

## **Dover Quartet and Avi Avital**

**Saturday, February 11, 2017 at 8:00 pm**

**Pre-concert Conversation at 7:15 pm**

This is the 693rd concert in Koerner Hall

### **Dover Quartet**

**Joel Link**, violin

**Bryan Lee**, violin

**Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt**, viola

**Camden Shaw**, cello

**Avi Avital**, mandolin

### **PROGRAM**

Sulkhan Tsintsadze: Six Miniatures for String Quartet and Mandolin

Bedřich Smetana: String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life"

- I. Allegro vivo appassionato
- II. Allegro moderato a la polka
- III. Largo sostenuto
- IV. Vivace

### **INTERMISSION**

Johann Sebastian Bach: Chaconne from Partita in D Minor for Violin, BWV 1004

David Bruce: *Cymbeline*, for string quartet and mandolin (Canadian premiere)

*Sunrise*

*Noon*

*Sunset*

*Please join us for a postlude performance in the Leslie & Anna Dan Galleria.*

String Concert series generously supported by

**David G. Broadhurst**

Media partner

**[Classical 96 FM logo]**

## **Sulkhan Tsintsadze**

Born in Gori, Georgia, USSR, August 23, 1925; died in Tbilisi, Georgia, November 15, 1991

### **Six Miniatures for String Quartet and Mandolin (1945-55)**

String quartets form the backbone of Georgian composer and teacher Sulkhan Tsintsadze's compositions. He wrote his first at the age of 23 as a student at the Tbilisi Conservatory, while also performing professionally as cellist with the Georgian State String Quartet and Symphony Orchestra. His 12th came almost a half century later, in 1991.

Tbilisi, a city at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, witnessed much political and cultural change over the five decades of Tsintsadze's career and it is reflected in his music. His three cycles of Miniatures for string quartet include

some of his earliest compositions where the folk influence is uppermost. Bartók is the composer who most frequently comes to mind when hearing Tsintsadze's expertly crafted, modally coloured, often epigrammatic Miniatures. The music of both Bartók and Shostakovich – to whom he dedicated his Seventh (1970) and Ninth (1978) Quartets respectively – subsequently helped the Georgian composer forge a distinctive voice beyond the confining needs of socialist realism. His early Miniatures, from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, often incorporate striking bowed and plucked string sonorities, a fertile imagination, and the craft of a composer who brings an insider's knowledge to his writing.

## **Bedřich Smetana**

Born in Litomyšl, Bohemia, March 2, 1824; died in Prague, Czech Republic, May 12, 1884

### **String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life" (1876)**

"I wanted to paint a tone picture of my life," Smetana wrote, not long after composing his first string quartet. That life was full of hardship for a composer who, along with Antonín Dvořák, is often acclaimed as the father of Czech music. Smetana came face-to-face with tragedy early in life. After marrying his childhood sweetheart, Kateřina Kolářová, in 1847, three of their four daughters died in infancy before Kateřina herself succumbed to tuberculosis. 10 years later, when he came to write the first of his two string quartets, Smetana himself was completely deaf, the result of a general physical decline due to advancing syphilis.

He wrote about the quartet in a letter, on February 10, 1879: "The first movement depicts my youthful leanings towards art, the Romantic atmosphere, the inexpressible yearning for something I could neither express nor define, also a kind of premonition of my future misfortune. The long, insistent note in the finale owes its origins to this. It is the fateful ringing in my ears of the high-pitched tones [a piercing E, high on the first violin] which, in 1874, came to herald my deafness. I permitted myself this little joke because it was so disastrous to me.

The second movement, a quasi-polka, recalls the joyful days of my youth when I composed dance tunes and was known everywhere as a passionate lover of dancing. The third movement ... reminds me of the happiness of my first love, the girl who later became my first wife. The fourth movement describes the discovery that I could treat national elements in music and my joy in following this path, until it was checked by the catastrophe of the onset of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery; but, remembering all the promise of my early career, a feeling of painful regret."

At the first, private, performance of the quartet, in Prague in 1878, the viola part was taken by the 37-year-old Dvořák. Unable to hear, Smetana closely followed the finger movements of the musicians from the side of the stage through opera glasses. Subsequent public performances of this intensely personal score began a tradition of deeply autobiographical Czech chamber compositions.

## **Johann Sebastian Bach**

Born in Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; died in Leipzig, Germany, July 28, 1750

### **Chaconne from Partita in D Minor for Violin, BWV 1004 (by 1720)**

Bach's magnificent, stately Chaconne first appeared as the crowning movement of the D Minor Partita for solo violin. A chaconne is, traditionally, a Baroque dance and instrumental form presenting a sequence of continuous variations on a four-bar phrase. Its origins, appropriately enough, lie in 17<sup>th</sup> century lute music, song, and dance. The 64 variations of Bach's Chaconne for solo violin have challenged both performers and arrangers for almost three centuries. As a non-violinist, Brahms felt that he could only truly appreciate what he called "one of the most wonderful and most incomprehensible pieces of music," by transcribing it for piano, left hand. Avi Avital is not alone in wanting to share the beauties of one of the very finest polyphonic movements for a solo instrument to come from Bach's pen.

## **David Bruce**

Born in Stamford, Connecticut, in 1970

### **Cymbeline, for string quartet and mandolin (2013) (Canadian premiere)**

American-born, but UK-raised, David Bruce now has a thriving career on both continents. While composer-in-residence with the Royal Opera House in London, his opera *Nothing* had its premiere at Glyndebourne one year ago to critical acclaim. The production was scheduled to be repeated just last week in Denmark. One of four commissions

for Carnegie Hall is *Gumboots* (2008), written for the St. Lawrence String Quartet and Todd Palmer. *Cymbeline* was composed four years ago for Avi Avital to a commission from the San Diego Symphony, with whom Bruce was composer-in-residence at the time. Taking its title from an old Celtic word meaning 'Lord of the Sun,' *Cymbeline* evolved from the composer's association of a golden colour with the combined sounds of mandolin and strings. David Bruce takes the idea further: "The sun was one of the first objects of worship," he writes, "and it has been surmised that the idea of a holy trinity (found not just in Christianity, but in numerous earlier religions) relates to the three distinct positions of the sun: sunrise (=father), noon (=son), and sunset (=spirit). Sunrise is 'the father of the day.' Midday represents the fullness of energy, the son. And sunset is a time for contemplation and reflection, the spirit. To me, these three states represent not just 'father, son, and spirit' but also, perhaps, the reflection upon an action about to happen (sunrise), the action itself (noon), and the reflection on the action that happened (sunset)."

*Cymbeline* is in three movements with two hypnotically-drawn, reflective outer movements enclosing an energetic, exuberant midday dance of joy. "I see the piece as a contemplation of our relationship with this fiery giver of life, whose significance to us is often overlooked in the modern world, but who still really does rule over us all," Bruce says.

- Program notes © 2016 Keith Horner

## Dover Quartet

The Dover Quartet's rise from up-and-coming young ensemble to occupying a spot at the top of their field has been "practically meteoric." (*Strings*) Catapulted to prominence after sweeping the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, the group has become a major presence on the international scene. With its burnished warmth, incisive rhythms, and natural phrasing, the Quartet's distinctive sound has helped confirm its status as "the young American string quartet of the moment." (*The New Yorker*)

In the 2016-17 season, the Dover Quartet will release its all-Mozart debut recording, undertake complete Beethoven quartet cycles for the first time, and perform over 100 concerts around the world. During the 2015-16 season, the Quartet performed more than 120 dates around the world, including debuts at Carnegie Hall, Yale University, the Lucerne Festival, and as part of the Lincoln Center "Great Performers" series.

Hailed as "the next Guarneri Quartet" (*Chicago Tribune*), the Dover Quartet draws from the lineage of that distinguished ensemble, as well as that of the Cleveland and Vermeer Quartets; its members studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, where they were mentored extensively by Shmuel Ashkenasi, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. It was at Curtis that the Quartet first formed, and its name pays tribute to *Dover Beach* by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber. The group has since returned for residencies to Rice in 2011-13 and to Curtis, where it became the conservatory's first quartet-in-residence, in 2013-14.

## Avi Avital

### Mandolin

The first mandolin soloist to be nominated for a classical Grammy Award, Avi Avital is one of the foremost ambassadors for his instrument. More than 90 contemporary compositions, 15 of them concertos, have been written for him, while his inspired re-imaginings of music for other instruments include the arrangements heard on his 2015 ECHO Klassik Award-winning Deutsche Grammophon recording, *Vivaldi*.

Avital's unprecedented Grammy nomination honours his recording of Avner Dorman's Mandolin Concerto, a work he commissioned in 2006. As the first mandolin soloist to become an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, he has made two recordings for the label to date besides *Vivaldi*: his 2012 debut, featuring his own Bach concerto transcriptions, and the 2014 album, *Between Worlds*.

Recent highlights include dates in Beijing, London, Berlin, Zurich, Barcelona, and Paris. In spring 2016, Avital undertook an international tour with a program of arrangements for mandolin, accordion, and percussion drawn primarily from *Between Worlds*. After more than 70 performances in Europe, Asia, and South America, the extensive U.S. portion of the tour took him from coast to coast and was capped by appearances in Boston's Celebrity Series, at the National Gallery in Washington, DC, and at Manhattan's 92nd Street Y.

Avital has partnered leading artists in a variety of genres and a host of international orchestras, and is a favourite on the international festival circuit, having appeared at the Aspen, Salzburg, Tanglewood, Spoleto, Ravenna, and Verbier festivals, among many others.

*All artists are making their Royal Conservatory debuts tonight.*