

Seventy-fourth Season 2024–25

The Westchester Chamber Music Society



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The Westchester Chamber Music Society (WCMS)
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Sunday, October 20, 2024
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester
Rye, New York

The Westchester Chamber Music Society
presents

THE AMERIGO TRIO

Glenn Dictertow, *violin*

Karen Dreyfus, *viola*

Inbal Segev, *cello*



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Goldberg Variations
(Selections arranged for string trio
by Dimitri Sitkovetsky)

Gideon Klein (1919-1945)

String Trio (1944)
Allegro
Lento—Poco piu mosso—Allegretto scherzando—
Allegro feroce—Andantino—Andante mesto—
Allegro scherzando—Un poco meno mosso—
Grave
Molto vivace

Intermission

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9, Nno. 3
Allegro con spirito
Adagio con espressione
Scherzo. Allegro molto e vivace
Presto

*Following the concert, there will be a
Question & Answer session with the musicians.*

About this Performance

During this concert, we are honoring the memory of Harriet Levine, a dedicated, long-time member of the WCMS Board who recently passed. Harriet served as our Vice-President of Membership and was involved in numerous aspects of the organization for many years. We will miss her energy, cheerful demeanor, and consistently positive outlook on life. Harriet touched many people in different communities as an energetic volunteer, dedicated educator, devoted family member, and loving friend.

The Amerigo Trio, was formed in 2009 by the former New York Philharmonic concertmaster Glenn Dicterow, with the violist Karen Dreyfus and the cellist Inbal Segev. Named for the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci, they are committed to exploring the riches of the string-trio repertoire, both old and new. Members of the Amerigo have been long-time friends of the Westchester Chamber Music Society. In 2023, they supported the development of and participated in the kick-off performance of WCMS's Youth Initiative, in which talented musicians from school, conservatory and college chamber-music programs in Westchester open for and receive coaching from the professional musicians at selected concerts.

Glenn Dicterow, *violin*, first came to prominence at the age of eleven, making his solo debut in Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where his father, Harold Dicterow, served as principal of the second-violin section for 52 years. He first appeared with the New York Philharmonic in 1967, at the age of eighteen, performing the Tchaikovsky concerto under the baton of André Kostelanetz.

Dicterow became the orchestra's concertmaster in 1980. Soloing annually with the Philharmonic in each of his thirty-four years, he served as the orchestra's "leader" (to use the British term) in collaboration with four very different music directors: Zubin Mehta, Kurt Masur, Lorin Maazel, and Alan Gilbert.

A graduate of Juilliard, where he was a student of Ivan Galamian, Dicterow also studied with Joachim Chassman, Naoum Blinder, Manuel Compinsky, Erno Neufeld, Gerald Vinci, Eudice Shapiro, Jascha Heifetz, and Henryk Szeryng.

Karen Dreyfus, *viola*, was born into a family of musicians. She began studying violin with her father, a member of the Philadelphia Orchestra, before pursuing the career of a concert violist. A graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Michael Tree and Karen Tuttle, she soon moved to New York City, and to the world stage.

Dreyfus has performed in such ensembles as the New York Philharmonic and the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and has collaborated with such legendary artists as Yehudi Menuhin, Alexander

Schneider, Leon Fleischer, Chick Corea, and Glenn Dicterow.

In recent decades, Dreyfus has joined the Juilliard faculty, leading a sonata class for violists and pianists, among other duties.

Inbal Segev, *cello*, is equally committed to new repertoire and masterworks. She has performed as soloist with such acclaimed orchestras as the Berlin Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic. In 2018, she was the first cellist to perform Christopher Rouse's *Violoncello Concerto* since Yo-Yo Ma premiered it in the 1990s. She is also a founding member of the Amerigo Trio with Glenn Dicterow and Karen Dreyfus. Segev began playing the cello in Israel at age five, and at sixteen was invited by Isaac Stern to the United States to continue her studies. She holds degrees from Juilliard and Yale. Segev lives in New York with her husband and three children. Her cello was made by Francesco Ruggieri in 1673.



Program Notes

by Joshua Berrett, Ph.D.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Selections from the Goldberg Variations,
arranged for string trio by Dimitri Sitkovetsky.

There is something we might call “accidental immortality.” The title of the J. S. Bach opener on today’s program is a case in point—a work forever linked with the name of Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, organist, harpsichordist, and composer. It is a linkage that originated with one Johann Nikolaus Forkel, who, in his 1802 Bach biography, had this to say about the work:

. . . we have to thank the instigation of the former Russian ambassador to the electoral court of Saxony, Count Kaiserling, who often stopped in Leipzig and brought Goldberg there with him, in order to have him receive musical instruction from Bach. The Count was often ill and had sleepless nights. At such times, Goldberg, who lived in his house, had to spend the night in an antechamber, so as to play for him during his insomnia. Once the Count mentioned in Bach’s presence that he would like to have some clavier pieces for Goldberg, which should be of such a smooth and somewhat lively character that he might be a little cheered up by them in his sleepless nights. Bach thought himself best able to fulfill this wish by means of variations, the writing of which he had until then considered an ungrateful task on account of the repeatedly similar harmonic foundation. But since at this time all his works were already models of art, such also these variations became under his hand. Yet he produced only a single work of this kind. Thereafter the Count always called them

his variations. He never tired of them, and for a long time sleepless nights meant: 'Dear Goldberg, do play me one of my variations.' Bach was perhaps never so rewarded for one of his works as for this. The Count presented him with a golden goblet filled with 100 louis d'or. Nevertheless, even had the gift been a thousand times larger, their artistic value would not yet have been paid for.

Forkel, who was writing more than sixty years after the 1741 publication of the *Goldberg Variations*, fabricated pretty much all of this story. Among other things, Goldberg was only 14 at that point, although he reportedly did take some lessons with Bach during 1742–43 and was given a copy of the score. Even more compelling, however, is the wording on the title page of the original edition. There is no hint of any dedication to Count Kaiserling, which would have been *de rigueur* at the time. Rather, the *Goldberg Variations* are presented as something drier and more didactic—as a “keyboard exercise” (*clavier-übung*). Translated from the original German, the wording is as follows:

Keyboard exercise, consisting of an ARIA with diverse variations for harpsichord with two manuals. Composed for connoisseurs, for the refreshment of their spirits, by Johann Sebastian Bach, composer for the royal court of Poland and the Electoral court of Saxony, Kapellmeister and Director of Choral Music in Leipzig. Nuremberg, Balthasar Schmid, publisher.

The *Goldberg Variations* were originally intended for performance on a two-manual harpsichord, although several memorable recordings are available on the modern piano. Most famous of these is the 1955 traversal by Glenn Gould—a game-changer in the way it awoke a larger public to the wonders of this monumental work. Almost thirty years later, in 1984 (with some revisions in 2009), Russian violinist and conductor Dimitri Sitkovetsky, made the arrangement for string trio, from which selections have been drawn for today's program. Thirty, of course, happens to also be the total number of variations in the cycle, and multiplying thirty by a factor of ten gives us 300. That is, the year 1985 marked the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth.

Turning to the music itself, there are at least four vital points to keep in mind:

- 1) The cycle of 30 variations is bookended by an Aria—a contemplative, highly embellished melody in a sarabande rhythm.

- 2) In a stunning departure from convention, Bach completely ignores this melody in composing his variations. His focus is entirely on only the bass line and its harmonic implications. That is the constant point of reference.

- 3) The writing is richly contrapuntal, drawing mostly on canonic devices (think of rounds like “Row, Row, Your Boat” or tunes like “*Frère Jacques*”).

- 4) Virtually all the variations, like the Aria itself, are binary

forms. That is, they are made up of two more or less equal parts, each calling for repeats.

The Amerigo Trio is performing 14 of the 30 variations, book-ending them with the Aria.

What follow are some brief comments about each of them:

Variation 1 brings a vivid contrast to the Aria. In a sprightly triple meter with a syncopation on the second beat, it hints at the *Polonaise*.

Variation 2, in duple meter, involves the interplay of two upper parts as they trade melodic lines and motifs in canon. The initiating voice is imitated one sixth higher. The bass meanwhile asserts its independence.

Variation 4, in triple meter, is a *passepied*; it is like an uptempo minuet—a dance that has Breton origins. Bach's counterpoint here is somewhat looser, not strictly imitative, but involving some inverted melodic figures.

Variation 5, once again in triple meter, is striking for its rapid 16th-note motion in counterpoint with longer, widely-leaping notes. These are acrobatics utterly germane to the two-manual harpsichord.

Variation 9 reverts to common time (4/4). It features a canon at the third in the two upper voices playing out over an independent bass line.

Variation 14 is a playful toccata in 3/4 time. It is replete with trills and other ornamentation, coupled with big jumps between registers. Motifs are manipulated every which way. Glenn Gould once described this variation as “certainly one of the giddiest bits of neo-Scarlatti-ism imaginable.”

Variation 18 presents a canon at the sixth in 2/2 time. This variation has been characterized as “an imperious, totally confident movement which must be among the most supremely logical pieces of music ever written, with strict imitation . . . providing ideal impetus and a sense of climax.”

Variation 19, in triple meter, returns to dance-like rhythms, animated by 16th-note motion.

Variation 20 reverts to the spirit of Variation 14. In 3/4 time, it is a virtuosic toccata with dramatic shifts in register as material is interchanged.

Variation 21 is a canon at the interval of a major seventh. Think in terms of B-natural as the seventh note of a C-major scale.

Variation 22 moves at a deliberate pace. There is extensive imitative interplay among three upper voices, while the bass line more clearly than elsewhere delineates itself as the ground bass upon which the entire variation cycle is built.

Variation 26 is a joyous, fast-paced two-part toccata, moving in 16th notes, and written originally for a two-manual harpsichord. It is also polymetric, with one meter superimposed on another—such as 3/4 over 18/16. The pattern in 3/4 time suggests a sarabande rhythm.

Variation 28 is once again a two-part toccata, but in this instance in 3/4 time. The writing is replete with trills while a melodic line is seemingly plucked out of the air.

Variation 30 has J. S. Bach coming back to earth This is a *quodlibet*—a crazy quilt made up of multiple German folk songs. Two of them are *Ich bin solang nicht bei dir g'west, ruck her, ruck her* (“I have so long been away from you, come closer, come closer”) and *Kraut und Rüben haben mich vertrieben, hätt mein' Mutter Fleisch gekocht, wär ich länger bleiben* (“Cabbage and turnips have driven me away, had my mother cooked meat, I'd have opted to stay”). The others remain unknown.

Bach's biographer Forkel explains the *quodlibet* by invoking a custom observed at Bach family reunions. Bach's relatives were almost all musicians, including three of his sons.

In the commentary accompanying his seminal 1955 recording, Glenn Gould offers the following summation to the whole cycle:

“It is . . . music which observes neither end nor beginning, music with neither real climax nor real resolution, music which like Beaudelaire's lovers, rests lightly on the wings of the unchecked wind.”

Gideon Klein (1919-1945) *String Trio (1944)*

Czech pianist, composer, and educator, Gideon Klein was barely 25 when the Nazis murdered him in 1945. Prior to that he, together with colleagues like Pavel Haas, Hans Krasa, and Victor Ullman, had been organizing the cultural life in the Theresienstadt ghetto (a.k.a. Terezin), presenting concerts, lectures, and more. To some extent, it is bitterly ironic that their efforts were exploited to deceive representatives of the International Red Cross, particularly when they visited a “beautified” camp in June 1944. In reality, this ghetto in German-occupied Czechoslovakia was a transit point for tragically too many Jews who were bound for slave-labor camps and extermination.

Klein's *String Trio* was completed in late September 1944, just a few days before he was deported to Auschwitz and then murdered in a slave-labor camp. The work is a study in sharp contrasts—a relatively lengthy middle movement bookended by much shorter, lively outer movements; in fact, the middle movement is longer than the two outer movements combined. Klein's soundscape is rich in folk rhythms and textures, some of it reminiscent of Béla Bartók and Leoš Janáček.

But it is the soul-baring middle movement that touches the heart. It is a set of seven vividly contrasted variations on a poignant Moravian folksong, *The Knezdub Tower*, a song about a wild goose flying up towards a high tower, only to fall to her death from a hunter's bullet. This symbol of freedom, refers to Klein's Moravian roots, a link to an idyllic childhood when his nanny originally sang the song to him. It is a movement that can well be heard as Klein's sad farewell to life in that the score indicates a completion date of September 21, 1944; by contrast, the first and third movements show completion dates of March 9 and July 10 respectively.

The conductor Karel Ančerl, himself trapped in Terezín, said the following about Klein: “Where there was a valuable cultural performance, there for sure Gideon Klein was the initiator. It is difficult to say how and to what dimensions Gideon Klein would have grown under normal circumstances. One can say with certainty that he could have been among the best, achieving the utmost perfection as a pianist, in composing and conducting.”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
String Trio in C minor, Op. 9, No. 3

Beethoven’s three Opus 9 string trios were all published in 1798. They were dedicated to Count Johann Georg von Browne de Camus, perhaps the most affluent of Beethoven’s early patrons. His generosity to Beethoven is further borne out by the fact that Beethoven dedicated four other works to him, including the *Piano Sonata Op. 22* and the cello variations on the “*Bei Männern*” duet from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*.

The String Trio, Op. 9 No. 3 in C minor has a special gravitas and intensity, on vivid display, particularly in the opening sonata form movement. There is a sense of dark urgency in the descending opening four unison notes: C, B-natural, A-flat, and G. This four-note module is reworked in multiple ways to help unify the movement. It is a creative spark that was to fire Beethoven’s imagination in his string quartets, continuing all the way to the finale of his late C-sharp minor string quartet op. 131. Integrated into a tight organic structure, it is combined to powerful effect with driving and insistent rhythms, sharp dynamic contrasts, offbeat accents, and chromatic shifts. Included as well, and first heard no more than about 30 seconds into the movement, is also an insistent, even pleading-sounding theme to which one could well put to such words as “Yes, yes, yes, I insist on this.” And symptomatic of the movement’s restlessness, the music has by this early point already modulated to the key of A-flat. As for the body of the movement, it is replete with evidence of Beethoven’s mastery of materials and form, sufficient to prompt lengthy further commentary. But we move on.

The Adagio con espressione is a hymn to peace. Cast in the key of C major, it is the voice of solace as the chorale-like melody unfolds seamlessly, growing in intensity before subsiding in closing passages of serene beauty. The third-movement *Scherzo* is the quintessence of concision, drawing upon tight motifs intensified by Beethoven’s characteristic disruptive off-beat accents. Included is a brief midsection in the contrasting key of C major. The *Presto* finale, a sonata form of almost relentless drive, works with two basic themes developed in masterly fashion. And so Beethoven bids farewell to the medium of the string trio, more than ready to undertake the creation of his monumental body of string quartets, starting with the Op. 18 cycle.

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Coming Up



The remainder of the 2024-2025 season

Frisson

(full ensemble of 9 winds/brass/strings)

November 10, 2025

*Program includes Handel-Halvorsen,
Walter, and Beethoven*

The Lysander Piano Trio

December 8, 2024

*Program includes
Beethoven, Clarke, and Schumann*

Tesla Quartet

March 16, 2025

*Program includes
Mozart, Bacewicz, and Dvořák*

The Callisto Quartet

May 4, 2025

*Program includes
Haydn, Esmail, and Dvořák*



