



short bio

Praised for their “superb capacity to find the inner heart of everything they play, regardless of era, style or technical demand” (*The International Review of Music*), the Tesla Quartet brings refinement and prowess to both new and established repertoire. Dubbed “technically superb” by *The Strad*, the Tesla Quartet recently took Second Prize as well as the Haydn Prize and Canadian Commission Prize at the 12th Banff International String Quartet Competition. The quartet has also garnered top prizes at numerous other international competitions, including the 2012 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, the 6th International Joseph Haydn Chamber Music Competition in Vienna, and the 2012 London International String Quartet Competition. *The London Evening Standard* called their rendition of the Debussy Quartet “a subtly coloured performance that balanced confidently between intimacy and extraversion.”

Having recently completed their tenure as the Marjorie Young Bell String Quartet-in-Residence at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Canada, the Tesla Quartet also holds a community residency in Hickory, North Carolina that includes performances and workshops at local colleges, universities, and in the public school system, as well as a dedicated chamber music series. The quartet performs regularly across North America, with recent international appearances in London, Vienna, Beijing, Shanghai, and Seoul. The 2017-18 season includes debut performances in Germany and Hungary, concerts across America, and a residency with the Quad City Visiting Artist Series.

Inspired by Nikola Tesla’s words, “Though free to think and act, we are held together, like the stars in the firmament, with ties inseparable,” the Tesla Quartet views music as this incredible, binding force, and strives to create meaningful connections with their audiences. The Tesla Quartet is Ross Snyder (violin), Michelle Lie (violin), Edwin Kaplan (viola), and Serafim Smigelskiy (cello).



PHOTO BY DARIO ACOSTA

press

“The Tesla players...offered an impressive program of music reaching across centuries of compositional creativity. And they did so with a superb capacity to find the inner heart of everything they played, regardless of era, style or technical demand.”
–Don Heckman, *The International Review of Music*

“The Tesla Quartet (US) followed with Debussy’s String Quartet, the fleeting atmospheres of which have defeated some of the world’s finest. This was a subtly coloured performance that balanced confidently between intimacy and extraversion. A real sense of four players listening to each other did not obstruct a natural rapport with the audience.”
–*London Evening Standard*

“Impassioned interpretation was the rule throughout...There were many refined moments of sweet repose too, particularly in the coda that were given duly sensitive treatment by the ensemble, an important contrast that helped to display the many sides of Brahms’s musical personality...[The ensemble] handled it all with an astute combination of power and grace, shifting gears seamlessly throughout the manifold textures.”
–Stephan Bonfield, *Calgary Herald*

“There was poise, mystery and elegance in the first movement, and playing in the second that was at once strong and delicate, the staccato perfectly judged to both speak and bite, the fortissimo outbursts raw and vehement...The Tesla was technically superb in Debussy’s Quartet, its performance full of urgency, colour and subtle dynamics. This was a masterclass in quartet technique, with great momentum in the last movement.” –*The Strad*

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program offerings

PROVOCATEURS

If not for the nearly 100 years and 1,000 miles that separated them, Joseph Haydn and Sergei Prokofiev might very well have been friends, or at the very least musical compatriots. In their works we find kindred spirits who revel in the role of “provocateur,” toying with the listener’s musical sensibilities to create moments of unexpected confusion and imbalance, all the while crafting undeniably charming and attractive melodies and textures. In this program we present Prokofiev’s only two quartets set against two of Haydn’s 68.

Haydn’s B Minor quartet from Opus 33 is one of a set of six works with which the composer meant to herald a new era of style in the classical age, including the first “scherzos” (literally “jokes”) and written “in a completely new and peculiar way.” The F Major quartet of Opus 50 is more classically refined but still maintains his characteristic witty and rhetorical hallmarks. Prokofiev’s first Quartet is striking in that it omits one of the four standard movements and further subverts the expected structure by placing the finale in the middle and ending with the slow movement. His second Quartet was a product of his time spent in safe-keeping in the Caucasus during World War II and the folk music archives he discovered there.



Works to be performed on the “Provocateurs” program include:

Prokofiev, *String Quartet No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 50*

Haydn, *String Quartet in F Major, Op. 50 No. 5*

Haydn, *String Quartet in B Minor, Op. 33 No. 1*

Prokofiev, *String Quartet in F Major, Op. 92 “On Kabardinian Themes”*

INSIDE-OUT/SIDE-IN

This program explores the ways we communicate through our instruments and music. All four composers’ works appear on the surface to be simple in harmony and texture. However, when we look deeper into these works, we find that each composer has arrived from a completely different path. Arvo Pärt says that “music must exist of itself...two, three notes...the essence must be there, independent of the instruments.” Pärt seeks the meaning of music from inside out, resulting in the simple and pure sonorities of *Fratres*.

Meanwhile, John Luther Adams’ *The Wind in High Places* portrays the icy stillness from the landscape and the weather of the Great North, Alaska where he has spent many years. His “outside in” approach signifies the personal style of his music.

Samy Moussa’s String Quartet explores the inherent complexity sound contained in a single note. Suddenly a G is not a G, but a collection of frequencies and overtones that combine to create a rich and vivid sonic ecosystem. In this music the simplicity on the surface belies the complexity within.

The music of Philip Glass is instantly recognizable for its use of repetitive patterns that oscillate between triadic harmonies. However, in his fifth String Quartet, he ventures beyond his traditional minimalist roots, using formal structures and expressive contrasts. While he maintains his unmistakable personal style, this quartet delivers his personal maturity in understanding music. He says, “I was thinking that I had really gone beyond the need to write a serious string quartet and that I could write a quartet that is about musicality, which in a certain way is the most serious subject.” In this quartet, he demonstrates the musical inspiration derived from within itself.

Works to be performed on the “Inside-Out/side-In” program include:

Pärt, *Fratres*

Adams (John Luther), *The Wind in High Places*

Moussa, *String Quartet*

Glass, *String Quartet No. 5*



program offerings (cont.)



BREAKING WITH TRADITION

Before Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartók, Debussy was the first major composer to radically break from the continuous evolution of 19th century Romantic music from Beethoven to Wagner. Reacting against the dominant influence of Germanic music with its logical rigors of form and development, he sought a new music of color, sensation, fleeting mood, and relaxed form that would be distinctively French. Ironically, in this early work, Debussy still relies heavily on the cyclical thematic form that had been a staple of Germanic music for almost a century.

Szymanowski's music also explores post-Wagnerian, French Lyricism. Before this composition, he refused to write a string quartet because he felt there was "not enough timbre" in the instrumentation. However, inspired by Impressionists like Debussy and Ravel, he decided to face the challenge, and the result is in "harmonic experiment." Of particular originality is the polytonal finale, in which each instrument plays in a different key.

Respighi understood the string quartet form very clearly, as he himself was a member of a professional string quartet for a long time. His String Quartet in D was written fairly early on in his career, but he did not fail to demonstrate a rich command of harmony with the intimate and warm romantic sonority built on cyclical form.

These three pieces by French, Polish, Italian composers bring the string quartet genre to a new level by experimenting with post-Wagnerian harmonic structure and beautifully lyrical melodies.

Works to be performed on the "Breaking With Tradition" program include:

Szymanowski, *String Quartet No. 1 in C Major, Op. 37*

Debussy, *String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10*

Respighi, *String Quartet in D Major*

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

At every composer's passing, we are left with a single work we consider to be their final Opus. In most cases, composers are not even aware of their impending departure. However, the romantic notion of some musical genius on his deathbed furiously penning on staves of parchment his last will and testament is nevertheless an alluring one. Such thinking is unavoidable in the case of Beethoven's last completed work, Op. 135. Its final movement, the answer achieved with great difficulty, asks the question "Must it be?" and answers, "It must be." Such philosophical musing is what coaxes us into thinking of this piece as some ultimate life statement.

Heitor Villa-Lobos' 17th String Quartet is the last of his completed instrumental works, and was written two years prior to his death. He continued to work on various projects after this quartet including a film score that did make it to screen. However, with mental illness fast encroaching upon his faculties, Villa-Lobos could no longer sustain the prolific pace of his earlier years. Of the three composers on this program, it is Britten who is perhaps most aware of his fast approaching demise. The 3rd String Quartet was written during Britten's final illness and as his health faded he continued to tinker with the composition. In the weeks leading up to his passing, Britten workshopped the quartet in Aldeburgh with the Amadeus Quartet. The somber tone of the piece interspersed with ecstatic outbursts and moments of playfulness reveal Britten's conflicted emotions as he nears his end.

Works to be performed on the "Famous Last Words" program include:

Beethoven, *String Quartet in F Major, Op. 135*

Villa-Lobos, *String Quartet No. 17*

Britten, *String Quartet No. 3*



additional offerings

INTRODUCTION TO A STRING QUARTET (K-5 OFFERING)

Tesla offers an introduction to a String Quartet, with delightful examples, demonstrations of the role of each instrument, discussions of musical jokes, and more.

MUSIC AND ART (K-5 OFFERING)

Students can create works of art (drawing, painting, etc.) while watching/listening to a musical performance. This program allows children to express their emotional reactions to the music in a more abstract way than with words, which can sometimes be difficult or limiting. Students can then share their artwork with their peers and discuss their unique perceptions of the music.

HOW TO PLAY IN AN ENSEMBLE

This workshop is like a coaching or master class but focuses on learning to play together in an ensemble of any size. Attention is paid to communication, balance, cueing, blending sound, rehearsal etiquette, etc. The ensemble will have music prepared to work on with Tesla members.

IMPRESSIONISM IN ART AND MUSIC

For more advanced art students, Tesla can discuss parallels between Impressionism in the visual arts and music with examples of Monet and Ravel. Topics include subject matter, light/shadow, color palette, tonality/modality, and compositional techniques.

MASTER CLASS AND CHAMBER MUSIC COACHING

The Tesla Quartet is delighted to share their knowledge through teaching. A master class can last one to two hours, depending on the number of groups involved, and Tesla will give ensembles the opportunity to play a movement of their choice. Through detailed attention to the score, the Tesla Quartet will help guide students in discovering and highlighting the character of the music in addition to addressing more technical issues such as ensemble performance, intonation, and balance. Members of the quartet can also provide individual coaching to groups in a more private setting.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

The Tesla Quartet is happy to offer community enrichment programs for a variety of audiences. Tesla has an extensive background bringing their music to schools, libraries, retirement and assisted living centers, coffee shops, and even public transit terminals. The quartet presents exciting and informative programs that can be tailored to a particular venue or audience. Typical programs include introducing the instruments and classical music to young children, storytelling through music, and lecture/performances on specific repertoire. Through these programs, the Tesla Quartet aims not only to educate, but to excite the creative potential of the listeners.

