

Sunday, March 16, 2014, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## Jerusalem Quartet

Alexander Pavlovsky *violin*  
Sergei Bresler *violin*  
Ori Kam *viola*  
Kyril Zlotnikov *cello*

### PROGRAM

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) String Quartet No. 4 in D major, Op. 83 (1949)  
Allegretto  
Andantino  
Allegretto, attacca  
Allegretto

Shostakovich String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor,  
Op. 138 (1970)  
Adagio — Doppio movimento — Tempo primo

### INTERMISSION

Shostakovich String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68 (1944)  
Overture (Moderato con moto)  
Recitative and Romance (Adagio)  
Valse (Allegro)  
Theme and Variations

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**Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)**  
**String Quartet No. 4 in D major, Op. 83**

*Composed in 1949. Premiered on December 3, 1953, in Moscow by the Beethoven Quartet.*

In 1948, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and many other important Soviet composers were condemned for threatening the stability of the nation with their “formalistic” music. Through Andrei Zhdanov, head of the Soviet Composers’ Union and the official mouthpiece for the government, it was made known that any experimental or modern or abstract or difficult music was no longer acceptable for consumption by the country’s masses. Only simplistic music glorifying the State, the land, and the people would be performed: symphonies, operas, chamber music—any forms involving too much mental stimulation—were out; movie music, folk song settings, and patriotic cantatas were in.

Shostakovich saw the iron figure of Joseph Stalin behind the purge of 1948, as he was convinced it had been for an earlier one in 1936. After the 1936 debacle, Shostakovich responded with the Fifth Symphony, and kept composing through the years of World War II, even becoming a international figure representing the courage of the Soviet people with the lightning success of his Seventh Symphony (“Leningrad”) in 1941. The 1948 censure was, however, almost more than Shostakovich could bear. He determined that he would go along with the Party prerogative for pap and withhold all of his substantial works until the time they would be given a fair hearing—when Stalin was dead. About the only music that Shostakovich made public between 1948 and 1953 was that for films, most of which dealt with episodes in Soviet history (*The Fall of Berlin*, *The Memorable Year 1919*), and some patriotic vocal works (*The Sun Shines over Our Motherland* and *Song of the Forests*, which won the 1949 Stalin Prize). The only significant works he released during that half-decade were the 24 Preludes and Fugues for Piano. The other compositions of the time—the First Violin Concerto, the *Songs on Jewish Folk Poetry*, the Fourth and Fifth string quartets—were all withheld until later years.

With the death of Stalin on March 5, 1953 (ironically, Prokofiev died on the same day),

Shostakovich and all of the Soviet Union felt an oppressive burden lift. The thaw came gradually, but there did return to the country’s artistic life a more amenable attitude toward art, one that allowed significant works to again be produced and performed. Shostakovich, whose genius had been shackled by Stalin’s repressive artistic policies, set to work on the great Tenth Symphony, and composed steadily thereafter until his death two decades later. The creations of his later years are sharply divided into two seemingly antithetical streams, though each reveals a fundamental aspect of Shostakovich as man and artist. One series of works, including the Symphonies No. 11 (“The Year 1905,” extolling Lenin) and No. 12 (“1917”), cantatas, film music, patriotic marches and choruses, and instrumental scores in a popular vein (the Piano Concerto No. 2, for example), is for public consumption and the fulfillment of his duties as “People’s Artist of the U.S.S.R.,” a title conferred upon him in 1954. Paralleling these noisy, jingoistic entries is a large repertory of pieces that are both profound and personal: the magnificent and disturbing last symphonies (No. 13, “Babi Yar,” based on Yevtushenko’s searing poem about the German army’s massacre of 70,000 Jews near Kiev in September 1941; No. 14, settings of eleven texts dealing with death; and No. 15, one of the most stark and moving orchestral documents of the modern era), the First Violin Concerto, the songs on verses of Alexander Blok and Michelangelo Buonarroti, and, perhaps most significant of all, the last ten of his 15 string quartets. As had Beethoven, Shostakovich used the medium of the string quartet as the bearer of his most intimate and deep-seated feelings, a virtual window into his soul. The wealth of thought and clarity of expression in these quartets is staggering, and as an *œuvre* they are matched in the 20th century only by those of Béla Bartók.

The Quartet No. 4 was composed in 1949 for the Beethoven Quartet, the ensemble that premiered all of Shostakovich’s quartets from the Second onwards, though the work’s premiere was withheld until December 3, 1953, nine months after Stalin’s death. During the ominous, unsettled time of the Quartet’s creation, Shostakovich came to identify himself closely with other victims of persecution, namely the Jews of Russia. In the preface to

*Testimony*, the composer's purported memoirs, editor Solomon Volkov wrote that Shostakovich viewed himself and the Jews as "exiles on the brink of extinction who miraculously survived. This theme blended into an autobiographical motif: the lone individual against the raging, stupid mob." In *Testimony*, Shostakovich spoke of the inspiration behind the Fourth Quartet: "Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me. I never tire of delighting in it; it's multifaceted, it can appear to be happy while it is tragic. It's almost always laughter through tears.... [But] this is not purely a musical issue, this is also a moral issue. The Jews became the most persecuted and defenseless people of Europe [during World War II]. It was a return to the Middle Ages. Jews became a symbol for me. All of man's defenselessness was concentrated in them. After the war, I tried to convey that feeling in my music. Despite all the Jews who perished in the camps, all I heard people saying was, 'They went to Tashkent to fight.' And if they saw a Jew with military decorations, they called after him, 'Hey, you, where did you buy those medals?' That's when I wrote the Violin Concerto, the *Songs on Jewish Folk Poetry*, and the Fourth Quartet."

The overriding emotion of the Quartet No. 4 is restraint verging on repression. There are moments of intense tragedy or excitement when the music tries to burst beyond its expressive caution, but wariness, a pervasive checking-over-the-shoulder, always subdues any display of strong feeling. It is significant in this context that each of the Quartet's four movements begins and ends quietly, without much sense of expectant hope and without having achieved any kind of fulfillment or satisfaction or release—there could be a hundred movements in this piece, Shostakovich seems to say, and they would all follow the same pessimistic path. Each movement reaches its high point in the middle. The first is based on a folkish tune that might, in itself, be rather lighthearted, but it is so tightly tethered by the incessant drone of the cello that it here becomes claustrophobic and ironic. The *Andantino* is an introspective song of sorrow that erupts into a nearly uncontrollable wail of grief before again suppressing its emotion. The third movement is a sardonic scherzo whose central trio, built upon a mechanistic cello pizzicato, suggests the distant echo of hobnail boots. The finale, based

on a Jewish-inspired dance tune of sighing figures, gapped scales, and small, constrained intervals, attempts to have a folk festival, and actually achieves a few moments of frenetic abandon, but it is soon forced to dismiss this cheerful premise. The Quartet closes with an almost inaudible prayer that recalls the slowly arching arpeggios which ended the song of sadness of the second movement.

### Shostakovich

#### String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138

*Composed in 1970. Premiered on December 13, 1970, in Leningrad by the Beethoven Quartet.*

Though Shostakovich suffered a chronic loss of health following his first heart attack, in May 1966, he remained determined and productive for the remaining nine years of his life, composing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth symphonies, the Second Violin Concerto, vocal settings of texts by Michelangelo and Alexander Blok, a sizeable number of smaller pieces, and, most significantly, the last four of his 15 string quartets. In their biography of the composer, Dmitri and Ludmilla Sollertinsky described Shostakovich as they observed him at his country dacha in Repino in 1973, during the composition of the Fourteenth Quartet: "We would encounter him moving slowly along the paths and avenues. He made a surprising impression on us at that time. Elderly and suffering from numerous illnesses, he seemed intensely concentrated upon something known only to himself. It seemed as if he carried within him music he alone could hear, and that this was why he walked so slowly and cautiously, as if afraid it would evaporate before he grasped it.... Only later did we learn that he had been aware of his approaching end, and that he was indeed in a hurry to express everything within himself that required utterance. All things a person usually takes for granted were difficult for him: going to the dining room, walking up steps, shaking hands, sitting down, standing up.... Even so, he continued to meet colleagues, to listen to their music and to talk. But for the most part he worked. Illuminated by a table lamp, the silhouette of the composer bent over his writing table could be seen in the window of

the little chalet in the morning, the afternoon, and late in the evening. He was writing his Fourteenth Quartet.”

Shostakovich's late quartets provide one of the most intimate confessionals of personal feelings ever vouchsafed by a composer in his music. In *Testimony*, his purported memoirs, Shostakovich offered these words about the principal subject of the music of his last years: “Fear of death may be the most intense emotion of all. I sometimes think that there is no deeper feeling. The irony lies in the fact that under the influence of that fear, people create poetry, prose, and music; that is, they try to strengthen their ties with the living and increase their influence upon them. I tried to convince myself that I shouldn't fear death. But how can you not fear death? Death is not considered an appropriate theme for Soviet art, and writing about death is tantamount to wiping your nose on your sleeve in company. But I always thought that I was not alone in my thinking about death, and that other people were concerned with it too, despite the fact that they live in a socialist society in which even tragedies receive the epithet ‘optimistic.’ I wrote a number of works reflecting my understanding of the question, and as it seems to me, they're not particularly optimistic compositions.... I think that working on these compositions had a positive effect, and I fear death less now; or rather, I'm used to the idea of an inevitable end and treat it as such. After all, it's a law of nature and no one has ever eluded it.... When you ponder and write about death, you make some gains. First, you have time to think through things that are related to death and you lose the panicky fear. And second, you try to make fewer mistakes.... [The critics] wanted [my music] to be comforting, to say that death is only the beginning. But it's not a beginning, it's the real end, there will be nothing afterward, nothing. I feel that you must look truth right in the eyes.”

Hard, blunt, pessimistic words, these, which found their strongest expression in the searing Fourteenth Symphony of 1969, Shostakovich's orchestral song cycle of 11 poems by four authors dealing with death, and the wrenching Thirteenth Quartet, composed the following year (much of which he spent in a hospital in Kurgan). “The Thirteenth Quartet is indeed a harrowing experience for all involved,” wrote Alan George, violist of the

Fitzwilliam Quartet, which gave the work's British première in 1975 under Shostakovich's personal guidance. “Many listeners have been truly frightened by it, and even the most resilient temperament could hardly fail to be at least uncomfortably disturbed by it.” The score was dedicated to Vadim Borisovsky, recently retired as violist of the Beethoven String Quartet, the ensemble that premiered all of Shostakovich's quartets from the Second onwards; they introduced the Thirteenth Quartet in Leningrad on December 13, 1970, and played it in Moscow the following week.

The Quartet No. 13, whose prominent viola part honors its dedicatee, is arranged as a single, continuous, symmetrical span of music (A–B–C–B–A) that reaches its peak of intensity at the center. The outer sections are made from lamenting soliloquies (twelve-tone melodies, actually) set against icy ensemble harmonies and some terse counterpoint. The second section begins as the first violin offers a new motive, staccato repeated notes in quicker tempo (*doppio* [doubled] *movimento*), which is soft and quizzical at first but soon brutalized by the viola. The apprehensive quiet that follows is quickly fractured when the entire ensemble hammers out the repeated-note motive. The motive is then reduced to a single sound, a tap with the wood of the bow on the body of the instrument—a knock on the door? a wayward heartbeat? a clock ticking out the remaining minutes of a mortally ill composer's life?—that punctuates the sardonic scherzo which occupies the Quartet's central section. The remainder of the Quartet reverses the earlier music, recalling first the repeated-note motive and then (in the original slow tempo) the icy strains of the opening, here further unsettled by six more hollow taps and a final painful cry in the ensemble's highest register. The Thirteenth Quartet is, as Shostakovich once said of the music of his friend Benjamin Britten, a work that achieves its profound effect because its outer simplicity is coupled with a vast depth of emotional expression.

**Shostakovich**  
**String Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 68**

*Composed in 1944. Premiered on November 14, 1944, in Leningrad by the Beethoven Quartet.*

Vissarion Shebalin was a steadfast friend to Dmitri Shostakovich when he had precious few. “He was an extremely fine person,” Shostakovich said after Shebalin’s death in Moscow in 1963. “I always admired his goodness, honesty, and exceptional adherence to principle. How pleasant it was to share one’s joys and sorrows with him. In his company, joy became greater and grief less.”

Shebalin, four years Shostakovich’s senior, was born in Omsk in 1902, and studied under the Russian symphonist Miaskovsky at the Moscow Conservatory. He was appointed to the Conservatory’s faculty upon his graduation in 1928, and occupied increasingly important positions there during the next decade; he became the school’s director in 1942. Despite his heavy teaching and administrative duties during those years, he composed steadily, trying to forge a style that would satisfy the Communist Party’s demands for music that promoted its social and political agendas without sacrificing completely his own creative identity; his work was recognized with such official honors as two Stalin Prizes and the title of People’s Artist. None of this service to Soviet music, however, allowed Shebalin to escape censure in 1936 and 1948, along with Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Miaskovsky, and other leading musicians, for creating works of “decadent formalism.” In 1936, he was suspended from the Conservatory faculty for a time; in 1948, he was stripped of his director’s position and assigned to teach beginning theory at a bandmaster’s school; performances of his music were all but banned. “He suffered deeply and painfully under this highly unjustified dismissal,” Shostakovich recalled. By the time that Shebalin was reinstated at the Conservatory in 1951, his health had deteriorated badly, and he suffered a stroke two years later that left him paralyzed on his right side. He taught himself to write with his left hand, and continued to teach and compose, winning one of his greatest successes in 1957 with an opera based on *The Taming of the Shrew*. His rehabilitated position in the nation’s musical life was confirmed the following year through an official proclamation “restoring the dignity and integrity of Soviet composers.” During his six remaining years, Shebalin composed a ballet, his Eighth and

Ninth string quartets, his Symphony No. 5 and several vocal and instrumental works.

Shebalin and Shostakovich first met in 1923, when both were students—Shebalin in Moscow, Shostakovich in Leningrad—and aspiring composers. Friendship and mutual professional regard blossomed promptly and firmly. They corresponded regularly, followed each other’s work closely, and stayed at each other’s flats when visiting Moscow and Leningrad. Shebalin tried to get Shostakovich to move to Moscow for years, but he was not successful until 1943, when he gave his friend refuge from the German siege of Leningrad by making a place for him on the Moscow Conservatory faculty. In 1936, when Shostakovich was publicly denounced for writing “Muddle Instead of Music” (the title of the article in *Pravda*) in his lurid opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mzensk District* and other modernistic pieces, Shebalin spoke in his defense. Shebalin’s wife, Alisa, recounted the chilling scene: “Shostakovich was criticized, purged, disciplined, and scolded by one and all on every count. Only Shebalin maintained silence throughout the meeting. But then he too was asked to speak; it was hardly a request but a demand; he refused all the same. A short while elapsed and again it was ‘suggested’ that he should take the stand. Vissarion then stood up, but, remaining where he was without going to the podium, announced in a loud and clear voice for all to hear: ‘I consider that Shostakovich is the greatest genius amongst composers of this epoch.’ And with that statement he sat down.” Shebalin was censured for this audacity with suspension from his Conservatory post and prohibition of performances and publication of his music, edicts that were not lifted until the start of World War II. Though he began tailoring his own compositions more closely to the realities of musical life in Stalinist Russia through their subject matter and by using folk melodies as thematic material, Shebalin’s devotion to Shostakovich continued undiminished, and he again stood by his colleague in 1948 with results that devastated his health and his career. Shebalin and Shostakovich remained close. In 1953, Dmitri, Shebalin’s son, became violist with the Borodin Quartet, which had championed Shostakovich’s music since its

founding in 1946. A decade later, when Shebalin's health was declining rapidly, Shostakovich paid tribute to him in *A Career*, the finale of his Symphony No. 13 ("Baba Yar"), whose text, by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, praises those who courageously follow their visions and set an example for people of smaller faith. It was to Vissarion Shebalin that Shostakovich dedicated his String Quartet No. 2, composed in September 1944, a year after the war had thrown the two old friends together at the Moscow Conservatory.

In addition to being masterful revitalizations of hallowed Classical genres and forms, many of Shostakovich's important compositions are richly layered with meaning and reference. The String Quartet No. 2 is no exception. The score's dedication not only recognized the stalwart friendship of Vissarion Shebalin, but also acknowledged his place as one of the leading Soviet composers of string quartets. Though another name is not explicitly associated with the Second Quartet, that of Shostakovich's friend the critic and musicologist Ivan Sollertinsky, he is also evoked by its music. Sollertinsky died unexpectedly on February 11, 1944 (just five days after giving an introductory speech for a performance of Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony in Novosibirsk), and the Piano Trio No. 2 in E minor poured out of Shostakovich as a memorial tribute to him. The composer continued to vent his grief and loss in this Quartet, composed immediately after the Trio, most notably in the keening *Recitative* and in the melancholy descent from A major to A minor for the finale.

Any significant work written in the Soviet Union in 1944 could not be restricted to purely personal expression, however, but also had to address the broader issues of the war and the country's place in the international community. By September 1944, Allied victory was becoming increasingly assured, and Shostakovich mirrored the country's optimism and national spirit in the buoyant, folkish theme that opens the Quartet. Lurking behind this public confidence, however, Shostakovich saw the menacing figure of Stalin, who was even then positioning himself to reassert his stifling power over the country when the war was over, and he may have intended that the movement's

second theme—with its snapping dotted rhythms, hammered accents, and strange, squeezed crescendos on single notes (which Ian MacDonald, in his study of *The New Shostakovich*, suggested may represent "some mannerism of Stalin's personality or style of speech")—portray the barbarous dictator. That such a range of references could be molded into a finely balanced and logically developed Classical first-movement sonata form mark Shostakovich as not only one of the most proficient, but also one of the most subtle of modern artists.

MacDonald finds yet further associations in the second movement, a melancholy *Romance* framed at beginning and end by long violin recitatives: "Here, Shostakovich universalizes the predicament of persecuted Jewry [with whom he developed a deep sympathy during and after the war], mingling the voice of the cantor with that of the Bachian evangelist." The third movement is a spectral *Valse*, grown in its formal type from those of Tchaikovsky and Glazunov, but in its expressive character from the tragedy and pathos of the early war years. The finale begins with a solemn unison phrase that serves as an introduction to the set of variations on a somber, folk-like theme (borrowed from the Piano Trio No. 2) that comprises the main body of the movement. The variations grow increasingly more agitated until a kind of numbed calm is restored by the recall of the solemn introduction theme in long notes by the viola and cello. Both themes coexist for the remainder of the movement: perhaps indicating the sense of loss after five years of war; perhaps apprehensive at the fate of Russia when Stalin reclaims his full authority; perhaps, according to MacDonald, prophesying that "the People will overcome, will be avenged"; or—perhaps—just as the atmospheric close to a carefully crafted work of pure, abstract, "meaningless" music. Each listener must assess the delicate expressive balance that Shostakovich achieved here. Only great masterworks can be so personal, so universal and so profoundly ambiguous.

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THE JERUSALEM QUARTET (Alexander Pavlovsky and Sergei Bresler, *violins*; Ori Kam, *viola*; and Kyril Zlotnikov, *cello*), hailed by *The Strad* as “one of the young, yet great quartets of our time,” has garnered international acclaim for its rare combination of passion and precision. The ensemble has won audiences the world over, both in concert and on their recordings for the Harmonia Mundi label. They performed in North America in October 2013 and return in March 2014.

The Quartet performs regularly in Europe, with recent appearances at such venues as the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Herkulesaal in Munich, London’s Wigmore Hall, and the Cité de la Musique in Paris, as well as venues in Brussels, Antwerp, Gent, Lucerne, Dortmund, Perugia, Genoa, Siena, and Le Mans.

The Jerusalem Quartet is a record three-time recipient of *BBC Music Magazine’s* Chamber Music Award, most recently for

their CD of Mozart quartets (2012), as well as for their recordings of Haydn (2010) and Shostakovich (2007). The Quartet’s recording of Schubert’s *Death and the Maiden* and *Quartettsatz* in C minor was featured as an Editor’s Choice in the July 2008 edition of *Gramophone*, and was also awarded an ECHO Classic chamber music award in 2009. On their most recent recording, they perform Brahms and are joined by clarinetist Sharon Kam for the master’s Clarinet Quintet. *Gramophone* hailed the Quartet’s performance of Op. 51, No. 2, on that recording, saying, “Few command Brahms’s string quartets the way the Jerusalem do here.” The Quartet records exclusively for Harmonia Mundi.

In November 2007, the Quartet was awarded first prize in the “most impressive performance by a (small) ensemble” category of the Netherlands’ Vereniging van Schouwburgen en Concertgebouwdirecties. In 2003, they received the first Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and were part of the first ever BBC New Generation Artists scheme from 1999 to 2001.

The Jerusalem Quartet formed while its members were students at the Jerusalem Conservatory of Music and Dance. They quickly found a shared commitment to the music that has not only endured, but has propelled them to the highest level of performance. Ori Kam joined the group in 2011, upon the departure of founding violist Amihai Grosz.

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