

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

November 29, 2023 | 7:30 PM
Mazzoleni Concert Hall

ARC
ENSEMBLE





A Message from Dr. Peter Simon



In 2003, we decided to create an ensemble consisting of the extraordinary musicians from the faculty of the RCM. In so doing, we had two main objectives: the first was to create a group who would serve as international ambassadors for The Royal Conservatory and the second was to reclaim a significant portion of musical history by unearthing, recording, and performing masterpieces by composers whose works had been lost due to the horrific circumstances of the Second World War, the Holocaust, and mass displacement.

20 years on – with multiple Grammy and Juno Award nominations, performances in major venues and festivals around the world, and unanimous critical acclaim – ARC has exceeded our ambitions in every possible way. ARC has emerged as a global leader in the discovery of lost repertoire, works that musicians around the world are beginning to adopt. ARC's first release in 2006 included the premiere recording of Mieczysław Weinberg's remarkable Piano Quintet. There are now a dozen versions in the catalogue. With the release of ARC's Walter Kaufmann recording, his music is now being published and orchestras in

Europe and America are taking up his orchestral works, including a Carnegie Hall performance this month. It is no exaggeration to claim that ARC's additions to the repertoire are changing our view of the 20th century's musical history.

Today's program revisits Walter Braunfels' extraordinary String Quintet – a work the ARC Ensemble recorded some years ago – and introduces the world to three ravishing works by the forgotten Viennese composer Frederick Block, scores that have remained undisturbed in the composer's archive since his death in 1945. The ARC Ensemble's eighth "Music in Exile" recording for Chandos will be dedicated to Block's chamber music and released in the fall of 2024. Our congratulations to the ensemble on its first 20 years and its magnificent contribution to the repertoire.

Dr. Peter Simon

Michael and Sonja Koerner President & CEO
The Royal Conservatory of Music



Frederick Block

ARC Ensemble

presents

Celebrating 20 Years Chamber Music by Braunfels & Block

String Quartet, op. 23 [1930]

Frederick Block (1899–1945)

I Allegro

II Molto vivace

III Allegretto (marionettenhaft)

IV Andante moderato

Piano Quintet, op. 19 [1929]

Frederick Block

I Sehr bewegt (schneller Marsch tempo)

II Andante moderato (nicht schleppen)

III (Finale) Sehr lebhaft

INTERMISSION

Suite for Clarinet and Piano, op. 73

[1944]

Frederick Block

I Spanish Prelude Vivace

II Pastoral Andante

III Gaiety Allegretto vivo

IV Orientale Andante

IV Fugue Allegro

String Quintet in F sharp Minor, op. 63

[1945]

Walter Braunfels (1882–1954)

I Allegro

II Adagio

III Scherzo

IV Finale – Rondo

ARC Ensemble

Erika Raum, violin

Marie Bérard, violin

Steven Dann, viola

Tom Wiebe, cello

David Liam Roberts, cello*

Joaquín Valdepeñas, clarinet

Kevin Ahfat, piano†

*Student of The Glenn Gould School †Alumnus of The Glenn Gould School

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CBC Radio 2 for future broadcast



Walter Braunfels

Frederick Block & Walter Braunfels

Program Note by Simon Wynberg,
Artistic Director of the ARC Ensemble

The ARC Ensemble's 20th-anniversary concert explores the music of Walter Braunfels and Frederick Block, both born towards the close of the nineteenth century. While Braunfels' works are not yet part of the canon, they are becoming increasingly familiar – ARC recorded his String Quintet in 2009, and most of the composer's major pieces are now represented in the catalogue. In contrast, not a note of Block's music has been heard, let alone recorded, in 70-plus years.



The nature of their respective exiles is very different too. Block's exile was the sort with which we are most familiar: the flight from a home that has become dangerous and unlivable, to a haven that, while safe, is also jarringly and disturbingly different – from Vienna to New York City in Block's case. Braunfels, who was Jewish on his father's side, chose to remain in Germany, excluded from any kind of musical participation, his life under constant threat from the regime. After the war this self-imposed isolation became known as "internal exile," or "inner migration."

Frederick Block's biography is possibly the most affecting of any of the musical exiles I have researched, a poignancy deepened by the solitude of his final years, and the almost total anonymity that followed his death. I first came across his name in the New York Public Library's list of special collections. I had never heard of him, and neither had any of my colleagues. Block's archive was left to the library in 2000, following the death of his wife Anny, and its content was impressive: half a dozen operas, symphonic works, piano solos, vocal cycles and a rich trove of chamber music. It seemed odd that history had comprehensively ignored a composer with so impressive a legacy and vita. A few weeks after my initial online research, I was sitting in the special collections room of the Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center, working my way through the boxes of the Block Archive.

As well as the composer's beautifully penned scores, there was sufficient biographical information to chart the essential details of his life. He was born Friedrich Bloch in Vienna, on August 30, 1899, to a respectable upper-middle-class couple, Sigmund and Berta, who were Jewish, though not particularly observant. Sigmund's successful wholesale business supplied flour to bakeries and animal feed to farms. Like so many fathers before and since, he supported music as a pastime, but doggedly opposed it as a career. He relented when Frederick, an only child, returned unscathed from the Italian front at the end of WWI, relief at his son's survival prompting a complete change of heart. Frederick's first teacher was the esteemed Czech pedagogue and composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster. Later, at the University of Vienna, he studied with Hans Gál.

By the 1920s, Frederick's career was in the ascendant. On January 15, 1922, a concert of Frederick's chamber music introduced him to Vienna's musical establishment. There were many subsequent performances in both Vienna and Prague, notably a broadcast in March 1929, when his first Piano Trio, op. 15, shared a program with a Bartók string quartet. Sigmund had died the previous year and left the business to Frederick. The bequest, and the revenue it generated – Frederick was not involved in its management – meant that he could devote himself to composition. Concerts included the Vienna Symphony Orchestra's premieres of an *Allegro for Strings* and his *Notturmi* for voice and orchestra. During the early 1930s, several programs devoted to the younger generation of Austrian composers included Frederick's chamber music, but his focus soon shifted to opera, and between 1933 and 1937 he wrote no fewer than six (in addition to their libretti). The third, *Samum*, based on a dark one-act drama by August Strindberg, was premiered at the Slovak National Theatre in 1936. The opera was widely and enthusiastically

received, and Block's scrapbook includes several pages of reviews. Frederick was on the brink of a substantial career, but the timing could scarcely have been less propitious. On March 12, 1938, Vienna awarded Hitler a euphoric welcome, and was soon supporting the full force of the race laws that had been incrementally imposed in Germany. By June, Frederick had abandoned his apartment on 25 Taborstrasse and shipped his piano and personal effects to New York; the family business would doubtless have already been confiscated. He caught a train to Trieste, where he secured a British visa, made his way to Zurich, and then flew to London and his fiancée, Anny Margulies. They married soon afterwards and sailed to New York in the spring of 1940.

The Blocks' apartment on Fort Washington Avenue, between West 177th and 178th Street, gradually became something of a prison for Frederick. Recurring premonitions of his own death began to haunt him. There is no evidence to suggest that he was suffering from an underlying physiological ailment that could have accounted for his fears. Indeed, Frederick was so convinced by the legitimacy and inevitability of the portents that he raced to set down as many new works as he was able to. It is possible that the stress of his new life had caused this acute sense of foreboding, but I believe there is a less equivocal, more painful and familiar reason for Frederick's apprehension, and it is directly related to the circumstances of his flight from Vienna.

Frederick's mother, Berta, a widow in her late sixties, would have had required something close to a miracle to escape from Vienna and the Nazi occupation, and Frederick must have been acutely aware of her helplessness. He would have witnessed German barbarity at first hand, and read reports of the *Kristallnacht*, the death camps and, by 1943, the Nazis' systematic effort to eradicate European Jewry. Like so many thousands of émigrés, his good fortune must have been accompanied by a large measure of guilt. The details of Berta's fate were unknown to Frederick, but they are known to us now. Deported from Vienna to Prague and thence to the Terezin camp, she was among the 1,980 elderly and infirm Jews (*Alterstransporte*) who were packed onto the "Bq" transport on September 26, 1942 and taken to the Treblinka extermination camp.

By 1943, according to a friend, Frederick was "living the life of a houseplant," seldom leaving his apartment. Late the following year he developed a chronic cough, and early in 1945, the source of an intermittent, stinging stomach pain was diagnosed as cancer. Block died on June 1, just two months before his 46th birthday. The omens had finally made good on their threat. Anny remained in their Washington Heights apartment after Frederick's death and survived him by 55 years. She never remarried. Anny and Frederick

The sum of Block's New York output is staggering, especially so when one considers the pressures of reinventing both his domestic and professional life.



are buried next to each other in the Cedar Park Cemetery, Paramus, New Jersey – a very long way from Vienna.

The sum of Block's New York output is staggering, especially so when one considers the pressures of reinventing both his domestic and professional life. Of his larger chamber works, his Piano Quintet, op. 19 is particularly successful, a three-movement piece whose lushly chromatic harmony suggests Korngold and Strauss. The bewitching second movement, with its recurring bass motto of a falling fifth, is especially effective. According to the score, Block completed the piece on April 20, 1929. It received several performances as well as broadcasts on Radio Wien. The String Quartet, op. 23 was completed the following February. The elegaic theme and murmuring accompaniment that open the work provide the movement with its core material. The *Allegretto*, with its alternating bars of three-four and two-four time, provides a charming interlude to the energetic second and fourth movements. Subtitled *marionettehaft* (puppet-like), it is a nod to the centuries-old marionette tradition that lives on in the dedicated marionette theatres of Vienna and Salzburg. The Quartet's final movement betrays Block's admiration for Mahler, a longstanding source of inspiration.

Walter Braunfels became a major figure in German music during the 1920s and '30s. He had significant family connections to its musical past: his mother Helene, née Spohr, was a pianist, a great-niece of the violinist and composer Louis Spohr, and a friend of both Franz Liszt and Clara Schumann. The opera *Die Vögel* (The Birds) propelled Braunfels into the exalted musical orbit of Franz Schreker, Hans Pfitzner and Richard Strauss. It was premiered by Bruno Walter in 1920 and immediately caught the public imagination. Productions followed in Berlin, Vienna, Cologne (under Otto Klemperer) and a host of other major houses. A second triumph followed with Braunfels' *Té Deum*, a celebration and affirmation of the composer's conversion to Catholicism in the aftermath of WWI. Like the Verdi *Requiem*, it was intended for the concert hall, despite its liturgical message. First performed in Cologne in February, 1922, the *Té Deum* went on to receive dozens of performances, as well as wide critical acclaim. This was probably the work that prompted Adolf Hitler to visit Braunfels and to request that he write an anthem in praise of the National Socialist Party. I was more than a little startled when Braunfels' grandson, the distinguished German architect Stephan Braunfels, mentioned this meeting to me.

Braunfels felt compelled to remain in Germany, and in the autumn of 1937, he moved to Süssenmühle, a bucolic hamlet on Lake Constance. The time and effort spent setting up a new house, when the strictures of National Socialism were forcing wave after wave of German composers and musicians to leave, is testament to Braunfels' affection for his homeland, or at least the homeland he had once known.

Once Braunfels' Jewish ancestry had been established, Hitler's request would have been quickly forgotten. Not so Braunfels' dismissive rejection.

Ten years later, on May 2, 1933, following a vicious denunciation by his colleague, Hermann Unger, Braunfels was fired as director of the Cologne Hochschule and banned from Germany's musical life. Unger, a rabid anti-Semite who had joined the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) the previous year, steadily ascended the Nazi's musical hierarchy. Braunfels' youngest son, Michael, a pianist and composer, recalled the period:

Like Frederick Block, Braunfels spent the next several years locked out of the musical world, working in a musical vacuum.

I remember walking down the street with [my father] and seeing a person he knew suddenly switch to the other side just so that he wouldn't have to say hello. At the time, people were scared of the repercussions of giving too friendly a greeting to an outcast.

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In examining film and photographs of post-war Cologne, an intact building is a rarity, and like most German cities, its wholesale destruction was accompanied by the collapse of an administrative infrastructure. Cultural projects were not immediate priorities.

Cologne, Germany, 1945

Braunfels' sense of himself as a "a stone in the dam" was perhaps a little naïve. There was clearly no dam worth a damn within Germany, and in any case, the regime would have choked any activity that might have helped build one. The mad logic of Nazi race-laws held that a Jewish quotient of 25% (or less) would produce a male sufficiently German, and dependable, to fight for the Reich – even with a suspect father like Braunfels. His sons Wolfgang, Michael and Stephan were all drafted into the Wehrmacht. Stephan lost his life on the eastern front.

Like Frederick Block, Braunfels spent the next several years locked out of the musical world, working in a musical vacuum. He found refuge in the composition of works that explored his faith: *Verkündigung* (Annunciation), op. 50; the *Passionskantate*, op. 54, and *Jeanne d'Arc. Szenen aus dem Leben der heiligen Johanna* (Jeanne d'Arc. Scenes from the life of St. Joan), op. 57. Towards the end of the war, Braunfels devoted himself to chamber music, writing two string quartets in 1944 and the String Quintet in F sharp minor, op. 63 the following year. (A third string quartet was completed in 1947.)

Several years ago, I visited Braunfels' house on Lake Constance. I was struck by the proximity (and historic safety) of the Swiss shoreline, less than a mile away. Walter's grandson, Josef Dichgans, walked me over to the bomb shelter where the Braunfels family had hidden during Allied raids. The planes that had thundered overhead were usually on bombing missions to Friedrichshafen, some 40 kilometers southeast of Süssenmühle. When Germany surrendered, Konrad Adenauer, who had been returned

to the Cologne mayoralty by American occupying forces, begged Braunfels to reclaim the directorship of the Hochschule. He was an obvious choice: he had had nothing to do with the regime, nor any involvement in German musical life since 1933. Braunfels somewhat reluctantly acquiesced, and had every hope and expectation that his career would regain some of its early momentum. The works he had composed during his twelve years of isolation all awaited performance, but German cities had been devastated and their premieres had to wait. In examining film and photographs of post-war Cologne, an intact building is a rarity, and like most German cities, its wholesale destruction was accompanied by the collapse of an administrative infrastructure. Cultural projects were not immediate priorities. Despite some initial interest in his music Braunfels was soon forgotten, his works and his religious ideals viewed as out-of-touch and reactionary.

The ARC Ensemble gave the U.K. premiere of the Braunfels' String Quintet at London's Cadogan Hall in April, 2008. ARC had just recorded the work, and I had absolutely no doubt that it was a 20th-century masterpiece, albeit one that was still unknown and unrecognized. Braunfels had begun the piece as a quartet, but soon decided that he needed a second cello to fully realize his musical ideas. If one is looking for a work to complement that most famous string quintet of all, Schubert's C major (D. 956), there is no better candidate than this Braunfels quintet.

On first hearing, the work betrays the influence of Strauss, Schreker, Wagner and, in the slow movement particularly, Brahms. In listening to an unknown work, one is instinctively tempted to compare the new with one's previous musical experiences, a process which can become a kind of spot-the-composer parlour game. There are of course no wholly original voices; all art must either follow or react to something pre-existing. The hints of other composers should not imply that Braunfels is some sort of epigone. In fact, all of his works share a rare individuality, directness and invention. His String Quintet follows the traditional four movement scheme, although its material is mainly drawn from the opening statement of the first movement – a fifteen-minute journey that is both exquisitely paced and consistently engaging. Braunfels' harmonic mastery is married to a brilliantly subtle rhythmic sense that is most clearly demonstrated in the *Scherzo*. The *Finale*, as infectious a barnstormer as one will find in the late-Romantic string repertory, again reveals an acute dramatic sense, served by apparently limitless musical and technical reserves – the Quintet rewards repeated listening. Published in 1951, its expressive beauty and luxuriant Romantic language would once have damned and dismissed the piece as no more than an anachronism. But rather than confronting it as an essay representing a particular school, or a catalogue of acquired accents, seventy-five years on we are much more likely to hear the piece at an appropriate remove, and to appreciate the composer's honest, heartfelt and confident declarations, all expressed in a voice that is singularly rich and decidedly his own.

ARC Ensemble

The ARC Ensemble (Artists of The Royal Conservatory) was established in 2003 as the Conservatory's ensemble-in-residence and is now among Canada's most distinguished cultural ambassadors, with multiple JUNO, OPUS Klassik, and Grammy nominations as well as glowing international reviews.

ARC's repertoire is largely dedicated to music suppressed and marginalized under the 20th century's repressive regimes. ARC believes there is a moral obligation to recover works that have been forgotten because of political or racial discrimination, and that their omission sustains the aims of perpetrators and leaves us with a distorted appreciation of cultural history. A growing number of extraordinary works are joining the repertoire as a result of ARC's work.

The ARC Ensemble has appeared at major festivals and series, including the Budapest Spring Festival, the George Enescu Festival (Bucharest), New York's Lincoln Center Festival, Canada's Stratford Festival, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, London's Wigmore and Cadogan Halls, and Washington's Kennedy Center. The ARC Ensemble's "Music in Exile" series has been presented in Tel Aviv, Warsaw, Toronto, New York, and London, and its performances and recordings (on Sony's RCA Red Seal and Chandos labels) continue to earn critical acclaim and frequent broadcasts on stations around the world.

Comprised of senior faculty of The Royal Conservatory's Glenn Gould School, with special guests drawn from the organization's most accomplished students and alumni, the ARC Ensemble's core group consists of piano, string quartet, and clarinet with additional instruments as repertoire demands. The ARC Ensemble has collaborated with a range of artists, including the late pianist Leon Fleisher, the novelist Yann Martel, actors Saul Rubinek and R.H. Thompson, and composers R. Murray Schafer, Omar Daniel, and Vincent Ho.

James Conlon, Music Director of the Los Angeles Opera and a pioneer in the recovery of lost 20th-century repertoire, is the ARC Ensemble's Honorary Chairman. ARC's core members are Erika Raum and Marie Bérard, violins; Steven Dann, viola; Tom Wiebe, cello; Joaquin Valdepeñas, clarinet; and Kevin Ahfat, piano.

ARC's Artistic Director is Simon Wynberg, and its General Manager is Jessica Wright.

arcensemble.com



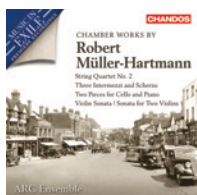
"Released in 2020, the ARC Ensemble Kaufmann disc does exactly what a series like this should do – puts up a flag for a neglected composer who deserves to be rediscovered. And the strategy seems to be working, as Leon Botstein is set to conduct Kaufmann's 'Indian' Symphony, also from his Indian exile period, at Carnegie Hall on 7 November."

– Simon Broughton, *BBC Music Magazine*

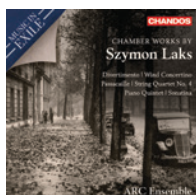
Music in Exile Series

As part of its mission to research and recover 20th-century music suppressed or marginalized by repressive regimes, war, and exile, the ARC Ensemble has released seven albums under the Chandos label in its acclaimed “Music in Exile” series.

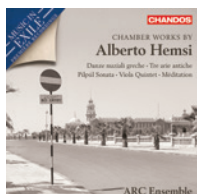
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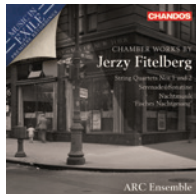
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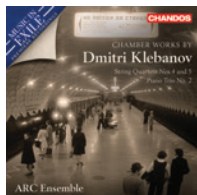
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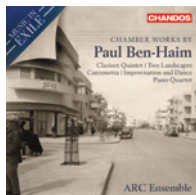
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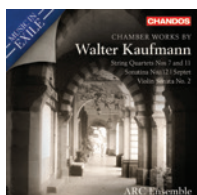
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The important work of the ARC Ensemble relies on the generosity of donors – those who recognize a unique opportunity to reach back through history and right the wrongs of the past. It is a powerful and lasting affirmation of the victory of the human spirit over adversity and a reminder of the power and resilience of music.

In the 20 years of ARC's existence, a number of works have joined the canon of 20th-century masterworks and once-forgotten composers have taken their rightful place among their contemporaries.

As Canadian cultural ambassadors, ARC's performances and recordings represent Canada's longstanding commitment to a world free from prejudice, and one where artistic and cultural diversity is celebrated.

If you appreciate ARC's unique and important work, please consider making a donation today. There are many ways for you to support ARC's ongoing mission. For more information, please email ARCEnsemble@rcmusic.ca

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**as of November 15, 2023*

Upcoming Concerts

The Viennese in Los Angeles

April 7, 2024 | 2:00 p.m.
Mazzoleni Concert Hall, Toronto

The ARC Ensemble performs Erich Korngold’s sublime Piano Quintet, together with a string quartet and works for clarinet and piano by his Viennese contemporary Ernest Kanitz. Both settled in Los Angeles in the 1930s, where Korngold became the most celebrated film composer of the day and Kanitz joined the faculty of the University of Southern California’s School of Music.

ARC Ensemble at The Isabel

April 21, 2024 | 2:30 p.m.
Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, Kingston

In celebration of its 20th anniversary, the Royal Conservatory’s Ensemble in Residence will perform chamber works by Frederick Block, Paul Ben-Haim, and Erich Korngold.

arcensemble.com

Acknowledgements

The ARC Ensemble is indebted to the Music Division of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts for providing scans of Frederick Block’s scores.

Frederick Block images provided by The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

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