

The Needham Concert Society

Sunday, December 6, 2020, 3 p.m.

Livestreaming from The Rivers School Conservatory, Weston, Massachusetts

presents

Orion Chamber Ensemble

Peter Zazofsky, violin

Ronald Lowry, cello

Randall Hodgkinson, piano

P R O G R A M

Piano Trio No. 2 in C major, Op. 87-----Johannes Brahms

Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo: Presto
Finale: Allegro giocoso

Impromptus, D. 899 (Op. 90)-----Franz Schubert

No. 2 in E-flat major
No. 3 in G-flat major

Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 97 ("Archduke")-----Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro
Andante cantabile, ma però con moto – Poco piu adagio – Tempo I
Allegro moderato – Presto

Program notes

Johannes Brahms, Piano Trio No. 2 in C major, Op. 87

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Presto

Finale: Allegro giocoso

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was born in the port city of Hamburg, Germany. His father, Johann Jakob, was a free-lance musician who played both string and wind instruments in a local militia band, and with a sextet that performed in a popular cafe. In later years Johann Jakob secured a position in the bass section of the Hamburg Philharmonic.

His father recognized Johannes Brahms' musical talent and began his instruction of cello and violin at age 4. As a young child Johannes demanded to learn to play the piano. He quickly progressed to musical composition under the guidance of his piano teacher, Eduard Maxsen, who recognized that Brahms' talents lay more in composition than in performance. However, the young Brahms was expected to earn money as early as he was able. At age 12, Brahms began playing piano in waterfront dance halls. There were also pleasant interludes, when the teenaged Brahms spent summers in the countryside, teaching piano.

In 1849 Brahms began to perform with Eduard Remenyi (born Hoffman), a violinist who presented programs of "national dances," which he described as Hungarian or gypsy folk music. Folk origins of these melodies have not been verified, but Brahms used the engaging style in many works, including the scherzo of the C Major piano trio.

Brahms and Remenyi embarked upon a concert tour in 1853 that led to Brahms' long association with violinist Josef Joachim. Through connections with Joachim, Brahms met and played for Franz Liszt, and Brahms had the fortunate opportunity to meet Robert and Clara Schumann, who were excited by Brahms' music and facilitated his first publications of music under his own name. Brahms continued a long friendship with the Schumanns, and he continued to assist and support Clara after Robert's illness and death.

In the 1860s Brahms began to spend much of his time in Vienna, where he held a series of conducting positions that enabled him to perform many of his own works, notably including his *German Requiem*, *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, and the Third and Fourth Symphonies.

Brahms' Piano Trio No. 2 in C major was initially performed in 1882. It is a joyous and vigorously moving work that displays Brahms' penchant for developing simple melodies into more complex iterations and his skillful use of ornamental figures and rhythmic variation. This trio, as is typical for Brahms, is based on classical forms such as the sonata allegro, in contrast to works by his contemporaries such as Liszt, Robert Schumann, Berlioz, and Wagner, who rejected older forms for more freely organized symphonic poems and musical drama.

The first movement, *Allegro*, begins with a poignant theme stated in unison by violin and cello, as the piano plays quiet chords and octaves. The theme gains complexity as it becomes an echoing duet between violin and cello. Meanwhile the piano begins a sequence of arpeggios that transition to measure-crossing triplets and then to octaves in a dotted rhythm. In later passages the strings take up

these varied rhythms, and the piano states the theme in dense chords. In an animated sequence, violin and cello voice another modification of the opening theme as the piano creates a quiet rumble by combining a bass tremolo with right-hand triplets. The movement ends with a triumphant statement of still another version of the original theme.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, is a set of five variations on a playful melody--and irresistible earworm--that resembles a Hungarian song. Again rhythmic complexity is a dominating element.

The third movement, a *Scherzo*, is a tour de force of virtuosity that includes rapid repeated notes in the strings opposed to octave scales in the piano. A simple melody is presented primarily by violin and cello as the pianist executes an array of dramatic arpeggios, scales, and chords. The *Scherzo* moves directly to the Finale, *Allegro giocoso*, which features a playful tune and sequences of ascending and descending chromatic triplets. Pianist Emanuel Ax has noted that fans of *The Simpsons* should recognize the finale's opening theme.

Franz Schubert, Impromptus, D. 899 (Op. 90)

No. 2 in E-flat major

No. 3 in G-flat major

Performed by pianist Randall Hodgkinson

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Trio in B-flat major, Op. 97 ("Archduke")

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Allegro

Andante cantabile, ma però con moto – Poco piu adagio--Tempo I

Allegro moderato – Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was born in the city of Bonn within the Electorate of Cologne, an ecclesiastical state on the west bank of the Rhine. Beethoven's grandfather held the position of *Kapellmeister*, or music director, of the court of the Electorate, and his father was also a court musician.

Beethoven began study of keyboard instruments at age 4 or 5. He is said to have played the clavichord sitting on his father's lap as his father sang. By his teenage years he was employed as a substitute organist at chapel, performed in music ensembles at court, and taught private keyboard lessons. He began composing music at an early age, and he published keyboard sonatas at age 12.

At age 20 Beethoven left Bonn for Vienna, where he studied with Josef Haydn and embarked upon an active career of musical composition and piano performance. By the mid 1790s he was reputed to be the premier virtuoso pianist in Vienna. In 1796 and 1798 he undertook concert tours to cities including Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin, and Prague, performing his own works as well as those of others. His

compositions include piano sonatas, sonatas for piano and violin and piano and cello, piano concertos, a clarinet concerto, several piano trios and piano quartets, many string quartets, nine symphonies, and numerous additional works.

Beethoven suffered from many illnesses throughout his life. He probably had smallpox during childhood, and he had frequent digestive afflictions. He experienced episodes of acute deafness as early as 1798, when he was 27 years old. He continued to perform and conduct until 1814, when he was at the piano in the first performance of the Archduke Trio, but it would be one of his last public performances.

Beethoven's Piano Trio No. 7 in B-flat major was dedicated to Archduke Rudolf of Austria, one of the composer's most significant patrons and also one of his students. The piano takes the lead in the trio, but the cello and violin parts are technically challenging and musically integral.

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, is dominated by a quietly majestic theme, introduced by the piano. In complex conversations between the three instruments, the theme and its elements are restated and developed in passages that are alternatively delicate and tender, showy, and strident. An especially remarkable sequence includes a delicate obligato in the high register of the piano over soaring thematic development by the strings.

The second movement, a jaunty *Scherzo*, is based on an ornamented and rhythmically stylized B-flat major scale. After introduction of the theme, the scherzo proceeds to three iterations of variations that include a sentimental and wistful song, a morose fugue, and finally a careening waltz.

The *Andante* is a set of four variations on a solemn, chorale-like theme. Throughout the movement, the theme is introduced by the piano and then repeated by all instruments. Each variation has its own rhythmic style of ornamentation, progressing from triplets, to sixteenth notes, to triplet sixteenth notes, and finally to thirty-second notes. The *Andante* ends with a dramatic coda.

The final movement, a brief rondo, follows the *Andante* without pause. This joyous and dancelike movement is embellished by virtuosic elements and dramatic dynamic contrasts.

Program notes by Nancy Klepper-Kilgore

Orion Chamber Ensemble



Members of the Orion Chamber Ensemble have been performing together for more than ten years. The chamber group gives concerts in Needham annually and performed in 2012 in the inaugural season of the Needham Bank Great Hall Concert Series celebrating the renovation of Needham's Town Hall.

Violinist **Peter Zazofsky** has performed with many of the great orchestras, including the Boston Symphony, the Berlin Philharmonic, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Philadelphia Orchestra, in collaboration with maestros such as Klaus Tennstedt, Seiji

Ozawa, Eugene Ormandy, Kurt Sanderling, and Charles Dutoit. He has made solo appearances with the orchestras of Atlanta, Baltimore, Leipzig, Santiago, Toronto, Minnesota, and Montreal, and he has toured Asia as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony as well as the U.S. with the Danish Radio orchestra. He is a frequent visitor to Israel, where he has performed numerous concerti. As first violinist of the Muir String Quartet, Mr. Zazofsky has performed many complete cycles of the Beethoven quartets and has encouraged creation of new works by several American composers. Early in his career, Mr. Zazofsky won top prizes in the Queen Elisabeth and Montreal International Competitions. He is on the faculty at Boston University and also teaches at New England Conservatory Preparatory School.

Ronald Lowry, described by *The Boston Globe* as a "superb cellist," has served as principal cellist of the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra since 1993 and of the Boston Ballet Orchestra since 1992, and he performs regularly with the Boston Symphony, including on tours of Europe and Asia. He has presented solo recitals in Jordan Hall, at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and throughout New England. As a chamber musician, he has been guest artist with the Boston Chamber Music Society, the New England Conservatory First Mondays concert series, and the Muir String Quartet. Mr Lowry teaches at the New England Conservatory Preparatory School, Walnut Hill School for the Arts, and The Rivers School Conservatory. He is the artistic director of the Needham Concert Society.

Pianist **Randall Hodgkinson** is the Grand Prize Winner of the International American Music Competition sponsored by Carnegie Hall and the Rockefeller Foundation. He has performed with orchestras in Atlanta, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Boston, Cleveland, and abroad in Italy and Iceland. In addition, he has performed numerous recital programs spanning the repertoire from J.S. Bach to Donald Martino. He is an artist member of the Boston Chamber Music Society, and he performs the four-hand and two-piano repertoire with his wife, Leslie Amper. Mr. Hodgkinson's festival appearances include Blue Hill (Maine), BargeMusic, Chestnut Hill Concerts (Madison, Connecticut), Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. He is a faculty member of the New England Conservatory and the Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge.

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