**Szymanowski Quartet**

Agata Szymczewska, *violin*  Robert Kowalski, *violin*
Volodia Mykytka, *viola*  Monika Leskovar, *cello*

***“It is hard not to fall in love with the Szymanowski Quartet.***

***All professionals perform with intensity, but playing from the heart is another matter.***

 ***The sound was unusually warm, filling this small space to capacity.”***Bernard Holland, The New York Times

Founded in Warsaw in 1995, the Szymanowski Quartet has developed into one of the most exceptional international string quartets of its generation. Their sophisticated programs present a perfect balance between intellect and passion, characteristics that have captivated audiences at festivals and concert halls throughout Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Australia.

The Szymanowski Quartet has received numerous prizes and distinctions for its extraordinarily high standards. They were prizewinners at both the Osaka and the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competitions and won first prizes at the “Premio Vittorio Gui” Competition in Florence and at Hanover’s “In Memoriam Dimitri Schostakowitsch” Competition. From 2001-2003 the Quartet participated in the “New Generation Artists Scheme” of BBC Radio 3 in London. In 2005 they received the “Szymanowski Award” of the Karol Szymanowski Foundation in Warsaw, the first time given to a string quartet, and the Polish government awarded them the Medal of Honor for service to Polish culture in 2007.

The ensemble performs throughout the world in major concert halls: New York’s Carnegie Hall, London’s Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Vienna’s Musikverein, the Konzerthaus in Berlin and Shanghai Symphony Hall. Their annual North American tours have included concerts in New York City, Washington DC, Los Angeles, San Diego, Vancouver and Montreal. The ensemble is a regular guest at prominent international festivals including Schleswig-Holstein and Rheingau, “Schubertiade” and Schwetzingen as well as Lockenhaus, Luxemburg, Paris, London, Warsaw, Moscow, Cheltenham, Basel, Bath and Perth. In 2008 the Szymanowski Quartet founded the Lviv Chamber Music Festival at the UNESCO World Heritage site on the border between the Ukraine and Poland. The Szymanowski Quartet studied at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hanover with teacher and mentor Hatto Beyerle. Further study has been with Isaac Stern, Walter Levin and the Amadeus, Emerson, Juilliard, and Guarneri String Quartets.

In 2017 the Szymanowski Quartet will present two new recordings: “Les Vendredis” to be released by SWR Music, and the piano quintet of Dmitri Shostakovich with Michail Lifits by Decca. The Avie label has released a CD of Haydn, Bacewicz and Dvořák. In 2009/15 the Quartet launched the recording series of 3 CDs on the Cavi-music record label, focusing on composer Karol Szymanowski in the context of the music capitals of Paris, Vienna and Moscow. Recent recordings include the Shostakovich and Weinberg quintets for Hänssler Classic, and music of Zelenski / Zarebski and Friedman / Rózycki released on Hyperion in 2012 and 2016.

Along with standard classical-romantic repertoire, the SQ’s strong commitment to contemporary music includes works by Krzysztof Penderecki, Sofia Gubaidulina, Magnus Lindbweg, Matan Daniel Porat and other composers, several of whom dedicated their works to the Quartet.

**November 2017 – please discard all other copies.**

#### THE PLAYERS

**Agata Szymczewska** was born in 1985 in Koszalin, Poland. Winner of the 2006 Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition in Poznań and the first winner of the London Music Masters Award, Agata made her Wigmore Hall debut in 2009. This was followed in 2010 with an invitation to play with Osmo Vanska and the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall. She has since performed with orchestras and in chamber music ensembles across Europe and in Israel, Canada, China, Korea and Japan, and joined Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Mutter Virtuosi on its first North American tour in November 2014. Her discography includes chamber performances of Grażyna Bacewicz’s Piano Quintets, and a recording of Bruch and Mendelssohn violin concertos paired with Wieniawski’s *Legend*. Agata Szymczewska plays an Antonio Stradivarius violin (Cremona, ca. 1680) on loan from Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben.

**ROBERT KOWALSKI** joined the Szymanowski Quartet in fall 2016 following the departure of ensemble co-founder Grzegorz Kotow, who left the group after 20 years to pursue other projects. A longtime friend and colleague of Agata Szymczewska, Agata and Robert met twenty years ago as members of different ensembles in masterclasses when they were children. Robert went on to study in Germany and Switzerland with Waleri Gradow, with influences by Ana Chumachenco and Kolja Blacher, as well as the masters of earlier generations: Bernard Greenhouse, Ivry Gitlis and Ida Haendel. He has years of experience playing chamber music at festivals and on concert series around the world. Robert Kowalski is the 1st concertmaster of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, Switzerland.

**VLADIMIR MYKYTKA** was born into a family of musicians in 1972 in Lviv, Ukraine. He began violin lessons at age five, later attending the school of music for exceptionally gifted youth at the Conservatory in Lviv. He later studied at the Academy of Music F. Chopin in Warsaw with Janusz Kucharski, and with Hatto Beyerle at the University of Music and Drama in Hanover. He is a laureate of numerous international competitions and teaches chamber music at the University of Music and Drama in Hanover. In addition to the Szymanowski Quartet, he works closely with other world-class musicians, playing regularly as a duo with pianist Claudia Rinaldi. Vladimir Mykytka plays a viola made by Hans Schicker (Freiburg im Breisgau) in 1983.

Croatian cellist **MONIKA LESKOVAR** was born in 1981 in Kreutztal, Germany. A student of David Geringas in Berlin, she was in masterclasses with Mstislav Rostropovitch and Bernard Greenhouse and won prizes at numerous international cello competitions. Monika has performed as orchestra soloist with the major orchestras of Eastern Europe and Russia (Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Moscow Philharmonic, St. Petersburg Symphonic Orchestra, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Kremerata Baltica, etc,) with conductors including Valerij Gergiev, Thomas Hengelbrock and Krzysztof Penderecki. She plays solo recitals and chamber music at festivals in Europe and Asia. She collaborates and records with cellist / composer Giovanni Sollima for Sony/BMG and has also recorded for OEMHS classics. Monika Leskovar plays a cello by Mantegazza, Milano 1765 loaned to her by Kronberg Academy.

**THE SZYMANOWSKI QUARTET & THE PRESS:**

***Passionate game of longing and death shadows*** at Landenargen Castle:
“The program suited the evening wonderfully, with the listeners honoring the intense, virtuoso performance of the world-famous quartet with hearty applause. Mozart’s C Major led to ever new, clear heights. The dialogue of the first violin and cello in the second movement was subtle. The third brought lightness and dark effervescence, the fourth playfully combining minor tones and cheerfulness. Between the wild forward rushing and the dancing, there were tender elements achieved in their interpretation. Violinists Agata Szymczewska and Robert Kowalski harmonized harmonically with Vladimir Mykytka on viola and Marcin Sienawski on cello. The Allegro assai was feverishly agitated, torn between restlessness and longing for peace. Szymanowski's Nocturne and Tarantella was mysterious, profound and unreal, yet interwoven with the folksong came the distant hint of wildly foaming, ardent passion. With an overt polka and a dreamy piece from the legendary ‘Les vendredis’ of St. Petersburg, the artists closed this concert.” -

 Schwäbische Zeitung – July 2, 2017

The Szymanowski Quartet: masters onstage

“This now-famous quartet, who appeared at the first Ammerseerenaden Festival in 1995, brought something very special: Schumann’a Piano Quintet. The players produced an amazing homogeneity, finding lyrical responses to powerful passages, the synthesis that Schumann had thought when he first established the genre with this work. Vigor and freshness was heard, which the audience understood from the first notes. The four musicians are a captivating narrator who constantly create scenes and images that fit into a coherent context with each other. How easy and carefree the musicians brought the work to blossom, no less for its intense connection to the audience. **Its members are all brilliant musicians**. The evening’s culmination was the emotionally heightened intensity of Beethoven's third Razumovsky Quartet. The dramatic development of the concert program was a high point with its increasing tension from a heaving dialogue in the opening to the spectacular finale. A great musical production that left the audience euphoric.” Süddeutsche Zeitung – September 2, 2016

“The Szymanowski Quartet made a really meaningful contribution for the 175th anniversary of Dvorák at the Rheingau Music Festival. The music sparked with a greater boldness in Dvorák’s Piano Quintet, with potent accelerations and decelerations, accents and impulses.”

Wiesbadener Tagblatt - August 8, 2016

 “A virtuoso arrangement of the Nocturne and Tarantella acts as a fitting prelude to the Parisian pairing of a suavely played Ravel F Major Quartet and a suitably intense account of the 1945 Quartet by Szymon Laks. The Vienna disc centres on an absorbing, authoritative performance of Szymanowski’s multifaceted Quartet No.1. Beethoven’s Op.18 No.2 is fresh-faced, the players capturing its Haydnesque whimsy, while Schubert’s Quartettsatz is vigorous and well-articulated and Webern’s Langsamer Satz warm-hearted and touching. In Moscow, Szymanowski No.2 meets a hard-driven account of Prokofiev’s Second. Tchaikovsky’s First Quartet is played with much warmth and Romantic ardour, and Skoryk’s Melody in A minor makes a fitting conclusion. All three discs have been sensitively recorded and their diverse and well-chosen repertoire means that each can be enjoyed at a single sitting, the more so given the special qualities of the Szymanowski Quartet’s excellent sense of ensemble and interpretative freshness.”

The Strad - April 27, 2016

 “From the beginning they showed an excellent sense of sound and ravishing musicianship demonstrated in the interpretation of the third Shostakovich string quartet, with cantabile playing and elegiac action in the Adagio and thrilling style. We are grateful for the vital, spirited playing in Dvorak, Op. 105. There was a sensually opulent tone in the subdued string sound - a showcase concert.” Weisbadener Kurier - March 17, 2016

 “The Szymanowski Quartet gave a splendid recital in [Herbst Theater](http://www.sfgate.com/search/?action=search&channel=music&inlineLink=1&searchindex=gsa&query=%22Herbst+Theater%22). The performance was evocative and deftly colored. The group boasts a distinctively understated sound, at once silky and emotionally urgent, and it deploys that texture in the service of readings that are dramatic without ever sounding overblown. Those qualities emerged most tellingly in Beethoven’s Op. 59, No. 3. From the sprightly rhetoric of the opening movement to the briskly contrapuntal finale, the quartet turned each musical paragraph into something that was both logically cogent and expressively direct. Most effective of all was the slow movement, rendered with a soft-grained intensity that made each melodic phrase and each rich harmony sound inviting.”

San Francisco Chronicle - Feb. 16, 2016

 “[Chamber Music San Francisco](http://www.chambermusicsf.org/) began its  [season](http://www.examiner.com/article/early-bird-subscriptions-are-on-sale-for-chamber-music-san-francisco-2016) with a return visit from the Szymanowski Quartet, an exploration of the exotic, well compensated by the attentiveness with which each player listened to the others and some well thought-out approaches to both dynamics and phrasing. The Quartet chose to play the last of the quartets from Beethoven’s Opus 59. The ensemble rose admirably to its challenges. The execution turned up thematic phrasings that endowed the entire composition with a stimulating freshness. The encore: the collaborative effort of Sokolov, Glazunov, and Lyadov, was clearly the result of all three artists enjoying themselves, and the Szymanowski Quartet delighted just as much in sharing the full measure of that joy with their audience.” San Francisco Examiner - Feb. 15, 2016

Passionate interpretation by Szymanowskis:

“With this new CD the Szymanowski Quartet concludes a trilogy that leads from Paris via Vienna to Russia, playing works by Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, Myroslav Skoryk - and its namesake Szymanowski. The four players bring this music to the boiling point.”

 Deutschlandfunk - January 1, 2016

Tettnang, Germany with actor Dominique Horwitz:
“They merged spoken word with music as new. Horwitz compiled excerpts from Bohumil Hrabal’s world of seemingly big events and everyday trifles. The string quartet responded to the different moods and events of the story, focusing on the String Quartet in F minor by Mendelssohn. Particularly striking, this tension erupted in an enthusiastic, prolonged applause for Horwitz and the Szymanowski Quartet.” Südkurier - May 16, 2015

“The Szymanowski Quartet made a meal out of its program at the Segerstrom Center. It was impressive and always intense music making. They play in a manner that seeks intense expressivity from every phrase and every detail. They hone in on poetic flights, whispered asides and glowing rapture. The players do it very well and with the same mind. It is fine playing.” Orange County Register - February 1, 2015

 “The Szymanowski Quartet was the highpoint of Basel’s Christmas gifts this season. These musicians gave a concert full of contemplation. Elgar Op. 84 marked the end of a truly impressive and moving concert.” Neue Merker - December 30, 2014

 “The Haydn was a subtle, elegant, naturally flowing with sparkling spirit and, in the Finale, full, vital elan. Szymanowski’s second quartet was the perfect accompaniment, playing with great color and selective tone. So it went with the elegant, small miracle of Mozart, with many living colors and delicate facets.” Süddeutsche Zeitung – October 2, 2014

“In place of the Guadagnini violin comes a brighter Stradivarius in the hands of the award-winning violinist. Agata Szymczewska fits in seamlessly in the sensitive and emotional playing of the Szymanowski Quartet, packing power and precision. Haydn was extremely rich and engrossing; a pearl in the gallant, lively dance of the Andante; the dramatic galloping finale, a swirl of design. Mendelssohn was a firework of colors and emotion, earning a prolonged ovation.” Süddeutsche Zeitung - September 6-7, 2014