

Brandeis

SPRING 2023

CONCERT SERIES

Slosberg Music Center

MARK BERGER, VIOLA



with special guest

ILYA KAZANTSEV, PIANO



Saturday, January 28, 2023 | 8 p.m.

Slosberg Music Center | Brandeis University

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PROGRAM

Morpheus for Viola and Piano (1917) Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)

Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 120, No. 2 (1894) Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

- I. Allegro amabile
- II. Appassionato, ma non troppo Allegro
- III. Andante con moto – Allegro

~ INTERMISSION ~

Three Songs for Voice, Viola and Piano (1906–7) Toru Takemitsu
(1930-1996)

A Bird Came Down the Walk (1994)

Sonata in F minor, Op. 120, No. 1 (1894) Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

- I. Allegro appassionato
- II. Andante n poco adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Vivace

PROGRAM NOTES

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)

Morpheus for Viola and Piano (1917)

One of the very first professional performing female musicians in London, Rebecca Clarke embarked on a tour of the United States in 1916 in pursuit of an international career. While in America, she made her Carnegie Hall debut performing a program that featured a number of her own works. In a sign of the times, the reviewer praised Clarke as a performer, but largely overlooked her compositions – it was highly unusual for a woman to be taken seriously as a composer at that time. The reviewer, however, had great praise for a work on the program by an unknown British composer, Anthony Trent. In fact, Clarke had been advised not to program too many of her own works because the promoters had thought that not many people would want to come see a program of music by a female composer. Clarke compromised by presenting several of her works under the pseudonym Anthony Trent. Unbeknownst to them, the audience and press had been treated to the American debut of one of England's most promising young composers, who also happened to be female!

Morpheus is a short, evocative work for viola (Clarke's own instrument) and piano. Based on the Greek god associated with sleep and dreams, the music instantly conjures a dreamy atmosphere of somber piano chords above which the muted viola unfolds a modal melody. The musical language shows a clear mastery of post-impressionistic style and techniques, particularly in the piano writing. Clearly influenced by Debussy and Ravel, this short work is also a strong artistic statement by composer who would soon expand her language into the much grander Viola Sonata and Piano Trio, two undeniable masterpieces that she would go on to compose in the next few years. particularly in the piano writing. Clearly influenced by Debussy and Ravel, this short work is also a strong artistic statement by composer who would soon expand her language into the much grander Viola Sonata and Piano Trio, two undeniable masterpieces that she would go on to compose in the next few years.

Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996)

A Bird Came Down the Walk for Viola and Piano (1994)

Largely self-taught, Tōru Takemitsu forged a unique compositional voice early on. At the age of 21, he co-founded a Tokyo-based composers' group, The Experimental Laboratory, with the purpose of creating a new kind of music that synthesized Japanese tradition with modern compositional techniques. He also began working with film, most notably for the masterful scores he produced for Akira Kurosawa's films.

A Bird Came Down the Walk, written for violist Nabuko Imai, was composed near the end of Takemitsu's life, but its materials are all drawn from his 1977 work for large orchestra, A Flock Descends into the Pentagonal Garden. The title for this pared down version for viola and piano comes from a poem:

In the Garden
by Emily Dickinson

A bird came down the walk:
He did not know I saw;
He bit an angle-worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass,
And then hopped sidewise to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all abroad,—
They looked like frightened beads, I thought;
He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, plashless, as they swim.

The music is evocative, thoughtful, and meticulously detailed in the coloristic effects called upon by both performers. The plaintive melody which unfolds in the viola is constantly subject to changing colors, taking full advantage of the instrument's timbral palette. The work begins with a soft chord in the piano (a pentatonic chord consisting of all the black keys of the piano – the "Pentagonal Garden") above which the viola melody unfolds like a bird floating in the sky. By the end of the piece, the bird has landed in a gentle song, grounded by a final D-flat major chord above which you can hear a blackbird chirping in the piano.

The music unfolds in a very different kind of narrative than most Western classical music. In program notes for the premiere in 1994 Takemitsu wrote:

"You view a Japanese garden this way, circulating through it. It's not a linear experience at all. It is circular...one always comes back. I write music by placing objects in my musical garden, just the way objects are placed in a Japanese garden...from gardens I've learnt the Japanese sense of timing and colour."

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata in F minor for viola and piano, Op. 120, No. 1

Sonata in E-flat major for viola and piano, Op. 120, No. 2

Johannes Brahms, perhaps the most self-critical of all late-Romantic era composers, was notorious for his perfectionism, carefully considering and meticulously editing his works to ensure that everything published met only the highest possible standards of taste and craftsmanship (a complex he undoubtedly developed when, as a very young man with very few compositions under his belt, Schumann crowned him as heir to the throne of Beethoven). Brahms was especially conscious of his legacy in the rich, Viennese musical tradition, and by the early 1890's, felt that he had made his mark, essentially retiring from large-scale composition following his G major string quintet in 1890. Thankfully, in 1891, Brahms encountered Richard Mülfeld, the principal clarinetist of the Meiningen Court Orchestra and the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra, performing a Weber concerto and the Mozart quintet. Brahms was so taken with his playing that he responded with a burst of inspiration resulting in the four chamber music masterpieces for clarinet composed in the years 1891-1894. The two sonatas for clarinet (F minor and E-flat major) represent the final chamber music compositions of Brahms, and are rightly revered as among the greatest masterpieces of the entire duo sonata repertoire. Immediately following the publication of the sonatas, Brahms arranged the clarinet part for viola. Interestingly, these arrangements are not simple transcriptions. Careful consideration was made in terms of register adjustments, and there are several passages that have been elaborated by Brahms to take advantage of double-stops and chords on the viola.

The first sonata, in F minor, is cast in a traditional four-movement form and is a journey from darkness into light. The first movement is an impassioned sonata-form movement filled, the tragic tone of which is established at the outset by the piano playing a theme in bare octaves in the Phrygian mode (Brahms was an ardent historian with a vast library of Renaissance polyphonic works, so his use of the old church modes – particularly Phrygian, which was often used in dirges and laments – is significant). The brooding intensity of the large, complex opening movement is counterbalanced by the remaining three movements, all of which are considerably smaller in scale, and all in the major mode. The slow movement is a masterclass in generating emotional complexity with very few notes, while the third movement begins with a recall of the first movement's opening, now transformed into an amiable Austrian Ländler. The final movement is a joyful romp of a rondo, brimming with contrapuntal virtuosity that brings the sonata full circle back to the home key, this time in the sunny major mode.

While still containing plenty of drama, the second sonata, in E-flat major, is highly contrasted with the first. The brooding intensity of the F minor's opening movement is replaced here by a gentle, flowing movement marked *Allegro amabile*, instructing the performer to play "in a charming, gracious" manner. The second movement, marked *Appassionata*, is a tour-de-force scherzo. Beginning with a fiery melody in the viola, the contrasting trio section is one of Brahms's most inspired and noble creations. The finale begins with a theme resembling folk-song. The six variations that follow transform this simple theme in surprising ways, covering a vast spectrum of textures, moods and methods of interplay between the instruments. After the fifth variation, cast in Eb minor and containing the stormiest music of the entire sonata, the final variation returns to the amiable atmosphere of the opening before winding up for its joyous conclusion.

- Mark Berger

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Violist and composer Mark Berger has toured throughout the United States and internationally as a member of the Lydian String Quartet, performing the acknowledged masterpieces of the classical, romantic, and modern eras as well as premiering remarkable compositions written by today's cutting-edge composers. In addition to his work with the quartet, Berger frequently performs with many of Boston's finest orchestras and chamber ensembles including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Pops, Emmanuel Music, and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Worcester Chamber Music Society, and Music at Eden's Edge. He has recently appeared as a guest artist with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, Boston Musica Viva, Chameleon Arts Ensemble, and Radius Ensemble, and has performed at summer music festivals including Tanglewood, the Newport Music Festival, and Kneisel Hall. Strongly devoted to the performance of new music, Berger has performed with many of Boston's new music ensembles including Sound Icon, Dinosaur Annex, Ludovico Ensemble, and ALEA III. He has recorded solo and chamber works for Albany, Bridge and Innova records.

Also an acclaimed composer, Berger's works have been presented by Boston Musica Viva, the New York New Music Ensemble, Dinosaur Annex, ALEA III, the Worcester Chamber Music Society, Xanthos Ensemble, Music at Eden's Edge, the Lydian, Arneis, and QX String Quartets, Third Coast Percussion Quartet, Ensemble Permutaciones (Mexico), Ensemble NODUS (Turkey), and the Hellenic Ensemble of Contemporary Music (Greece). His compositions have received awards and recognition from the League of Composers/ISCM, ASCAP, and the Rapido! Composition Competition and he has received commissioning grants from NEFA and the Brannen-Cooper Fund.

Berger is Associate Professor of the Practice at Brandeis University, where he teaches viola, chamber music, theory and analysis.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS (continued)

"[Mr. Kazantsev] ranged over the keyboard with unruffled mastery." - Robert Battey, The Washington Post

Ilya Kazantsev, a fresh and exciting presence on the international music scene, has been hailed by The Washington Post as "virtually flawless." He has performed extensively with orchestras in Russia and the United States, as well as appearing in recital in Germany, Japan, Italy, France, Canada, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, the United States, and Slovenia. His many awards and honors include first prize at the Nikolai Rubinstein International Competition (Paris); he also won the International Chopin Competition (Moscow) and the 2007 & 2008 World Piano Competitions (Cincinnati).

In 2014, Ilya was invited to join the esteemed Hermitage Piano Trio, which also includes the renowned soloists Misha Keylin (violin) and Sergey Antonov (cello). An enthusiastic advocate of contemporary music, Ilya has presented numerous premieres of works by contemporary American, Russian, and Eastern European composers, many of which have been dedicated to him. His advanced studies have included working with such prominent contemporary music specialists as Jay Gotlieb, Mark Ponthus and the legendary composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, who praised Ilya for his thoughtful performance of composer's Douze Notations.

Ilya began his music studies in his native Moscow and at the age of nine was accepted as a student of Valeriy Pyasetsky at the Central Music School at the Tchaikovsky State Conservatory. Subsequently, he moved to the United States in 2002 to continue his studies at the Mannes College of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, working with Arkady Aronov. He currently resides in Boston, MA.

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