



# Brandeis University

Department of Music

*presents*

Joanna Marcus, *violin*

Saturday, April 30th, 2022 at 2 p.m.

Slosberg Music Center

Five Pieces for Two Violins and Piano

- I. Prelude
- II. Gavotte
- III. Elegy
- IV. Waltz
- V. Polka

Dmitri Shostakovich

(1906-1975)

Andrea Segar, *violin*

April Sun, *piano*

Second Sonata for Solo Violin, op. 596 (2016-2017)

- I. As Generous And Lyrical As Conditions Permit
- II. Sketched In The Large Thonet

John McDonald

Sonata for Piano and Violin in F major, op. 24 ("Spring")

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio molto espressivo
- III. Scherzo: Allegro molto
- IV. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

April Sun, *piano*

~ INTERMISSION ~

Sonata for Piano and Violin in D minor, op. 108

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Un poco presto e con sentimento
- IV. Presto agitato

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

April Sun, *piano*

## Program Notes

**Dmitri Shostakovich** was a Russian composer born in 1906. His music was very much influenced by political events and the restrictions that the Soviet government imposed on art. Shostakovich often came under heavy criticism from the government for his music, and in 1936, a major public humiliation and attack in response to his opera, "Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District" changed the course for the type of music he would continue to write. Up until 1936 a large portion of his compositions consisted of music for ballets, operas, and films, but this major event steered him in the direction of writing, with few exceptions, exclusively for concert halls.

Thus, the charm, lyricism, and wit within these five short pieces are an unexpected deviation from the intense boldness and drama that characterizes so much of Shostakovich's symphonies, chamber works, and concertos. These pieces were assembled and arranged by Shostakovich's friend Levon Atovmyan, who (with Shostakovich's permission) collected music Shostakovich had written for ballet, film, and theater productions. This set of pieces begins with the warm, inviting, and sentimental *Prelude*. The *Gavotte*, a type of French dance, is lighthearted and cheerful. The *Elegy* brings in an elegant and singing nature that contrasts with the joyous *Gavotte* heard previously. The *Waltz*, a type of dance written in a triple meter, is flowing with forward motion and passion, with a tinge of sadness. The *Polka*, a dance characterized by its liveliness, is an energetic and witty end to this group of five short pieces.

I first performed **John McDonald's** Second Sonata for Solo Violin in 2017 at the Rivers School Conservatory's Contemporary Music for the Young in Weston, MA. It was amazing to work with John, then and now, and playing his sonata is a gratifying experience in so many ways. The freedom of time given within the rests and spaces (from the written markings in the music, and in conversations with John) is something that I find very special about this piece. It is especially fun to play in the recital hall because the resonant space allows for the sound to ring longer and for the "pauses" to still be filled with the echoing sound. In each movement, the motives and figures evolve and transform in remarkable ways. In the first movement, *As Generous And Lyrical As Conditions Permit*, there is a four sixteenth-note figure that opens the piece and carries through the movement, presenting in different ways. In the second movement, *Sketched In The Large Thonet*, the longer opening phrase comes back in fragments and reversed versions throughout the movement. At the end, we hear the opening measure of the movement come back, but this time with pizzicato (plucked notes).

Below are John's words about the sonata:

*Composed with Joanna Marcus in mind from the outset, this two-movement sonata follows my first (which Joanna has also performed) after 23 years. Though somewhat more modest and personal than the first, this music is nevertheless challenging both expressively and physically. The first movement was composed in an unusually quiet space in Manhattan (23rd Street, where I was an overnight guest at a seminary), while the "Thonet" of the second-movement title is a rocking chair (a later-generation design by Michael Thonet [1796-1871], who invented bentwood furniture), inherited from a much-admired friend upon his death.*

~ John McDonald, February 2017

**Ludwig van Beethoven** was a German composer born in 1770. He played a major role in the transition from classical to romantic music, and his immense influence reaches past his lifetime to today's study, performance, and historical perspective on music. Beethoven wrote ten sonatas for violin and piano, each in their own way demonstrating a beautiful partnership between these two instruments of very different timbres. His Sonata for Piano and Violin in F major, op. 24, also known as the "Spring" sonata, was written in 1801.

The name "Spring" was given to the sonata sometime after Beethoven's death. Although the composer did not give it this name, the nickname "Spring" is quite appropriate for the sonata's character. We hear a sense of vibrancy right from the beginning of the first movement, *Allegro*, with the violin's opening melody (which the piano will soon take over) lyrically singing. This lyricism intertwines with moments of tensions throughout the movement. The second movement, *Adagio molto espressivo*, has a delicate and meditative nature to it. It brings in a sense of introspection that contrasts with the more outgoing first movement. The third movement, *Scherzo: Allegro molto*, is the shortest of the four movements. With its energetic offset rhythm between the piano and violin and the rising and falling scale of the Trio, it has a humorous and playful character to it. The fourth movement, *Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo*, begins with an elegant melody in the piano, and the violin immediately follows with this same melody. This melody shows up a couple of times throughout the movement, each time bringing back an atmosphere of sweetness.

**Johannes Brahms** was a German Romantic composer and pianist born in 1833. He spent a lot of his professional life in Vienna, Austria. While some composers' influences are only recognized after their death, Brahms was different. He gained extreme popularity during his lifetime, and after his first symphony, the term "The Three B's" (Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms) was coined. Brahms wrote three sonatas for piano and violin, but some think that he may have written more and destroyed them (He was often very self-critical of his works). His D-minor sonata, written between 1886 and 1888, is the third of these sonatas. Unlike the first two sonatas, this one has four movements instead of three, and it is comparatively darker.

Brahm's third violin sonata demonstrates a range of emotional depth, each movement expressing a unique statement of intensity. The first movement, *Allegro*, is mysterious in character. In the beginning of the movement, the violin part is given the marking, "sotto voce ma espressivo", directing the violinist to be soft in voice, but expressive. This inward expression in the beginning is mixed with restless moving notes in the piano. This constant unsettled motion drives the movement throughout, even through the lyrical lines. The second movement, *Adagio*, opens with a singing melody played entirely on the lowest string of the violin (G), establishing a rich and deep sound world. The reflective presence introduced in the beginning continues throughout the entire movement, with moments of brightness and passion coming up to the surface. In the third movement, *Un poco presto e con sentimento*, the piano and violin are intricately related, with precise fragments interwoven between the two instruments. A motive evolves throughout this movement, eventually seeming to evaporate into space. *Presto agitato* is a stormy, dramatic finale to the sonata. The agitated momentum, with interludes of tranquility, leaves an impression of powerful intensity, summing up the sonata's emotional narrative.

## Bios and Acknowledgments

**Joanna Marcus** is a senior majoring in Music, on the Violin Performance Track, and minoring in Creativity, the Arts, and Social Transformation. She studies with Professor Andrea Segar. Her mentors and teachers before coming to Brandeis have included Shufang Du, Kelly Barr, Kirsi Perttuli, Janet Packer, Gillian Rogell, and Lilit Hartunian. At Brandeis, Joanna enjoyed her time playing in the Early Music Ensemble, Fafali, and the Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra, and she is currently part of a student-led klezmer group. She especially loves chamber music (which she has done throughout her time at Brandeis), and the connections that happen when interpreting a piece with other musicians. Her non-music courses and overall Brandeis experiences have influenced her thoughts about the interconnectedness of music, diversity, and peace. Joanna hopes to use her music to promote mental health, well-being, and inclusion of marginalized populations. She loves the way music can convey such a breadth of emotional worlds, and she aims to portray these emotions in her violin playing. Outside of Brandeis she is a teacher and inclusion aide at a local religious school.

There are so many people who have shaped Joanna's four years at Brandeis, both musically and personally. Her amazing and incredible friends have been a source of deep support, and she would like to give a big shoutout to her housemates, Jessie and Rosie! Her family - mother, father, brother Caleb and late brother Noah - have been with her every step of the way, always providing her with care, humor, and the unwavering support that has allowed her to journey through this wonderful world of music. Special admiration and thanks go to her brothers who had to put up with her practicing (especially the scratchy sounds in the early years...!). Joanna is extremely grateful to the the dedicated faculty, staff, and students of the Brandeis Music Department. This community has given her an exceptionally meaningful musical experience. And her incredible teacher, Andrea Segar - words cannot express the impact of Andrea's caring, encouraging presence throughout Joanna's time at Brandeis. Andrea's love for the violin and her passion for teaching is a gift.

Joanna feels grateful and so happy to play with April Sun, pianist, whose thoughtful musicianship, beautiful piano playing, and kind presence has made this experience so wonderful.

Boston-based pianist **April Sun** enjoys a multi-faceted musical life as a performer, educator, and arts organizer who values curiosity, sincerity, and fun in her work/play. An avid chamber musician who relishes playing both modern and historical pianos, she co-founded the Meadowlark Trio, frequently collaborates with Phoenix and the Cape Cod Chamber Orchestra, and has performed with various small ensembles in diverse venues across the US, and also in China. April holds a D.M.A. in collaborative piano, an M.M. in piano performance, a certificate in pedagogy, and the Bennett Levine Chamber Music Award, from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Committed to helping communities forge meaningful relationships with music, April serves as Co-Executive Director of Music for Food, a nonprofit that uses music to generate funds for food pantries, and volunteers with Asian Musical Voices of America to build community among self-identified AAPI musicians. She also teaches piano and chamber music at Brookline Music School and works as a collaborative pianist at both New England Conservatory and Boston University.