

Mandelring Quartet

Sebastian Schmidt - *violin* • Nanette Schmidt - *violin*
Andreas Willwohl- *viola* • Bernhard Schmidt – *violoncello*

“A quartet’s quartet, matching technical finesse with insightful interpretation.” - [Vancouver Sun](#)

The Mandelring Quartet’s remarkable homogeneity of sound, intonation and phrasing has become its distinguishing characteristic: four individuals who play as one in their shared determination to always seek out the innermost core of the music and remain open to the musical truth. By grasping the spiritual dimension, exploring the emotional extremes and working on the details, these musicians probe far beneath the surface of each work, revealing the multiplicity of meanings inherent in each. One of the highest-profile ensembles on the international chamber music scene, the Mandelring Quartet’s approach to music is always both emotional and personal.

Critics agree. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* declared the Mandelring Quartet a worthy successor to the Alban Berg Quartet. Writing of their Shostakovich cycle at the Salzburg Festival, the leading Austrian arts magazine, *Die Bühne*, named the Mandelrings the heir of the legendary Borodin Quartet. *Fono Forum* magazine counts it as one of the world’s six best string quartets.

Based in the German wine region in Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, the three Schmidt siblings joined with violist Roland Glassl in a partnership dedicated to exemplary performances of chamber music. Their success in winning some of the world’s great competitions – Munich (ARD), Evian and Reggio Emilia (Premio Paolo Borciani) – started the Mandelring Quartet on their international career. In addition to performances in Germany, concert tours take them throughout Europe (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Brussels, Copenhagen, London, Madrid, Milan, Paris, Vienna), to North America (New York, Washington D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, Vancouver, Montreal), to Asia (Osaka, Tokyo), Central and South America (Bueno Aires, Lima, Montevideo), and the Middle East, including recent appearances in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. .

The Mandelring Quartet has enjoyed appearances at the Rheingau Festival, the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, and the international festivals in Lockenhaus, Montpellier, Montreal, Ottawa, the Engadiner Konzertwochen in Switzerland and the Salzburg Festival, where they presented the complete cycle of Shostakovich string quartets over 2-days in summer 2011.

The ensemble’s numerous CD and SuperAudio CD recordings have received the German Record Critics’ Prize and been nominated for the Midem Classical Award. Their more than three-dozen recordings include Schubert’s string quartet cycle, piano quintets of Brahms and Franck, chamber works by the French composer Georges Onslow (nominated for *Cannes Classical Award*), the complete string quartets of Janacek, and the complete chamber music for strings by Mendelssohn for the Audite label. The Mandelrings received the *Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik* for their Berthold Goldschmidt recording, and their recording of the complete Shostakovich string quartets has been hailed by specialist press as one of the outstanding complete sets of our time.

The Mandelring Quartet has presented a regular concert series since 2010 in the Chamber Music Hall of the Berlin Philharmonie and in its hometown of Neustadt on Germany’s Weinstrasse. The HAMBACHER*Musik*FEST, the quartet's festival, is a meeting point for lovers of chamber music from all over the world. Founded in 1997 under the Mandelring Quartet's artistic direction, the

international festival takes place annually in the celebrated castle at Hambach on Germany's Weinstrasse, a picturesque setting among the vineyards. The ensemble invites eminent soloists from Germany and abroad to perform with them in collaborative programs using widely diverse instrumental combinations. *December 2017: Please discard any previously printed materials*

THE PRESS

Great string music “A cohesive ensemble formed immediately. The tender passages were convincing and captivating. One needs to also praise the absolute cleanliness of the sound, even in the furious conclusion. They played up to the highest standard here. It became clear how the voices depend on each other - the highly motivated players gave the music elegant momentum. At the close there was long-lasting applause, grateful for a great concert.”
Schleswig-Holstein Zeitung – Nov. 22, 2017

“The Mandelrings offered Wolf's ‘Serenade’ with wit, lightness and the stage presence that distinguishes a world-class ensemble. All the evangelical spirits gathered together and pacified each other in Brahms' Op. 51/2. There was huge applause and, as an encore, the pizzicato movement from Ravel's Quartet.”
- Süddeutsch Zeitung – May 31, 2017

“The Mandelring Quartet is praised for being one of the best quartets in the world. Clean, strikingly clear and tempo rich, they never stop searching for the core of the music. Breathing crescendo arches and amber shimmering timbre. Each voice is doubly occupied as a sense of symphonic sound passes through the hall. Loud cheering.” - Der Tagesspiel – May 3

Worldclass: Absolutely great music in Bad Urach:

“The hall offered a close-up musical experience for the well-attended performance. Only four strings, but the basis for inspired interplay. First with Haydn, they show their fine sense for ensemble and for the content of the music – lustful, virtuosic, always precisely controlled, supported by secure technique, balance and elaborate articulation, sensitively led by principal violinist Sebastian Schmidt. The humorous and solid presentation is convincing. Schubert's String Quartet in A minor also transmitted almost physically to the listeners up to the ecstatic finale with nuance-rich articulation – the more than 30 minutes pass by as if in flight. Beethoven's Op. 59/2 must have had a ‘new music’ effect on its contemporaries, with feeling transferred from the Mandelring Quartet for the full work. An enormous musical force is demanded and felt, partly finely chiseled, partly in broad strokes. In the end, raging in the whirlwind of the dance finale – pushed to the limits of madness. After the closing sound: lively applause.” -
Südwest Presse – April 9, 2017

Südwest Presse interviewed the Mandelring Quartet about their Brahms string sextets recording:
<http://www.swp.de/ulm/nachrichten/kultur/mandelring-quartett-spielt-brahms-streichsextette-14869757.html>

“The Mandelring Quartet's tone is distinguished by such a degree of tension yet also fragility that one fears everything must burst in the very first bars: the music, the listener's heart, the whole world. But instead they sing and cry out, in terror and mysteriously wan beauty: music, heart, world. The Mandelring Quartet's Schubert is so eloquent that it makes one speechless. Poignantly painful, exceptionally beautiful.”
Hundert11 - Feb. 23, 2017

“What unfolds in Berg's Lyric Suite is not a drama of loneliness but a drama of love between Alban Berg and Hanna Fuchs. Once again the quartet gives a wonderfully illuminating insight

into the highly virtuosic score; the whispering third movement seems full of trepidation, the love night positively glows.” Clemens Goldberg, Kulturradio des RBB

“A work by Berg can be played in two ways: coolly and analytically or with full tone and great pathos. The Mandelring Quartet combines the two approaches and masters the score with breathtaking precision.” Berliner Zeitung

“Years of common musical and family connections certainly pay off, and the Mandelring Quartet is a perfect example. These musicians have long expanded their repertoire. Following the enthusiastic audience applause, the musicians thanked us with a medley and the tango by Guinot.” Schwäbische - Feb. 14, 2017

Munich, Residenz, Max-Joseph-Saal: The Art of Chamber Music

“The F Major string quartet by Brahms’s contemporary Felix Otto Dessoff is ‘charming, compositionally ambitious, free from any deliberate display of erudition, and never derivative’, and lauds the Mandelring Quartet’s ‘manifest delight in surprising us with this elegant work’. The musicians exploit Dvořák’s *American Quartet* to the full with supreme skill: the vitality of the opening movement, the spacious Lento, so touching and full of yearning, the rhythmically witty Scherzo and the irresistibly fiery finale. The Mandelring’s rendition became a somber yet rugged C minor sound-world. This contrasts with “charm and a touch of dance-like swing” in the third movement, and a “tenderly beatific cantilena” in the encore, the *Andante cantabile* from Tchaikovsky’s opus 11. Harald Eggebrecht, Süddeutsche Zeitung– January 31, 2017

Neubeuern Castle series: *Fireworks*

“The Mandelring Quartet thanked the audience for its enthusiastic applause. The Quartet is a highly esteemed ensemble, which captivated listeners with its expressive playing, high culture and uncommon musical color in string quartets of Haydn, Schubert and Beethoven. The Quartet interpreted Schubert’s *Rosamunde* with great sensitivity and harmonious sound balance. The work is characterized by incredible color and compelling melodic influence. Beethoven once again demonstrated the highly differentiated sound cultivation of the ensemble. After the graceful scherzo the finale with its stomping dance rhythm seemed like fireworks. The movement rose to a virtuoso, spirited presto, to which the listeners gave a stormy ovation.”

Oberbayerisches Volksblatt – Jan. 27, 2017

Forbes Magazine in its overview of 2016’s best recordings: Jan. 1, 2017

“....the mellifluous aspect of the Mandelring Quartet.”

The complete Brahms string quintets on Audite:

“The Mandelring Quartet with Roland Glassl as second violist makes the diversity and complexity of the music audible in a profound way. We enjoy to the full the *cantabile* beauty of the set from the first quintet; experiencing the Beethoven-like recitals of the finale in an almost symphonic fullness. The beginning of the G Major quintet breathes a passionate spirit, and the melancholy of the ensuing Adagio is conveyed by the cantilevering of the individual voices. In short, the Mandelring musicians allow us to experience Brahms in the full range of his expressive spectrum and aesthetic content - which is very good!”- Rondo Magazine – December 3, 2016

“In the performance of Mendelssohn’s first string quartet, the four musicians immediately confronted the highly concentrated character of this concert. Clear, but always precise, sketching the temperaments with powerful, yet cultivated second movement theme attacks and a narrative, resolved tone in the third. In Paul Engels’ ‘Hommage à Robert Schumann,’ shimmering quotations of themes by Schumann, as well as motifs of Brahms, offered numerous ‘aha’

moments. Engels' immediate, sometimes tonal, and often enormously propulsive music was stated in expressive reveries. Schumann's piano quintet was the climax concert. Dynamic restraint with simultaneous eloquence, infused in the first movement, intensified to the furioso-marked scherzo: everything was feverish, under high tension, courageous and expressive. As thanks for the intense applause, the second movement from the piano quintet of Johannes Brahms.”

- Wiesbadener Kurier – December 1, 2016

“The concert sparkled with orchestral richness and playful brilliance. After a rich prelude, the Shostakovich Scherzo unfolded with breath-taking energy achieving an orchestral sound. The piece becomes a work of screaming expressivity in the Mandelring's hands. They unquestionably played its usual high level, excelling as the changing principal voices unfolded.”

- Volksfreund - October 14, 2016

“The pianist Ian Fountain joined the Mandelring Quartet in this evening of Schumann. They matched so sensitively and with such fine shading that one wished it could go on forever. The sighing of individual instruments (the plangent tone of Andreas Willwohl's viola being particularly impressive) and their collective sigh in the seemingly weightless ascending islands of remembrance was a triumph of the perfectly harmonious concordance. Schumann's String Quartet in A minor was a perfect model of ensemble playing. They immersed themselves with ineffable gentleness in the Andante espressivo introduction, with every part singing and each fugue sounding like a canon. The Adagio, tense to the point of heartbreak, was exquisite. When, before the end of the finale, the downward runs pause, the earth seemed to stop turning as we held our breath in a moment of Schumann bliss.”

- Hundert11 - April 15, 2016

Mandelring Quartet thrills. “The Mandelring Quartet delighted listeners with three masterpieces played with discipline and an emotional dedication that captivated. Mozart's ‘Hunt’ Quartet was bubbling with life and energy. Ravel's Quartet created a deep experience of light and color in the room. It was a marvel. Dvorák's ‘American’ Quartet’ articulates his experience in the vastness of the New World as a tonal language. The musicians could barely hold to their seats. Wow! The intensity echoed silently throughout the hall. Finally one could breath followed by huge applause! Then a wonderful aftertaste with Dvorák's Waltz in A Major. Fantastic.”

- Rheinische Post– Nov. 24, 2015

Playing to the limits of expressivity

“The four players advance with great concentration and sensitivity to the limits of expressivity, whose energies remain perceptible even when the underlying simmering power occasionally gives way to a wonderful luminosity.... The Mandelring's players are both conscientious and inspired, and this is equally true in the rugged, Beethoven-inspired sudden plunges in mood that seem to testify to the threats inherent in life.”

- Mannheimer Morgen - Oct 2, 2015

“The first concert of the Mandelring Quartet's classics series was a delightful feast of chamber music of the most exquisite kind. Ovations after each individual piece and at the end of the evening were overwhelmingly enthusiastic. It was all impeccable: the totally homogeneous, pellucid ensemble and the perfectly calculated crafting of the melodic lines as the basis for an extremely lively, intensive dialogue in chamber music: seamless transitions and sudden dynamic changes, achieved with lightning reactions by all the players. To hear the Mandelring Quartet playing quietly is just astonishing. This ensemble possesses an exceptionally wide spectrum of subtle tonal nuances and shades of colour, employed with the greatest delicacy.”

Neustadt/Weinstrasse

- Die Rheinpfalz - Sept 15, 2015

Mandelring Quartet sets standards

“The Mandelring Quartet wowed playing Haydn, Mendelssohn and Gernsheim at the Bonndorfer Castle. They shone with a brilliant directness of expression in this extremely entertaining program. This quartet made you want more.” - [Badische Zeitung](#) - April 22, 2015

Vol. 3 of the Complete Chamber Music for Strings of Mendelssohn:

“The Mandelrings play the music for all it’s worth, ratcheting up the excitement in the *minor-key variation* at the heart of the slow movement, capturing the elfin capriciousness of the *scherzo*. Advocacy like the Mandelrings give this music shows how much emotional fervor as well as craft there is in Mendelssohn’s art, early and late. Given the power and beauty of the performances, I fervently recommend.” - [AudiophileAudition](#) - March 1, 2015

“Ligeti’s Metamorphoses Nocturnes is technically difficult, but sounded enchanting in this strong interpretation. The audience rewarded the dense, emphatic presentation and the mastery of the enormous difficulties with frenetic and prolonged applause. Their interpretation was outstanding! Haydn’s ‘Lerch Quartet’ sounded expressive, vibrant and fragrant, with a continuous joy that was reinforced by the apparent ease of perfectly matched playing and homogeneity. Two Waltzes by Dvorak stressed once more what the playing of the Mandelring is about: technical brilliance, unstrained playing emphasizing expression and a round, beautiful sound.”

- [Nordwest Zeitung](#) – January 19, 2015

“Nothing could follow this. The Schubert is moving in its power, beauty and tragedy, especially when presented with such intensity. The musicians of the Mandelring Quartet find a very earthy, almost virtuoso access. The melodic arches seduce the audience in beautiful worlds, and then violence destroys the idyll. The second movement is more gripping still. The musicians bring out the stark contrast of sounds. The prancing third movement spills over so suddenly into the sadness of death. The Mandelring Quartet has long been one of the best chamber music ensembles in the world. They perform with incredible perfection and a smooth beautiful sound. There was enthusiastic applause from the Ingolstadt audience.”

- [Donaukurier](#) - November 28, 2014

“Everything that Mandelrings have to throw at these pieces shows them to be at their best advantage. Fleet footed bowing, tongue-in-groove intonation and ensemble and a sense of momentum that always drives the music in the right direction. The Definitive set is complete.”

[Gramophone Magazine](#) – Sept. 2014

“A concert of the class of the Mandelring Quartet absolutely made this year's season of Rudert Festivals. They are among the most renowned ensembles in the classical music scene. The audience used every last seat in the hall and was still. Four string players drew them, with everything music has to offer: finesse, heterogeneity and stunning line. Ranging from Haydn to Shostakovich, to Schubert's ‘Death and the Maiden,’ music was presented with overwhelming intensity. The Mandelrings explored every nuance hidden in those complex works. The explosive expressivity in Shostakovich's lonely, gloomy narrative contrasted with the musicians’ serenity in their playing; an impression of weightlessness and a bewitching ambivalence. The overflow audience finally resorted to prolonged applause, the enthusiasm carrying out into the autumn air.”

Schwarzwälder Bote – October 28, 2014

30th Anniversary celebration with five concerts in Berlin:

“Since the appearance of their complete recording of all fifteen string quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich, the Mandelring Quartet has ranked among the world's most exciting quartets. Recording all the Mendelssohn quartets this year has enhanced their reputation even further. The

Mandelring Quartet reveals how expressive and radical this composer could really be. It is hard to believe the degree of mastery with which they play around with tonal inflections, how figurations spill into sonorities and sonorities into figurations, how, even in savage chords and sudden silences, they draw in scenic elements, and introduce a pervasive, droll humor that anticipates the later Ligeti.”

Berliner Zeitung - July 13, 2014

"Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' is definitely the most popular choice and the Mandelrings' interpretation precisely conveys that duality between the fear of death and the longing for it. The audience, closely grouped around the podium, shares the passion of the players first hand, with no loss of friction.”

Tagesspiegel - July 13, 2014

“In the course of thirty years the four members of the famous Mandelring Quartet have grown so close that even their breathing seems synchronized. They speak with a single voice and feel with a single great heart.”

Berliner Morgenpost - July 14, 2014

“The Mandelring Quartet’s interpretation of the Schubert ‘Quartet in D Minor’ was inimitable. In its guest appearance at the Teo Otto Theater the world-renowned ensemble brought the many facets of this music to the fore: melancholy as well as exuberance. An aching jubilation that seemed to unite all opposites, bringing a huge ‘Wow!’ from the rows of seats.. Their self-confidence shown in the great theme and they sounded as if to own it. All hell broke out in the ‘Scherzo’ before Sebastian Schmidt brought the ‘Presto’ to a virtuoso finale.”

Remscheider General Anzeiger - June 6, 2014

A great concert, always startlingly intense in Germany’s Villa Rot Museum:

“As soon as the first few bars played, the listener was captivated by the intense feeling as well as the individuality of this top ensemble. Their lifelong familiarity with this music is certainly one reason for their unique harmony.”

Schwäbisch Media - May 26, 2014

“A fascinating concert with corners and edges at Bonn Castle. The Mandelring Quartet plays with almost unsettling precision, exploring contrasts, even where they might not be expected, offering a high degree of expressiveness. Schubert's String Quartet No. 9 rang with an inner tension, as if there were a paradox with precisely calibrated loveliness. They presented the final Allegro partly mysterious, partly playful and always wise. The first movement of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 3 accentuated the change to rich, full string sound presented in a trickster’s way: unpredictable musical turns and delicate harlequinades, a balancing act between light-spirited grace and subliminal despair. Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden' showed clearly the particular homogeneity and expressiveness of these four brilliant musicians. Almost with bated breath they ramped up the voltage. Highly sensitive and highly dramatic, powerful weighty chords answered by a tender whisper.”

Badische Zeitung - April 30, 2014

“Clearly, the Mandelring Quartet succeed in making me take this music more seriously. They proceed to play the music with intensity. It is obsessive in its forward momentum. That jaunty *finale* is a blazing juggernaut – good-natured, but there’s real brio as well. The Mandelrings have given me a whole new perspective on this piece. The musicians bring the same level of intensity to the remarkable *Octet*. The work can certainly handle it, and the playing is brilliant. The Mandelrings play the music for all it’s worth, ratcheting up the excitement in the *minor-key variation*, capturing the elfin capriciousness of the *scherzo*. Advocacy like the Manderlings give this music shows just how much emotional fervor as well as craft there is in Mendelssohn’s art.”

Audiophile Audition - March 1, 2014

“The Mandelring is a quartet’s quartet, matching technical finesse with insightful interpretation. Its rendition of Beethoven’s Quartet Op. 18, No 2 was a winning balance of charm and meticulousness presented with exacting care and attention; the trajectories of the individual movements and the overall whole were fastidiously defined and elegantly delivered. Gyorgy Ligeti’s Second String Quartet dates from the 1960s, and sounds like it. Cast in five short movements, it explores the extended techniques and textures that seemed so revolutionary at the time, but were actually following pathways blazed by Bartok three decades earlier. No matter. Familiarity with Ligeti’s once-difficult idiom made the brilliance of the Mandelring’s flawless presentation all the more evident: the work received a strikingly committed performance. Shostakovich’s Second String Quartet (1944) rounded out the program. Accuracy and precision are the Mandelring’s exemplary virtues. Here these were matched by deep feeling, and one was never at a loss to understand the rhetoric of the work. But the lasting impact came from a vision that stressed Shostakovich’s place in the historical string quartet tradition and his eloquent use of its shared language, not just his own Soviet-Expressionist dialect. Rarely have we witnessed this remarkable music delivered with such nuance, logic, and clarity.

The Vancouver Sun: February 26, 2014

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/entertainment/Classical+review+Flawless+presentation+century+masterworks/9553901/story.html#ixzz2uYUKRqCo>