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# Akhtamar Quartet's biography







Akhtamar, an Armenian legend. The name of the quartet is a reference to the Armenian Miniatures by Komitas/Aslamazyan, which the ensemble has performed with passion since its foundation. Formed in Brussels in 2014, the ensemble was one of the six quartets **selected for the "tremplins jeunes quatuors" of Paris' Philharmonie** in 2016 and in the same year won **the second prize in the Musiq'3 festival competition**. In 2021 the quartet was awarded **the third prize of the International Johannes Brahms Competition**.

The Akhtamar Quartet **performs in prestigious concert halls and festivals all around Europe**: Radio France Festival in Montpellier, the Concertgebouw in Bruges (Be), the MonteLeón Festival (Sp), as well as venues in Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Baltic States... and of course in Armenia.

In 2020, the quartet released its first CD: *légende arménienne*. The label Cypres Records produced the recording of Komitas' miniatures and "un quatuor arménien" by Eugenie Alécian, dedicated to the Akhtamar Quartet. Regularly broadcast on national radios (Musiq'3, France Musique, SWR2 in Germany...), *légende arménienne* has been rewarded with four stars by the prestigious BBC Music Magazine and Classica Magazine, four diapasons, the silver medal from the Global Music Awards and is one of the five nominees in the classical music category of the "Octaves de la Musique" 2021.

In **April 2023**, "**Enluminures**", **their second album**, is released by Cypres, revolving around Claude Debussy and the composer Judith Adler de Oliveira.

The Akhtamar Quartet is very keen on working with contemporary composers. Several of them, such as Roger Boutry, Eugénie Alécian, Jan Kuijken and Judith Adler de Oliveira have asked the musicians to create and record their works.

The quartet attaches great importance to bringing classical music everywhere and to everyone. They have several sets which they perform in establishments like schools, hospitals, homes and psychiatric institutes. This activity has also won recognition since The Dream Makers, a show for young audiences, was the public choice in the small ensemble category in the YAM awards 2021 (Young Audiences Music). From this impulse were born several solidarity projects that received important support: Music 4 Armenia, a tour of twenty free concerts in Armenia after the war in the fall of 2020; Harmonies of Dreams, a series of concerts and shows for patients in psychiatric hospitals in Belgium, organized in collaboration with the health care professionals, and Music 4 Lebanon in September 2022.

The Akhtamar Quartet is supported by the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Wallonie Bruxelles International, Le Dimore del Quartetto, the Boghossian Foundation, and the Centre National de Musique.

Want to discover our quartet in video? K Click here!

# The musicians





Coline studied in Paris with Dominique Juchors, then at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels. She perfected her playing with Stephan Picard in Berlin.



Coline is the founding member of the quartet and comes from a family of musicians. Her Armenian origins formed the initial tie between the group and Armenia, a country rich in musical heritage. Devoted to the continuous development of the quartet, her ideas for Akhtamar continue to proliferate together with the nuances of her sound.



She plays a Neapolitan violin, made around 1890 by Giovanni Pistucci.

Jennifer first studied the violin at the Conservatory of Colmar and then at the Royal Conservatory of Brussels.



Jennifer joined the quartet in 2016. She quickly embraced the project Akhtamar in its entirety, managing program notes and applications together with delighting in the role of second violinist of a string quartet. Passionate about literature, she weaves her musical interpretations like









a novelist weaves a storyline. She plays a violon by Dom Nicolò Amati, made in Bologna in 1731.





Ondine studied at the Conservatory of Colmar before entering Thérése-Marie Gilissen's viola class in the Royal Conservatory of Brussels.



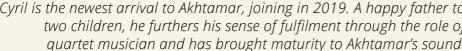
The quartet attained its professional level with the arrival of Ondine in 2014. She has steadily built up the quartet's network and forged relationships with invaluable talents: narrators, video-makers, sound engineers, social media managers and translators... Ondine is often the head of the Akhtamar family!



She plays a 19th -century French viola.

Cyril studied in Paris with Frédéric Borsarello and further improved from Marie Hallynck's teaching in the Royal Conservatory of Brussels.

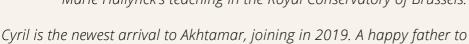


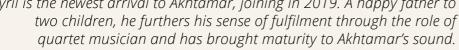
















# Programs

## The Akhtamar quartet has more than 60 works in their repertoire. This season, they propose the following:

#### **QUARTET:**

Judith Adler de Oliveira, "Enluminures" (18') Creation 2021 more information page 8

Bartók, Quartet Op.7 n.1 (30')

Beethoven, Quartet Op.18 n.1 (25')

Brahms, Quartet Op.51 n.1 (33')

Debussy, Quartet op.10 (27')

Dvořák, Quartet op.106 n.13 (36')

Haydn, Quartet op.50 n.6 - "The Frog" (23')

Haydn, Quartet Op.20 n.5 (25')

Janáček, Quartet n.1 "Kreutzer Sonata" (18')

De Jonghe, Strijkkwartet II (5')

Mendelssohn, Quartet Op.44 n.2 (30')

Komitas, Miniatures, transcripted for string quartet by Serguey Aslamazyan

#### **AKHTAMAR & CO:**

Schubert, String Quintet in C Major D.956 (55')
more information page 7

Lysight, Septentrion (15') (for string quartet and saxophone)

Brahms, Piano Quintet in F minor op.34 (43')

Piazzolla, Grand Tango, transcripted for Violin, Double Bass and string quartet by Jean-Frédéric Molard (12')



The show "Freestyle Classics" forms bridges between two vastly different artistic and cultural worlds: classical music and Freestyle dance. Through the performance, the "Freestyle Classics" project breaks traditional artistic codes and advocates diversity. In uniting artists from "opposing" disciplines, the project proves that we can still create entirely new sensations and emotions.







## Introduction

"Freestyle Classics" is a unique performance that mixes the classical music universe with street dance, thanks to the unexpected meeting of two groups of established artists: the Freestyle Lab collective and the Akhtamar String Quartet.

This exchange between freestyle (an eminent form of street dance) and classical music (a domain too often directed towards privileged audiences) breaks traditional codes and gathers people from different walks of life to the same event. The artists involved wish to bring classical music to the street and urban culture to classical concert halls. The show will allow for genuine exchange and connection between the artists. Everyone involved has the opportunity to express themselves through both movement and music. The performances, adaptable to various interior and exterior spaces, propose a wholly new artistic form: a mix of improvisation and choreography, adapted to the needs of both dancers and musicians.

The project started in 2021, thanks to the program "CultureCultuur 1060", the GC Het Huys, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and Danspunt.

Discover the teaser of this creation by clicking here!



This collaboration between the quartet and their mentor originated in Vienna. Schubert, the greatest of the Viennese composers, had a profound impact on all five musicians and before long the idea of interpreting the majestic string Quintet in C major became their common dream and goal.









The cellist Vida Vujic regularly gives concerts as a soloist or in chamber music ensembles in Europe and in South America. She has won first and second prizes and in many international competitions in Serbia, Italy and Austria. Vida Vujic has been teaching chamber music since 2014 at the Vienna University of Music.

## Introduction of the String Quintet in C major, D.956 (op. posth. 163)

Schubert worked on the composition throughout the year of 1828, completing it shortly before his death on the 19th of November.

The piece clearly demonstrates Schubert's utmost mastery and goes beyond the realm of chamber music through its abundance of musical imagery. Meditative solos and dialogues between two instruments blend with complex harmonies and sublime melodies, which together evoke an intangible sense of eternity. The driving force of Schubert's creativity shines through every bar, as does each emotion he chooses to express, ranging from pure innocence to exuberance. The listener is presented with a seemingly infinite number of sound landscapes, some so original they forbid any point of comparison.

In every movement, we hear the most intimate revelations of Schubert's soul: his pain, melancholy and nostalgia, always accompanied by a tender reserve. There are moments in the quintet which bring us out of our world of life, death and all that is visible. Thus, we are introduced to the mystery of music.



Duration: 55 minutes



"Enluminures" is a multidisciplinary work (musical and visual) that awakens the senses.

Composed by Judith Adler de Oliveira and designed by Isabelle Françaix, "Enluminures" will be interpreted by the Akhtamar quartet.

Judith Adler - composer

Akhtamar - Performer

Isabelle Françaix - videographer







## Introduction of the piece

Enluminures, composed for the Akhtamar quartet, consists of a series of miniatures based on traditional Armenian themes. The title recalls illuminated manuscripts and their constantly shifting presence between literature and painting. It is the interpreter's decision whether a particular image resembles an alphabetic character or not, and if so, to what extent... illuminated manuscripts are fundamentally open-ended and always offer choice to the onlooker. Their relationship to literature and painting has been explored continually over centuries in a variety of ways. "Enluminures" echoes these historical explorations: at times, the secular, Armenian themes are reworked with an emphasis on authenticity and at others, fresh outlooks take over and therefore break with tradition.

Thematic similarities can be drawn between "Enluminures" and the Komitas/Aslamazyan miniatures, a piece that lies at the heart of the quartet's repertoire. These are most prominent in "Grounk" and "Kagavik". Other themes in "Enluminures" ("Eri eri jan" "Yel yel" and "Dle Yaman") pay tribute to Komitas' invaluable work collecting and preserving Armenian music.

Duration: 18 minutes

Discover the teaser of this creation by clicking here!



By bringing together in the same concert Dvořák's quartet opus 106 and Janáček's first quartet, both created by the Czech Quartet, Akhtamar takes us to the Czech Republic, to a land of colours and emotions.

## Introduction

Prague, 1874: Antonín Dvořák's first meeting with Leoš Janáček marks the beginning of a long friendship full of exchanges and musical influences.

In his op. 106 quartet, Dvořák pays tribute to Czech harmonies and rhythms. In particular, the third and fourth movements are inspired by the "furiant"; a traditional, masculine dance. Through lyrical emphasis and pastoral themes, the composer conveys his pleasure at finally being reunited with his homeland after a long stint in America.

Janáček on the other hand integrates poetic meters of the spoken language into his compositions. His string quartet, inspired by Tolstoy's novel "The Kreutzer Sonata" is written like an opera without words. Each instrument has its own voice in this intimate, psychological drama that explores the inner tension of tormented, romantic relationships. Janáček expresses with exquisite pain the horrors of jealousy and the inevitable tragedy of love.

## Program

**DVORÁK**, Antonín (1841, Nelahozeves, Czechia - 1904, Prague, Czechia),

Quartet n.13 opus 106 in G Major

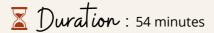
- 1. Allegro moderato
- 2. Adagio ma non troppo
- 3. Molto vivace
- 4. Finale: Andante sostenuto. Allegro con fuoco

JANÁCEK, Leos (1854, Hukvaldy, Czechia - 1928,

Ostrava, Czechia)

Quartet n.1 "Kreutzer Sonata"

- 1. Adagio. Con moto
- 2.Con moto
- 3. Con moto vivo andante
- 4. Con moto (adagio) più mosso





In September 2022, the Akhtamar quartet embarked on a solidarity tour in Lebanon, accompanied by the French writer and photographer Baptiste Cogitore. Mixing music and narrative, this concert-lecture relives the artists' journey through the fragmented and insular country of Lebanon.

## Presentation

From Tripoli to Baalbek via Beirut, the concert-lecture "Islands of Lebanon" is like a direct flight to this fractured country where the population have been left with nothing but hope and solidarity to battle the incessant storms of crises they are forced to face. Through the subtle union of classical music and readings from the book, the concert-lecture promises to touch the hearts and souls of a large, diverse audience.

This performance was born from the "Music 4 Lebanon" solidarity tour in which the Akhtamar Quartet gave twenty free concerts in either isolated places or institutions particularly affected by the crisis, like orphanages, schools, refugee associations and medical clinics. To immortalise the quartet's encounters and the corresponding emotions and questions that arose during the tour, Baptiste Cogitore accompanied the musicians, permanently equipped with his notebook and camera. The raw material Baptiste collected soon took the form of portraits, videos, a blog and now the book "Islands of Lebanon" which will be published by 'Rodéo d'Âme' in June 2023.

In the concert-lecture, the Akhtamar Quartet plays a selection of pieces from their repertoire, ranging from works by Haydn to contemporary creations as well as Debussy, Beethoven, Komitas, and transcriptions of Arabic songs by Abdel-Rahman El Bacha. Meanwhile, Baptiste Cogitore delivers poignant stories full of raw emotions, offering a Western perspective on Lebanon's physical, cultural and social reality.

A multidisciplinary event that carries the voice of a population and reflects different life trajectories

☑ Duration: 1h







# First album

## légende arménienne

The opportunity to travel has allowed us to discover the soul of a country through its simultaneously joyful and nostalgic music



#### Presentation of our album

The Komitas Miniatures manage to condense all aspects of Armenian musical culture into a few short minutes. Serguey Aslamazyan's arrangements of the work for string quartet enhance their inherent emotional intensity. We sense a nobility in the quartet arrangements, which is not present in the original. However, Aslamazyan's subtle additions do not distort the Miniatures' real message of peace and hope. Similarly, these themes lie at the heart of Eugenie Alécian's "Un Quatuor arménien'. This powerful work expresses the energy of a country that never stops singing and dancing, no matter how much it suffers. The album has received four stars from both the prestigious BBC Music magazine and Classica magazine as well as four "diapasons" from the well-known Diapason magazine. It has been rewarded by the silver medal from the Global Music Awards, and was one of the five nominees in the classical music category of the "Octaves de la Musique" 2021.



« Komitas's Miniatures are lively and folky, while Alécian's Un quatuor arménien has a darker, more wistful outlook. The admirable Akhtamar Quartet seems equally at home with the demands of both. »

BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE (UK) — 2020

« The cd is outstanding in all respects. »

ADÈLE MOLLE — MUSIQ'3 (BE) — 2020



« The Akhtamar quartet favors tenderness and melancholy. By its lightness and its sophistication (...) this chamber music interpretation is defined by its intimate and sometimes naive character..»

« The Akhtamar Quartet's first cd is a complete succes: brilliant technique, personnal coulour and perfect cohesion. This first disc from the brussel born quartet holds great expectations and offers a passionate trip throught armenian music's heart, past and future. »

STÉPHANE RENARD — LARSEN (BE) — 2020

FABIENNE BOUVET — CLASSICA MAGAZINE (FR) — 2021

## Listen to our CD by clicking here!





# Second album Release in spring 2023 Enluminures

A composer in the spotlight connects the orient with the occident and folklore with modernity.



## Presentation of our album

Debussy's string quartet op. 10 was considered perturbing at the time, on the Parisian music scene, and has since become an absolute staple of quartet repertoire. It sweeps us along the most unexpected harmonic pathways and takes inspiration from sound-worlds as diverse as jazz, gamelan ensembles and Spanish folk music. Rich in colour and exotic tonalities, this poetic masterpiece frees itself from traditional Western customs and stands as a unique bridge between different cultures. It was the famous Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaye's string quartet who premiered the work. They later defended it from the many accusations of "too modern". With it's ties to Belgium, France and Armenia, the Akhtamar quartet immediately related to it and placed the piece at the heart of their repertoire. The Akhtamar quartet chose its name in reference to both the ancient Armenian myth and the Komitas Miniatures arranged by Aslamazyan, which they have played with passion since their formation.

In all areas of art, ancient works are visited by contemporary artists and adapted or transformed to speak to today's world. Judith Adler de Oliviera has taken secular, Armenian themes and expressed them through music in a variety of ways. At times, she "narrates" these themes in a direct manner and at others, we have a faint sense of the original material as her innovative approach draws us away from tradition. As some of the same themes figure in the Miniatures by Komitas/Aslmazyan, a pathway is created between Oliviera's work and the music which lies at the heart of Akhtamar's repertoire.



« The Akhtamar Quartet plays both sides of this music [Debussy's quartet]: the sonorous, sensual sound and the highly original thematic structure, which has never before been heard with such effortless, self-evident conciseness. It is truly impressive how the ensemble shapes the melodic contour of the work, articulating it with eloquence and exploring its emotional depths. »

GISELHER SCHUBERT — FONO FORUM (DE)— AOÛT 2023



« The excellent Akhtamar quartet reveals a young female composer.

STEPHANE RENARD — L'ÉCHO (BE) — AVRIL 2023







## Young audiences

#### **The Dream Makers**

A musical journey without words, a quartet full of lights, animated by the power of the compositions of Brahms, Debussy, Haydn, Dvorak... to discover from the youngest age the emotions, the colors of the music and what happens inside us when it passes through us.

From 6 to 12 years-old







The Dream Makers show explores the place of dreams, friendship and music in an individualized society, where everyone is caught up in the rush of action and time. With the power of their art, the four musicians will succeed in changing the world around them and bring out the lights that shine in all of us.

The staging of the show, directed by Ségolène Van Der Straten, allows children to grasp the meaning of the story not through the usual means of speech, but by immersing themselves totally in the music. The musicians express themselves through music, communicate, dance, and invite the children to embark on a journey with them...

Sometimes surrounded or taken to task by the musicians, the children are at the very centre of the artists' journey, of their friendship, their sorrows and their joys. A journey they will not soon forget!

An original production by the Akhtamar Quartet, directed by Ségolène Van der Straten and staged by Anne Desclée.



Discover the trailer of this show by clicking here!

## Young audiences

## Classical music, As You Like It!

Our show "Classical music, As You Like It!" is a concept that offers the public the chance to become a musical maestro, through learning 101 anecdotes about composers and their pieces!

What would you like to listen to today? It's your choice!







A story lies behind every piece of music. By letting the public draw names out of a hat, the quartet renders each performance a unique concert. The fun and playful atmosphere created through the musician's interactions with the audience allows them to discover more about classical music in an original way.



Each piece the quartet plays forms a link with either literature, painting, or the history of an era or a country. Drawn by luck, whichever piece is then accompanied by a short text or illustration, painting or musical explanation, sometimes a historical account... These elements guide the listening experience and stir the imagination. Time and space can quite simply fall away! Some of the most well-known artistic works are used as guiding tools, like certain films, pictures and buildings. This use of association allows for an incredibly clear understanding of the musical work at hand.

Discover the trailer of this show by clicking here!



## Solidarity projects



#### **Harmonies of Dreams**

The project "Harmonies of Dreams" offers the beneficial qualities of classical music to hospitals and homes. Several original shows created by the Akhtamar Quartet have been adapted for every patients. Each performance consists of a tailored musical journey, supported by healthcare professionals. Created thank to the support of "Un Futur pour la Culture", this project began in Liege and Brussels for more than 250 people, and is expanding throughout Belgium.



"The Dream Makers" Show performed for psychiatric patients in Liege - October 2021



Souvenir given by the teenagers of the hospital ISoSL in Liège - October 2021



Concert in support of healthcare professionals during the covid-19 pandemic in Liege – July 2021

Human beings are receptive to music throughout their lives. Both a universal language and a source of well-being, music is used increasingly in the medical world. Its benefits are most renowned in psychiatric care and the monitoring of patients, as it has a clear impact on motor functions and memory. Convinced by these potential benefits, the Akhtamar quartet formed a mission to make their music sound in hospitals and medical institutions. Through their live performances, they would share the qualities of journeys and dreams with those patients who no longer have the opportunity or ability to experience them. This project is based on principles of music therapy.

#### In hospitals, medical centres and clinics

The performances, written according to to the ages of different audiences (children, adolescents or adults) have been created in direct liaison with healthcare professionals. They are dedicated to all patients, and also people with mental health disabilities and/or handicaps, whether or not they are permenant residents. The Akhtamar Quartet gives performances to small groups of patients, during which they prioritize interaction and moments to share.

#### In homes for the elderly

The Akhtamar quartet plays on a regular basis for the elderly at the Sainte-Gertrude Home in Brussels. With each musical get-together, the bonds between us and the Sainte -Gertrude residents strengthen, and our discussions go deeper. At the end of each concert, the residents choose the repertory for the next occasion.

But the project does not stop there: we wish to add an intergenerational dimension by inviting the pupils from the school across the road, "Chanterelle", to join the performances.



# Solidarity projects

## **June 2021**



Music to heal a grievously wounded and bereaved population? This is the quest of the musicians of Akhtamar Quartet. This solidarity tour, which took place in June 2021, allowed hundreds of people to meet and hope again around French and Armenian melodies.

Since September 2020, Armenia yet again finds itself staring catastrophe in the face. Despite the ceasefire of the 9th November, the situation in the country remains extremely worrying. Military action has led to the deaths of 5000 largely teenage soldiers, many thousands wounded and tens of thousands of families forced into exile. The visible marks of Armenia's suffering will in time fade but the spiritual scars constitute a near-permanent additional disfigurement.

In June 2021, the Akhtamar Quartet flew to Armenia for a solidarity tour of two weeks, to fill hospitals, schools and rural areas with music. Many Armenians, sensitive and appreciative of classical music, have had little or no access to any for far too long.

In order to introduce as many people as possible to the works of French composer Claude French-Armenian composer Alécian, Eugénie Komitas/Aslamazyan among others, the Akhtamar Quartet has given twenty free concerts. The quartet presented a special show "The Dream Makers" for more than 200 children. A musical journey without words, which highlights the poetic and unifying power of music, the true universal language.

Thanks to the collaboration of the filmmaker Baptiste Cogitore, a documentary series in 5 episodes was created. By following the steps of the Quartet, this series brings a testimony, an outsider's perspective not only upon the current physical condition of Armenia but also upon its musical and cultural well-being.

## Discover the first episode of the documentary series here!

A project supported by GFEDERATION - GEBOUW-



















# Solidarity projects

## September 2022



The Akhtamar Quartet's project "Music 4 Lebanon" aspires to bring serenity and help build an optimistic outlook for the future. Having received numerous positive reactions for its "Music 4 Armenia" tour, the quartet aims to bring the benefits of music to another country going through exceptionally difficult times: Lebanon.

For several months now, Lebanon has faced **an unprecedented economic situation** that has pushed millions of people into poverty. This financial crisis, defined by the World Bank as one of the worst globally since 1850, has further deteriorated due to the Beirut port explosion in August 2020 and the pandemic. Extortionate inflation, less spending power and rising unemployment have stripped the Lebanese people of their autonomy; the exit from such a downward spiral is unclear. Inevitably, **the ongoing situation produces the worst kind of spiritual distress.** 

When both action and words cease to function, solidarity between people remains. The "Music 4 Lebanon" tour, **organised on-site by the "Hammana Artist House"**, offered approximately **15 free concerts around Lebanon, which hundreds of people will be able to attend**. The concerts were held in places where there is significant vulnerability, like hospitals, schools, care homes and refugee camps.

As children have been particularly affected by the surrounding distress, the Akhtamar quartet would like to privilege interaction with them. With their young-audience show "The Dream Makers", the quartet was able to share positive and reassuring energy through music.

A travel diary by Baptiste Cognitore, *Beirut and other islands* was born from our *Music 4 Lebanon* project. Photographer and writer, Cognitore accompanied the quartet on their tour across the country. The diary, published by Rodéo d'Âme, consists of a unique testimony and a Western perspective on Lebanon's material, cultural and musical situation.

Discover Baptiste Cogitore's logbook about "Music 4 Lebanon"
here!







#### They supported our solidarity projects and tours

































And all the people who took part in our fundraising campaigns!



You would like to support our next solidarity projects?

You can contact us or make a donation here!

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Want to learn more about our quartet?

Visit our website by clicking here









