**PROGRAM NOTES BY KEN MELTZER**

# JERUSALEM QUARTET

**Thursday, April 11 at 6 pm**
**Trinity United Methodist Church**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)**
**String Quartet No. 5 in A Major, Opus 18, No. 5 (1800)**
I. *Allegro*
II. *Menuetto*
III. *Andante cantabile*
IV. *Allegro*

**MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)**
**String Quartet in F Major (1903)**
I. *Allegro moderato—Très doux*
II. *Assez vif—Très rythmé*
III. *Très lent*
IV. *Vif et agité*

INTERMISSION

**DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)**
**String Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Opus 73 (1946)**
I. *Allegretto*
II. *Moderato con moto*
III. *Allegro non troppo*
IV. *Adagio*
V. *Moderato—Adagio*

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

## String Quartet No. 5 in A Major, Opus 18, No. 5 (1800)

**Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827.**

*Approximate performance time is 30 minutes.*
*SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

Ludwig van Beethoven composed his first six String Quartets between 1798 and 1800. The six Quartets, published collectively as Beethoven's Opus 18, were dedicated to Prince Joseph Lobkowitz. The publication of the Opus 18 Quartets in a set of six is significant. Beethoven's teacher, Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) habitually published his String Quartets in groups of six. In 1785, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) dedicated a series of Quartets to Haydn. They, too, were published as a collection of six. And with regard to Beethoven's Opus 18, No. 5, in A Major, it's worth noting this recollection by pianist and composer Carl Czerny:

> Once, in my house, Beethoven saw the scores of the six Mozart Quartets. He opened the 5th in A (K. 464) and said "That is a work! In it Mozart said to the world: 'See what I could create if the time had come for you!'"

In addition to being set in the same key as Mozart's K. 464, Beethoven's Opus 18, No. 5, replicates the earlier Quartet's structure of two quick-tempo movements (in sonata form) framing a minuet, and theme and variations. And the character of much of the music in Beethoven's A Major mirrors the character and traditions of his great Vienna Classical-era predecessors. Nevertheless, such "Early Period" works as the Opus 18 Quartets, the Symphony No. 1 (1800), and the "Pathétique" (1798), and "Moonlight" (1801) Piano Sonatas offer tantalizing glimpses of the stunning, dramatic contrasts, and brilliant thematic manipulation that are hallmarks of the revolutionary voice that would soon forever change the course of music.

I. *Allegro*—A *forte* chord launches the playful initial theme, set in a tripping 6/8 meter. The contrasting second theme, opening in the minor, has a darker hue. The exposition's closing episode returns to the cheerful mood of the opening theme. The brief development section focuses (albeit not exclusively) on the closing episode. A recapitulation of the principal themes culminates in a pair of *forte* chords.

II. *Menuetto*—The second movement is a *Minuet*, a dance in triple meter. For the better part, the music radiates the kind of elegance and ease typically associated with this court dance. But a forceful sequence, culminating in a measure of silence, injects a moment of turbulence. The central *Trio* evokes an organ grinder or bagpipes. The movement concludes with a reprise of the *Minuet*.

III. *Andante cantabile*—The first violin leads the introduction of an elegant falling and rising theme that serves as the basis for five variations. Beethoven explores a wide range of moods and instrument colors, with the most striking juxtaposition occurring between the hushed introspection of Variation IV, and the bold, joyful statement of Variation V. A coda builds to an emphatic statement, followed by the final *Poco Adagio* episode that brings the movement to a *pianissimo* resolution.

IV. *Allegro*—The viola introduces a four-note motif, the basis for a lively exchange between the members of the quartet. The second principal theme, too, grows out of four notes, but here in the form of a broad and noble chorale. Both themes appear in the vibrant development episode. The coda offers a beehive of activity before finally resolving (as in the Mozart Quartet, K. 464) to a hushed conclusion.

## String Quartet in F Major (1903)

**Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France, on March 7, 1875, and died in Paris, France, on December 28, 1937.**

*Approximate performance time is 28 minutes.*
*SMF performance history: 3/30/15, 3/31/11*

Maurice Ravel began his String Quartet in late 1902, completing the work in 1903. At the time, Ravel was still a student at the Paris Conservatory. Ravel dedicated the work to his teacher at the Conservatoire, French composer Gabriel Fauré. Ravel commented: "My String Quartet represents a conception of musical construction, imperfectly realized, no doubt, but set out much more precisely than in my earlier compositions."

According to Ravel's friend and biographer, Roland-Manuel:

> Contrary to his practice, he submitted his work to the judgment of his friends, and the criticism of the master to whom it was dedicated. Fauré did not mince matters. He found the fourth movement stunted, badly balanced, in fact, a failure. In the end, (Claude) Debussy was asked for his opinion, and he reassured and congratulated the younger man, writing him a solemn injunction: "In the name of the gods of music, and in mine, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your Quartet."

The premiere of the Ravel String Quartet took place in Paris on March 5, 1904, played by the Quatour Heymann as part of a Société Nationale concert. Many critics noted the influence of Debussy's path-breaking Quartet in G minor, Opus 10 (1893). Pierre Lalo, writing for *Le Temps*, commented: "In its harmonies, its sonority and form...in all the sensations which it evokes, it offers an incredible similarity to the music of Monsieur Debussy." Jean Marnold, critic for *Mercure de France*, agreed: "Its new and delicious harmony evokes that of Claude Debussy." But, Marnold added: "You should remember the name of Maurice Ravel. It is the name of one of the masters of the future."

I. *Allegro moderato—Très doux*—The opening movement begins with the first violin leading the introduction of the beautiful and serene initial principal theme (note Ravel's addition of the direction, "very sweetly," to the *Allegro moderato* tempo marking). An extended and varied presentation of the melody by the ensemble leads to the second, triplet-based principal melody (*très expressif*), introduced two octaves apart by the first violin and viola. The melodies intertwine, leading to a mysterious development section that journeys inexorably to a *fff* climax. The mood calms, setting the stage for the *pianissimo* start of the recapitulation of the central themes. Portions of the two principal themes once again combine in the closing measures. The tranquil dénouement features delicate pizzicato chords accompanying the first violin.

II. *Assez vif—Très rythmé*—The outer portions of the Quartet's scherzo movement feature a remarkable synthesis of quicksilver energy and an extraordinary range of instrumental colors. A high-flying melody (*bien chanté*) soon introduced by the first violin, incorporates the triplet motif from the opening movement's second principal theme. The hushed central slow-tempo episode (*Lent*) features muted strings, a kaleidoscope of colors, and a melody that also features the triplet motif. A brief reprise of the opening scherzo races to a terse finish.

III. *Très lent*—The slow-tempo movement opens with a mysterious introduction played by muted strings. The first violin soon introduces a lovely melody (*Très calme*), related to the opening movement's first principal theme. The second principal theme also plays an important role in this movement. As in the preceding scherzo, Ravel employs an arresting variety of instrumental colors, now at the service of poignant, affecting music that journeys to a sublime conclusion.

IV. *Vif et agité*—The finale opens with a violent *fortissimo* outburst by the ensemble, resolving to a sequence of arresting energy and forward momentum. The first violin introduces two lyrical melodies, again related to their counterparts in the opening movement. The remainder of the finale juxtaposes these vibrant and lyrical elements, with the former emerging triumphant in the arresting concluding bars.

## String Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Opus 73 (1946)

**Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, on September 25, 1906, and died in Moscow, Russia, on August 9, 1975.**

*Approximate performance time is 35 minutes.*
*SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

Dmitri Shostakovich composed two Symphonies during World War II. The Seventh ("Leningrad") (1941) and Eighth (1943) Symphonies are epic works, each lasting over an hour. Both of the Shostakovich wartime symphonies are gripping musical portraits of the suffering of the Russian people during those horrific years.

But as the War progressed, the fortunes of the Soviets greatly improved. In November of 1944, Shostakovich wrote:

> What are my dreams today, as I think about the future of the arts in the Soviet Union?
>
> I have a dream—common, I should think to every Soviet artist—of creating a large-scale work which will express the powerful feelings we have today. I think that the epigraph to all our work in the next few years will be the simple but glorious word, "Victory."

Many anticipated that Shostakovich's "dream" would manifest itself in his next Symphony, the Ninth. Shostakovich confided to a friend: "I would like to write it for chorus and solo singers as well as an orchestra if I could find suitable material for the book and if I were not afraid that I might be suspected of wanting to draw immodest analogies." Here, Shostakovich was referring to another Ninth, Beethoven's magnificent "Choral" Symphony (1824).

In January of 1945, Shostakovich began work on his Ninth Symphony. The composer shared some of the score with his associates. They described it as "powerful, victorious major music in a vigorous tempo," and "majestic in scale, in pathos, in its breathtaking motion."

But by the early spring of 1945, Shostakovich put the work aside. Abandoning the music he had written up to that point, Shostakovich recommenced the Ninth in July of that year. Shostakovich completed his Ninth Symphony on August 30, and the work received its premiere in Leningrad on November 3, 1945, with Evgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic.

Those who had expected the Shostakovich Ninth to emulate Beethoven's "Choral" Symphony were stunned. Instead of an epic score with chorus and vocal soloists, the Shostakovich Ninth features conventional orchestral forces, and runs about 25 minutes. Rather than displaying a grandiose form of expression, much of the music is lighthearted, sometimes evoking the circus or silent film comedies.

In the 1979 book *Testimony*: *The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, Solomon Volkov quotes

the Russian composer as follows on the Ninth Symphony:

> Everyone praised Stalin, and now I was supposed to join in this unholy affair. There was an appropriate excuse. We had ended the war victoriously; no matter the cost, the important thing was that we won, the empire had expanded. And they demanded that Shostakovich use quadruple winds, choir, and soloists to hail their leader. All the more because Stalin found the number auspicious: the Ninth Symphony.
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> Stalin always listened to experts and specialists carefully. The experts told him I knew my work and therefore Stalin assumed that the symphony in his honor would be a quality piece of music. He would be able to say, There it is, our national Ninth.
>
> I confess that I gave hope to the leader and the teacher's dreams. I announced that I was writing an apotheosis. I was trying to get them off my back but it turned against me. When my Ninth was performed, Stalin was incensed. He was deeply offended, because there was no chorus, no soloists. And no apotheosis. There wasn't even a paltry dedication. It was just music, which Stalin didn't understand very well and which was of dubious content…
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> I couldn't write an apotheosis to Stalin, I simply couldn't. I knew what I was in for when I wrote the Ninth.

It was in the wake of these events that Shostakovich began work on his Third String Quartet, composing the piece between January 26 and August 2, 1946. The premiere took place in Moscow on December 16, 1946, performed by the Beethoven String Quartet.

The Third Quartet is in five movements. When Shostakovich originally created the work, he assigned descriptive titles to each:

I. "Calm unawareness of the future cataclysm"

II. "Rumblings of unrest and anticipation"

III. "The forces of war are unleashed"

IV. "Homage for the Dead"

V. "Why, and for what?"

Shostakovich eventually deleted these titles, and they do not appear in the published score. As with many of Shostakovich's compositions, it remains for the listener to try to discern Shostakovich's message. Does the Third String Quartet depict the horrors of life during wartime, or under Stalin (or perhaps, neither, or both)? Regardless, it is clear that Shostakovich was deeply attached to this Quartet. After completing the work, Shostakovich wrote to Sergei Shirinsky, the Beethoven Quartet's cellist: "It seems to me that I have never been so pleased with one of my works as with this quartet. Probably I am mistaken, but for the time being this is exactly how I feel." Fyodor Druzhinin, who joined the Beethoven Quartet as its violist in 1964, recounted a rehearsal of the Third Quartet, with Shostakovich in attendance. Shostakovich promised to stop the rehearsal if he had any comments to offer. But as each movement concluded, Shostakovich waved his hands and exhorted: "Keep playing!" At the conclusion of the entire Quartet, Shostakovich "sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face. This was the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenseless."

I. *Allegretto*—The first violin, over repeated accompaniment by the remainder of the quartet, sings the carefree first principal theme. The second theme, by contrast, is broader and more subdued. The exposition's closing episode combines elements of both themes. The development section features brilliant contrapuntal treatment of the thematic material. The traditional recapitulation of the principal themes leads to the scurrying final measures, capped by a pair of playful chords.

II. *Moderato con moto*—The lighthearted mood of the opening movement now gives way to sardonic humor. The first violin, over a lumbering viola figure, plays a tripping melody. Cast in triple meter, the second movement is in the spirit of a *danse macabre*, exploring a wide range of moods and instrumental colors. The viola's mournful refrain leads to the hushed closing measures.

III. *Allegro non troppo*—The third movement, alternating 2/4 and 3/4 time signatures, features music of irrepressible energy and ominous force.

IV. *Adagio*—The penultimate movement is a *passacaglia*, a Baroque musical structure in which a repeated sequence serves as the foundation for various episodes. In the Third Quartet's *Adagio*, that sequence is immediately proclaimed, *fortissimo*, by the second violin, viola, and cello. The first violin's mournful proclamation sets the stage for the heartbreaking introspection that pervades throughout. The viola's repeated statement leads, without pause, to the final movement.

V. *Moderato—Adagio*—The cello, to pizzicato viola accompaniment, plays a winding theme in 6/8 time. The first violin soon incorporates the theme, and later, introduces a soaring, dance melody. A shift of key to A Major, and a time signature of 2/4, heralds a more rustic episode. A varied reprise of the finale's opening section builds to a harrowing climax, punctuated by the return of the fourth movement's *passacaglia* sequence. The mood calms, as echoes of previous moments in the finale resolve to the closing bars (*Adagio*). The first violin's soaring plea concludes with three hushed pizzicato chords.