a presentation yesterday at the Museo del Violino in Cremona, the Quartetto di Cremona took on the loan of the 'Paganini Quartet', four instruments by Stradivari previously played by the Paganini and Cleveland Quartets and more recently by the Tokyo and Hagen Quartets.

The instruments were known to be treasured by Paganini in his lifetime

The violins are the 1727 'Comte Cozio di Salabue' and 1680 'Desaint'; the viola, one of just 13 surviving by Stradivari, is the

'Mendelssohn' of 1731, the tone of which so inspired Paganini that he commissioned Berlioz to write *Harold in Italy* for it; and the cello is the 1736 'Ladenburg', thought to be the maker's last.

The instruments were separated after Paganini's death and only reassembled in the 1950s by dealer Emil Herrmann in New York. They were acquired by the Nippon Music Foundation in 1994 and were played by the Tokyo Quartet until it disbanded in 2013, and subsequently by the Hagen Quartet.

Simone Gramaglia, violist of the quartet, noted a particular poignancy to receiving the instruments in the city they were made, as well as further satisfying coincidences: 'Even if the name of our ensemble is "Quartetto di Cremona" we all are from Genova, hometown of Paganini.

'Moreover we are honorary citizens of Cremona, hometown of Stradivari.

'The opportunity then to perform on the "Paganini Quartet" acquires many deep meanings for us. We are thankful to the Nippon Music Foundation to give us what we consider a unique and great privilege in a musician's life.'



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

The Herald

July 28, 2016

Quartetto di Cremona, Beethoven Complete String Quartets, Vol VI (Audite)

By Michael Tumelty

With two great performances in their established pattern of coupling one early and one late quartet, the Quartetto di Cremona's magnificent survey of Beethoven's complete String Quartets moves securely and unquestionably into mastery.

The lightness and deftness (always with power in its drive) of their fantastic interpretation of the fifth of the opus 18 quartets represents yet another call for the stature of these 'early' quartets by Beethoven to be reconsidered. Not only did the young composer have technical command at his fingertips, his powers of musical characterisation, as revealed by the Cremona Quartet, are astoundingly inventive, from the acute dynamic contrasts deftly handled throughout, to the riotous cartoon capers and near-Tom and Jerry tail-chasing antics in the finale. Who said that Beethoven had no sense of humour! There was wicked mischief within that gigantic brain. The great B flat Quartet opus 130, with its rollickingly-benign alternative finale, is pure aural and intellectual magic with the flawlessly-judged pacing adopted by the group: the finale is wonderfully cathartic following the gently-aching humanity of the Cavatina: such warm playing; such perfection on a silver disc; what a glory this is.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA



September 15, 2016

The Cremona Quartet interpret Beethoven's chamber works

By Michael Tanner

This is the most exciting new disc of string quartet playing that I have come across for a long time. It opens with one of Beethoven's least performed or mentioned works, his Quintet Op. 29, for which Lawrence Dutton of the Emerson Quartet joins the Cremona Quartet. It is not a masterwork, but it goes naturally with the Op. 18 Quartets in its bold and charming way.

What really matters, though, is the stupendous performance of the Quartet No. 15 in A minor, the one late quartet that I have found hardest to fully respond to until now. The Cremonans have an individual style of playing. It comes as no surprise that they were coached by Piero Farulli of the Quartetto Italiano: they seem to have taken his lessons to extremes. Their playing is characterised by strenuous lyricism, the individual players seeming almost to go their own way, as if they were a quartet of singers with strong personalities. They give this strange music a choral quality, which in the great Song of Thanksgiving, that immense slow movement, reaches almost unbearable levels of intensity. The alternating *andante* sections, which I have often felt, like Stravinsky, were like the layers of a five-decker Dagwood sandwich, here are necessary to relieve the tension. The almost mad, desperate finale is annihilating. Altogether a revelation.



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QUARTETTO DI CREMONA

GRAMOPHONE

April 2013

'Italian Journey'

Boccherini String Quartet, Op 2 No 6

Respighi String Quartet Puccini Crisantemi

Verdi String Quartet

Cremona Quartet

Klanglogo (P) KL1400 (71" • DDD)



A quartet for Verdi year with other Italians for company

It is very appealing to be taken on a tour of Italy through Respighi, Puccini, Verdi and Boccherini by way of chamber music, rather than opera. It feels so much more sunny and joyful, though there is still an ineluctable sense that there is as much a singer's line in what the Cremona Quartet are playing as there is a string player's. They have a similar sinuous sound to the Quartetto Italiano, and something of the same Mediterranean temperament that made the Italiano's listeners so devoted during their 35-year lifetime. It's a rare blend: breadth of sound and capriciousness combined with perfect tuning and ensemble (the little-known Respighi Quartet in D has the players sounding absolutely of one voice, especially in the opening movement, which is as graphic an illustration of the Emilia-Romagna countryside as Elgar's is of the English landscape).

Although their sound may bring out all the innate Italianness in these pieces, playing them as naturally as an Italian singer would sing an aria in grand Italian opera, they are still surprisingly light with their vibrato and never push the boundaries of what is appropriate intensity of expression. In fact, there may be many threads that sew this disc together, but the most striking is that at all times, whatever the tempo, texture, voicing or general disposition, you never lose the feeling that you are being sung, not played, to. Whether or not this is due to the age-old notion that the Italians are a garrulous bunch, listening to this recording making the music sound so immediate (particularly beautifully concentrated in the Verdi quartet) is nothing less than life-affirming. **Caroline Gill**



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