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Chameleon Arts Ensemble celebrates 100th anniversary of Stravinsky’s L’Histoire du Soldat on December 1 and 2

November 1, 2018 – Boston, MA – The Chameleon Arts Ensemble celebrates the 100th anniversary of Stravinsky’s L’Histoire du Soldat (The Soldier’s Tale) on Saturday, December 1, 8 PM and Sunday, December 2, 4 PM at First Church in Boston, 66 Marlborough Street. The program, titled L’Histoire at 100, also includes Stravinsky’s rarely-heard Concertino for string quartet; Camille Saint-Saëns’ neo-classic Septet in E-flat Major for trumpet, string quartet, double bass, and piano, Op. 65; and Joan Tower’s vibrant homage to the master, Petroushskates for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. Acclaimed for his gleaming tone and vibrant stage presence, baritone and voice-over artist James Demler will narrate The Soldier’s Tale.


ABOUT THE PROGRAM
Premiered in September of 1918, Igor Stravinsky’s L’Histoire du Soldat tells a Faustian tale of a soldier who sells his violin to the devil in exchange for wealth and knowledge. The First World War is the obvious backdrop, and L’Histoire is a complex, layered allegory of the profound changes it brought. Four years into the war, Stravinsky was living in exile in Switzerland. His family money was gone, and he needed to generate income. A large-scale ballet or opera wasn’t practical, so he conceived of a portable work scored for a chamber ensemble of violin, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, trombone, and percussion, with three actors in the roles of the narrator, the soldier, and the devil. For Chameleon’s production, baritone James Demler will provide the narration and take on all three roles.

Stravinsky drew his musical inspiration from popular music of the time such as ragtime, tango, and jazz. The economy of means with regard to nearly every aspect of the piece – melody, rhythm, and instrumentation – is astonishing. Sharp, sarcastic and brilliant, it serves as a bridge between
Stravinsky’s Russian period and the neoclassic style he was soon to adopt. The result is a masterpiece that remains as fresh and exciting today as it was 100 years ago.

Opening the program is a rarity: Stravinsky’s 1920 Concertino for string quartet. It was composed for the Flonzaley Quartet, and Stravinsky was given free rein over the form. He chose “one single movement, treated in the form of a free sonata allegro with a definite concertante part for the first violin.” Stylistically, the Concertino continues his move toward the neoclassic while still drawing on the Russian dance style of Petrushka and L’Histoire. One of only three works for string quartet, Concertino is a significant entry in Stravinsky’s small chamber music catalog.

Scored for the unusual combination of trumpet with string quartet, double bass, and piano, Camille Saint-Saëns’ Septet in E-Flat Major, Op. 65 is a neoclassic work that draws on Classical and Baroque forms, evoking the lightness and spirit of 18th century French dance. It was composed in 1879 at the request of Émile Lemoine for his whimsically-titled, Parisian chamber music society “La Trompette.” Lemoine had asked Saint-Saëns for many years to compose something for trumpet and the instruments ordinarily available to the society, but Saint-Saëns demurred, jokingly suggesting that he would instead write for guitar and thirteen trombones. Despite his reluctance, the Septet became one of Saint-Saëns’ most successful and popular works, showing his immense gift for reimagining music of an earlier age.

Rounding out the program is Joan Tower’s vibrant homage to the master: Petroushskates for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. The work’s twin inspirations – reflected in the title – are Stravinsky’s Petrushka (specifically the opening Shrovetide Fair scene) and figure skating. She notes: “In an attempt to understand why figure skating, especially pair skating, was so beautiful and moving to me I discovered a musical corollary — the idea of a seamless action. (Skating, of course, has no seams unless you stop!) I also always loved Petrushka and wanted to create an homage to Stravinsky and that piece in particular. As it turned out, the figure skating pairs became a whole company of skaters, thereby creating a sort of musical carnival on ice.” The occasion also marks Ms. Tower’s 80th birthday.

ABOUT CHAMELEON ARTS ENSEMBLE OF BOSTON
Founded in 1998, Chameleon Arts Ensemble has distinguished itself as one of Boston’s finest, most versatile chamber ensembles. For 20 years, Chameleon and Artistic Director Deborah Boldin have consistently earned unqualified praise for integrating old and new repertoire into unexpected chamber music programs that are themselves works of art. They were recognized nationally with 2009 and 2007 Awards for Adventurous Programming from Chamber Music America and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. The Boston Globe recently noted: “The Chameleon Arts Ensemble has distinguished itself over the course of two decades by sheer dint of its sparkingly imaginative programming. Its concerts are the slow food of local chamber music, events where sounds and sensibilities, rhapsody and reverie, old music and new, are balanced with care and a sense of individual voice.”

James Demler has appeared as baritone, actor, and voiceover artist with opera companies, ensembles, and organizations coast to coast. He made his film debut in Wes Anderson’s Moonrise Kingdom, and was a guest Public Address Announcer for the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park. With the Boston Pops and conductor Keith Lockhart he sang and narrated the Boston Baseball Cantata and the world premiere of The Christmas Story. The Boston Musical
"Intelligencer" recently noted “Demler was a commanding presence, an almost prophetic one, with marvelously pointed intonation, power, shapely phrasing, and dynamic control.”

The artists of the Ensemble are highly respected and sought-after performers, with growing national and international reputations. Their superb artistry and finely-honed collaborative skills ensure luminous performances and dynamic musical dialogues. *The Arts Fuse* praised them for “a spectacular, shattering rendition.” *The Boston Musical Intelligencer* hailed “Chameleon’s interpretation riveted, offering a seemingly entirely new way of hearing a familiar piece.”

**PERFORMERS**
Deborah Boldin, flute  
Robyn Bollinger, violin  
Vivian Choi, piano  
James Demler, narrator  
Joshua Gordon, cello  
Eunae Koh, violin  
Gabriel Langfür, trombone  
Rodney Marsalis, trumpet  
Ayano Ninomiya, violin  
Kelli O'Connor, clarinet  
Damian Primis, bassoon  
Matt Sharrock, percussion  
Scott Woolweaver, viola  
Randall Zigler, double bass

**CALENDAR LISTING - 2018-2019 Season**

**Chamber Series 2: L’Histoire at 100**

**Program:**  
Igor Stravinsky, Concertino for string quartet  
Joan Tower, *Petroushskates* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello & piano  
Camille Saint-Saëns, Septet in E-flat Major for trumpet, strings & piano, Op. 65  
Igor Stravinsky, *L’Histoire du Soldat* (The Soldier’s Tale)

**Date/Time & Location:**  
Saturday, December 1, 2018, 8 PM  
Sunday, December 2, 2018, 4 PM,  
First Church, 66 Marlborough Street, Boston

The closest subway stops are Arlington Street on the Green Line and Back Bay Station on the Orange Line. First Church in Boston is wheelchair accessible.

**TICKETS**  
Individual tickets are $47, $36, and $25, with $5 discounts for students and seniors.

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