

# Jerusalem Quartet played at the Maine Jewish Museum against backdrop of recent attack on Israel

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By Steve Feeney

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Alexander Pavlovsky (violin), Sergei Bresler (violin), Ori Kam (viola) and Kyril Zlotnikov (cello) make up the Jerusalem Quartet, who played at the Maine Jewish Museum on Saturday. *Contributed photo*

Against a backdrop of troubling news just breaking from Israel, the Jerusalem Quartet came to play a long-scheduled concert at the Maine Jewish Museum in Portland on Saturday afternoon.

Aimée M. Petrin, executive and artistic director of Portland Ovations, which presented the concert, brought the gathering to order by asking for a moment of silence before calling the Jerusalem Quartet to the stage. The all-male foursome then began with a performance of the national anthem of Israel, for which a large audience stood.

Though their names did not appear in the printed program, nor were the players individually introduced during the performance, the Ovations website indicates that the quartet was made up of Alexander Pavlovsky (violin), Sergei Bresler (violin), Ori Kam (viola) and Kyril Zlotnikov (cello).

Their overall playing was especially vivid with both peacefulness and passion, when called for from the works in the program, evocatively closer to the surface of the music than in many string quartet performances. The foursome could be crisp and precise. They were visibly and aurally leaning into their efforts, controlling with more than a hint of an edge. Though the works spanned centuries in style, the music was made to feel alive in the moment.

The performance of the 1829 “Quartet in E flat major, Op. 12” by Felix Mendelssohn opened the proceedings with a spirited journey through a classical equanimity periodically unsettled by the composer’s reverence for the exuberance of Beethoven. It was a fulsome and rich reading of the piece.

Those strained symmetries of the early Romantic period were long since disrupted by the time Paul Ben-Haim composed his “String Quartet No. 1, Op. 21” in 1937. The German-born Israeli citizen’s work fits quite well in the company of composers of his period like Stravinsky and Bartok.

But his take on that sort of driven lyricism taken through traditions of folk music was quite his own, as evinced by the Jerusalem Quartet. The song and dance elements, particularly blossoming in the final movement, brought the quartet closer to a broadly popular realm and had some audience members swaying in their seats.

After intermission, the quartet returned for the perennial favorite “String Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10” by Claude Debussy. While the 1893 work is chronologically located between the two pieces that preceded it on the program, the Debussy quartet transcends easy categorization. Its cyclical form creates a sort of dreamy world all its own. While, as they had done on the prior pieces, the Jerusalem Quartet provided some push and pull to the dynamics of the work, it can be, like many of the greatest works, appreciated on many levels.

Perhaps it was at least partially an effect of knowing the news of the day, but the playing of the Jerusalem Quartet brought to mind a certain orderly resolve that sought to somehow decisively mark the turbulent moment.

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