

# Music in Midtown

THE  
GRADUATE  
CENTER  
CITY UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW YORK

Elebash Recital Hall  
The Graduate Center  
365 Fifth Avenue (at 34th Street), NYC  
Thursdays 1:00–2:00 PM



Thursday, May 12, 2022  
1:00 p.m.

## CHAMBER MUSIC ON FIFTH II

### PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 35

Anton Arensky  
(1861–1906)

*Moderato*

Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky: *Moderato*

*Finale: Andante sostenuto - Allegro moderato*

Leonard Fu, violin  
Martine Thomas, viola  
Audrey Chen and Kirsten Jermé, cellos

**Music in Midtown** is a series of lunchtime concerts spotlighting the highly regarded musical performance program at the CUNY Graduate Center. Presented in the warm, intimate, acoustically rich Elebash Recital Hall, these performances feature the music program's renowned faculty, alumni, outstanding performers selected from students in the DMA program and noted guest artists. Some concerts are followed by a master class, which the public is invited to observe. Norman Carey is Director and Jacqueline Martelle is Assistant Director.

### About the Program

**Anton Arensky** (1861-1906) was considered a child prodigy, having written several songs and piano pieces by the time he was nine years old. Born to a pianist mother and a doctor/cellist father in Novgorod, Russia, Arensky made a name for himself as both a pianist and composer. He studied under Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory before becoming a professor at the Moscow Conservatory in 1882 at the young age of 21, mentoring the likes of Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, and Glière.

Arensky became well-known in his lifetime as a composer of the Romantic aesthetic that dominated Russian song in the 19th century. At the time, composers like Glinka advocated for Russian music to be distinct from the Western canon, and while Arensky integrated Russian folklore, tunes, literature and legends into his music, he was not bound by Nationalistic ideas. He was curious about the compositional trends of his time and could just as easily write beautiful keyboard miniatures that stemmed beyond arranging Russian tunes into larger pieces.

One of Arensky's greatest musical influences was Tchaikovsky, who ultimately became a dear friend and mentor to him upon their initial acquaintance in Moscow. Following Tchaikovsky's death in 1893, Arensky composed and dedicated *String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 35*, to his memory. Published in 1894, the work breaks from the conventional string quartet model of two violins, viola and cello, opting instead for a single violin and viola with two cellos, creating a richer, deeper, and darker timbral palette. A master of choral writing, Arensky makes use of Orthodox chant and melodies from a Requiem mass and a coronation anthem, exploiting instrumental sonorities to evoke the centuries-old Russian religious vocal tradition. Arensky pays homage to Tchaikovsky directly through a middle-movement set of variations on a theme from his *16 Songs for Children, Op. 54*, and referentially through the use of the funereal chant in the first movement—a technique Tchaikovsky employed in the slow movement of his 3rd string quartet, similarly dedicated to the memory of a recently-deceased friend. At his publisher's request, Arensky arranged a version of the work for traditional string quartet, as the original scoring is virtually non-existent elsewhere in the chamber music literature.

The first movement, marked *Moderato*, opens with a hushed recitation of the Orthodox hymn, played initially with mutes. The chant is scored in a relatively compressed low register with the first cello leading on the upper line, perhaps emulating a chorus of men's voices led by the tenor. After two iterations of the hymn, the violin layers a quintessentially Russian Romantic melody over a slightly more moving version of the chant, then bursts into agitated activity before the viola takes over the yearning melodic line. As is typical of elegiac movements, a tender second theme in the major mode offers a loving reminiscence in contrast to the mournful solemnity of the opening. Here, Arensky employs more traditional string quartet writing, with the inner voices playing supple accompaniment to the violin's melody over a buoyant plucked bass line. Alternating between re-

turns to the chant and passages of nearly frenzied activity, the movement closes with the Orthodox hymn, once again muted and almost a whisper of its original form.

The second movement, Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky, uses a song by Tchaikovsky as the melodic backbone of the movement. Although this movement in particular commemorates Tchaikovsky's life and work, its variations are not somber. The violin begins with the theme, played with a singing, pastorale quality and a buoyant pizzicato accompaniment. The following seven variations move between characters that are playful and lighthearted, nostalgic, festive, languid, and skittish. Finally, the movement closes with a coda that reprises the theme in delicate harmonics and combines it with a return to the first movement's hymn.

The third movement is the briefest movement of the piece, just a few whirlwind minutes long. It is structured as one extended accelerando, with a few moments of respite where the original hymn returns again to interrupt the forward motion. This movement also quotes a famous Russian folk melody that Beethoven uses in the third movement of his String Quartet Op. 59, No. 2 ("Razumovsky") as well as more Russian liturgical music. The finale is an exuberant ending that makes the most of the powerful sound generated by the two cellos and delivers drama, grandeur, and excitement to close the piece. *Program note by Kirsten Jermé*

### About the Artists

Cellist **Audrey Chen** is a passionate solo and chamber musician dedicated to sharing the process of musical discovery and collaboration with the rest of the world. She has concertized with the Seattle Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra Summer Institute Orchestra, and the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, and has been featured as a guest artist with the Boston Chamber Music Society, Silk Road Ensemble, Parker Quartet, Borromeo Quartet, Argus Quartet, and Boston-based A Far Cry. Festival appearances include at Music@Menlo, the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Perlman Music Program, Tanglewood Music Center, and Sarasota Music Festival. After receiving a Bachelor's from Harvard University and Master's in Music from the New England Conservatory, she is now in her second year of a Doctorate in Musical Arts at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her main teachers include Laurence Lesser, Lluís Claret, and Marcy Rosen. Recently, Audrey was named a 2022 recipient of the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship. In her free time, she enjoys watching movies, trying new recipes, and making greeting cards.

Violinist **Leonard Fu** has performed as a soloist, chamber musician, and concertmaster across Europe, Asia, and the US, with orchestras such as the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the NDR Radiophilharmonie Orchestra, the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonic Orchestra Bremerhaven. Amongst his many chamber music partners are Laurence Lesser, Kim Kashkashian, Donald and Vivian Weilerstein, Janine Jansen, Jörg Widmann, Jens-Peter Maintz, the Kuss quartet, and the Frielinghaus Ensemble. Leonard has been laureate of prestigious international violin competitions in Fermo, Trieste, Hannover and Frankfurt and was the winner of the 2022 Schadt International String Competition in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He is also recipient of a scholarship from the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes and the Celia Ascher Artist Diploma Fellows Fund. He is currently pursuing an Artist Diploma at the Juilliard School of Music under the tutelage of Catherine Cho and Donald Weilerstein, to whom he has served as a teaching assistant. Further mentors have been Tanja Becker-Bender, Vivian Weilerstein, Merry Peckham, and Efstratios Minakakis.

An avid chamber musician, cellist **Kirsten Jermé** has appeared internationally from Harlaxton College in England to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. to the Accademia Chigiana in Siena. Formerly cellist of the Larchmere String Quartet, she performed across the U.S., Canada and Italy and recorded for Naxos while serving as Eykamp String Quartet Faculty Artist-in-Residence at University of Evansville and principal cellist of the Evansville Philharmonic. In New York, she has performed at Carnegie, Madison Square Garden, the Joyce Dance Theater, Le Poisson Rouge, and the United Nations. This summer, she will join the Cassatt Quartet as guest cellist on tour. Kirsten recently served as cello faculty at North Carolina State University and has given masterclasses at UNC-Chapel Hill, Otterbein and Western Kentucky University. She holds degrees from Eastman School of Music and Stony Brook University, and is currently pursuing her D.M.A. at the CUNY Graduate Center. Her primary teachers include Marcy Rosen, Steven Doane and Colin Carr.

**Martine Thomas** is a violist and poet based in New York City. She began her Doctorate of Musical Arts degree at CUNY Graduate Center in Fall 2021 and has a Masters in Viola Performance as well as a Bachelor of Arts in English from the Harvard-New England Conservatory dual degree program. She performs traditional classical music as a soloist and chamber musician, collaborates closely with composers like Vijay Iyer and Joy Guidry, and plays creative and improvised music. Martine is also a poetry editor for Peripheries Journal and you can find her recent poetry in the Lana Turner Journal and the Colorado Review.