

69th Concert Series 2022-23



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is pleased to present

Jordan Bak, viola

with

Ji Yung Lee, piano

Saturday, October 15, 2022. 3:00 pm.

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

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Who We Are

Friends of Music Concerts, Inc. is an award-winning, non-profit, volunteer organization now celebrating its 69th season of showcasing, right here in Westchester, artists chosen from among the finest in today's diverse world of chamber music. Additionally, our Partners in Education program in the public schools and free student admission to our concerts give young people enhanced exposure to and appreciation of classical music.

In order to help sustain what one of our artists called this “legendary series,” we would welcome people who can join the volunteers listed above, either as Board members or equally valued off-Board committee members. People we are looking for include, but are not limited to, those with writing/publishing production and/or fund development skills. Call us at 914-861-5080 or contact us on our website (see below); we can explore the possibilities together.

Acknowledgments

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Program

Lachrymae for Viola and Piano, Op. 48

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Sonata for Solo Viola (1937)

Paul Hindemith
(1895-1963)

Romance for Viola and Piano

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

Andante

Poco Animato

Andante

Intermission

Adagio and Allegro in A-flat Major, Op. 70

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

Sonata in F minor, Op. 20, No. 1

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro appassionato

Andante un poco adagio

Allegretto grazioso

Vivace

Piano by Steinway

Next concert

Sunday, November 6, 2022 at 3:00 pm. Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York
The Dover Quartet.

Program: Josef Haydn's Quartet in C Major, Op. 76, No. 3 ("Emperor"); Amy Beach's Quartet for Strings; and Mendelssohn's Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3.

Program notes

Lachrymae for Viola and Piano, Op. 48

Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten, England's greatest composer of the 20th century, has been known and admired primarily for his compositions for the human voice. These range from simple folk song settings to operas. The most well known of the latter is the highly-respected *Peter Grimes*. His gigantic *War Requiem*, composed for the restoration of Coventry Cathedral following its bombing in World War II, is an impassioned plea against the devastation caused by human conflict.

Britten was born on the feast day of Saint Cecilia, the patron saint of music. He made his first attempts at composing at age five and later studied piano and composition with some of the most distinguished musicians in England. In 1930 he enrolled in the Royal College of Music, but soon found its formal curriculum too restrictive. So he left, bravely setting out to pursue an independent career as a composer. As he matured, his style became cosmopolitan and international.

In 1950, while composing his opera *Billy Budd*, Britten wrote **Lachrymae for viola and piano** for the violist William Primrose, who, with the composer, gave its debut performance at the Aldeburgh Festival on June 20 that year. **Lachrymae** is a set of variations on the opening part of the Elizabethan era composer John Dowland's song, "If my complaints could passions move." Elizabethan love songs by convention expressed love's sorrows as frequently as they did its joys, and many of Dowland's love songs have a dark texture, which Britten borrows. One of Dowland's other songs, "Flow my tears, fall from your springs," a melodious lament for unrequited love, was also called *Lachrymae* (Latin for "tears") in its musical arrangement.

The subtitle *Reflections on a Song of John Dowland* indicates that this work is not a canonic set of variations. Instead, Britten takes only the opening phrases of Dowland's song as the basis for allusions that he makes to Dowland's work in the ten different permutations or free variations, which preserve the dark, subdued character of the original song. Throughout, Britten uses pizzicato to create a sense of falling tears.

Sonata for Solo Viola (1937)

Paul Hindemith

Paul Hindemith, who began his musical career in the theater and café orchestras of Frankfurt, became one of the great composers of the 20th century, a powerful creator, an earnest theoretician, and an influential teacher. Throughout his lifetime he lived and worked as a practical musician, finding or making a place for his art in the society in which he lived rather than in some imagined or idealized ivory tower. "It is the composer's responsibility," he once wrote, "to reach a mutual understanding with the consumers," and he did so in a variety of ways in the course of his long career. He wrote serious, abstract concert music, operas both grand and comic, educational music, and music-for-use that became part of everyday life.

His earliest published works were composed just as World War I came to an end, at a period when he was concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra. Later he decided to make the viola his principal instrument, and he became a chamber player and soloist of great distinction. The music he wrote in those early years shows his very great seriousness of purpose and the beginnings of the superb craftsmanship that was to become one of the special qualities of his art. He was searching, at the same time, for a new path to follow in his work, one that would lead him away from the overblown Romanticism that was then the leading style. Despite his fame, however, politics caught up with him; the Nazis expelled him from his academic position and forbade any performances of his work.

In writing about the **Sonata for Solo Viola (1937)**, Malcolm MacDonald says: "By April 1937, when Hindemith wrote his final sonata for unaccompanied viola, he was virtually exiled from Germany by the Nazis and living the life of an itinerant composer-performer, though he had not quite taken the final decision to leave Germany for good: that would happen the following year. The sonata was dashed down on a train journey from New York to Chicago, and finished on 21 April, the day he premiered it at the Chicago Arts Club. By now his language had become more

warmly emotional, even romantic again, and in contrast to the chromaticism of the two preceding sonatas there is an emphasis on bright intervals, notably the perfect fourth and fifth”.

MacDonald goes on to say, “Despite the anxious times in which it was composed, this sonata is in fact the most direct and lyrical of [his sonata] series, and its three movements (with central hints of a fourth and fifth) provide the most balanced formal design. Nevertheless, a virtuosity rooted in Hindemith’s profound knowledge of the instrument is everywhere apparent, as in the alternately pugnacious and tender opening movement. In the central movement, meditative and deeply philosophical polyphony encloses a vigorous scherzo section which flows into a capricious episode of strumming pizzicato, and complete contrast in sonority and texture before the slow music returns. The finale, in moderate tempo, contrasts serious and formally grave music, almost like impassioned oratory, with a quieter, more reflective central episode. The music rises to a peak of eloquence just before the laconic close.”

Romance for Viola and Piano

Ralph Vaughan Williams

After a protracted dreary period in the history of English music, a school of nationalist composers flowered in the early years of the 20th century. These composers systematically collected and studied their country’s folk music and revived the works that their countrymen had written from the 15th to the 18th centuries. These composers, who also were activists in regard to music, wrote, taught, played, and conducted in concert halls, churches, theaters, and schools, giving traditional and historical English music a new place as well as a new life.

Vaughan Williams, one of the most influential of this group, had had a rigorous classical and musical education. He studied the viola when he was in school in the 1880s and continued to play that instrument throughout his life, deriving much pleasure from playing chamber music with his friends. He studied in Berlin with Max Bruch, and after he earned his doctorate from Cambridge University, he went to Paris to study with Maurice Ravel. Vaughan Williams’s orchestral works include many viola solos; his chamber music also frequently highlights the instrument.

This **Romance**, a soulful piece, is Vaughan Williams’s earliest surviving work for viola. It was discovered among his manuscripts after his death in 1958, and was published posthumously in 1962. It was premiered by violist Bernard Shore with pianist Eric Gritton in January 1962 at a Macnaghten Concert in London.

Because no date appeared on the manuscript, little is known about the genesis of the work. Speculation is that it was written during World War I, around 1914. It may have been composed for the great, innovative violist Lionel Tertis, for whom Vaughan Williams composed several other works, including, in 1925, the suite for solo viola *Flos Campi* (Flower of the Field).

This short work begins with a feeling of fragility. The opening and closing *Andante* sections are melancholic and expressive, while in the central *Poco Animato* the piece grows in intensity and anguish, becoming more restless, turbulent, and passionate. Overall, it is a very effective, expressive, and heartfelt piece. It concludes with a mood of introspective calm.

Adagio and Allegro in A-flat Major, Op. 70

Robert Schumann

The renowned German Romantic composer Robert Schumann took his first piano lessons when he was a very young child, and began composing when he was just eleven years old. His father was a small-town bookseller who encouraged his son’s inclination toward the arts. Nevertheless, his family wanted him to study law; although he complied with their desires, he soon abandoned that study to take up music. He initially hoped for a career as a pianist, but one of his hands became incapacitated due either to illness or to an injury. As a result, he turned to composing, conducting, and editing an important musical journal that he founded in 1844.

In the late 1840s and early 1850s, Schumann composed a number of works that he felt could be played by any of several instruments with piano accompaniment. The lyrical **Adagio and**

Allegro, originally intended for horn, cello, or violin, over the years has become a favorite for many different instruments. Schumann composed it in Dresden during four days of February 1849; two weeks later, his pianist wife Clara tried it out with a horn player from the local orchestra. At the first public concert performance during the next winter, she played it with a violinist.

The opening of the **Adagio and Allegro** echoes the work's original title (Romanze und Allegro) in its intimate evocation of a love song. After the gentle and lyrical introduction, the work becomes bolder, with a brightness that Schumann described as "fast and fiery."

Sonata for Viola and Piano in F minor, Op. 20, No. 1

Johannes Brahms

On his fifty-eighth birthday, in 1891, Brahms drew up his will. He felt old, and thought that his creative powers were leaving him. He believed that he would compose no more music, and that it was time to prepare for the end of his life. Just two months later, however, he quickly completed a big new work, his *Clarinet Trio*, which he sent to a friend with a note saying that it had a twin, "an even greater folly," the *Clarinet Quintet*. In 1894 he wrote his last two pieces of instrumental chamber music, the pair of *Clarinet Sonatas*, Op. 120. Because there were many more professional violists in the world than clarinetists at that time, all four of these works were published with alternative viola parts that could replace those for the clarinet. For a variety of reasons, only the **Sonatas** are equally satisfactory with either instrument; in fact, they work so well with the viola that many violists believe that he must have had their instrument in the back of his mind when he wrote them.

The clarinet had never had an important place in Brahms's work before this final burst of inspiration, which was the result of his admiration for Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907), a clarinetist whom he first met in 1891. Because Brahms was a very severe judge of music and musicians, his unequivocal praise of Mühlfeld as an artist and virtuoso was extraordinary. If the two had not met when they did, perhaps someone or something else would have caught his interest and sparked the fire of invention in him again, but posterity is grateful to Mühlfeld, whom the composer called "my nightingale" and "my prima donna," for these last, glorious works.

The sonatas were completed in the fashionable Austrian resort town of Ischi during the summer of 1894. What was supposed to be a private reading there that September for a small circle of friends attracted so much attention that it was reviewed in a musical magazine published in far off Berlin. In November, Brahms and Mühlfeld gave the first formal public performances of the sonatas during the course of two special chamber music evenings presented by the Rosé Quartet in Vienna's Bösendorfer Hall; this viola version of the sonata was performed on January 11. After one more public performance, Brahms declared himself satisfied with both works and sent them to his publisher.

The **Sonata in F minor** is especially intricately written within a series of relatively simple, classical forms. The whole sonata progresses steadily but gradually from its initial dark melancholy to an expression of the highest of spirits. The first four notes of the opening theme in the sonata-form first movement, *Allegro appassionato*, are found throughout the work. They are present at some times in subsequent melodies, while at others are concealed in complex musical textures.

The second movement, *Andante un poco adagio*, is a reverie in the form of a three-part song, the second of which contrasts with the first and third. The next movement, *Allegretto grazioso*, is a minuet, almost Schubertian in its charm, but full of hidden contrapuntal complexities that Brahms does not allow to weigh down its light spirits. The *Vivace* finale brings back its witty musical ideas again and again in a clever rondo.

About the Artists

Jamaican-American **Jordan Bak** has been building an exciting international career as a trailblazing artist, frequently in demand as a concerto soloist, recitalist, chamber musician, and educator. The 2021 YCAT Robey Artist and a top laureate of the 2020 Sphinx Competition, Bak also is a Grand Prize winner and Audience Prize recipient of the 2019 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition, the recipient of the 2019 Samuel Sanders Tel Aviv Museum Prize, and the 2019 John White Special Prize from the Tertis International Viola Competition. As the 2022 winner of the Leo B. Ruiz Memorial Award, he will be performing in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall this December 6.

Highlights of past performances have included recital debuts at London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Merkin Concert Hall, and Baltimore's Shriver Concert Hall Series, as well as chamber music tours with Musicians from Marlboro and Concert Artists Guild (CAG) on Tour. He has been heard as a recitalist and chamber musician in the United States in such venues as Boston's Jordan Hall, San Antonio's Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, and at the Taos Music School; and in Europe at Switzerland's Verbier Festival, Conservatoire de Musique de Genève, and Centre de Musique Hindemith, and the Helsinki Musiikkitalo.

Bak is a member of the New York Classical Players, and is a featured artist for WQXR's Artist Propulsion Lab. He has written for The Juilliard Journal and his own blog, "let's talk." He plays a 2016 viola made by renowned luthier Jon van Kouwenhoven. He and his wife, violinist Rubina Bak, currently live in New Haven with their two cats, Bartok and Walton.

Pianist and singer **Ji Yung Lee**, a native of South Korea, has performed at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Alice Tully Hall, and the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, DC. She has captivated listeners to classical music radio stations in New York, Boston, and Chicago. She recently joined Victory Hall Opera as its first official pianist-in-residence, with the title of Chief Répétiteur. She serves as both an opera coach and a staff pianist at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

Recent highlights include the new opera *Fat Pig* at Victory Hall Opera in Charlottesville, VA; Dame Myra Hess Concert Series live-streamed on WFMT with Jordan Bak; inaugural concerts at Amelia Island Opera in Charlottesville, VA, and Minnesota Public Radio's Performance Today in St. Paul, among many others.

Ji Yung began her artistic studies at Sunhwa Arts School and Seoul Arts High School. As a young pianist, she was a prizewinner in both Korean American National Competition and Piano Duo Association of Korea Competition. She received her Bachelor's degree at Yonsei University in Korea, majoring in choral conducting. She received her Master's Degree and Graduate Diploma in collaborative piano with academic honors at the New England Conservatory. She received her Graduate Diploma from the Juilliard School, studying both collaborative piano and voice.

From 2010 to 2012, Ji Yung was cast in several musicals in South Korea. One of those, *Moby Dick*, was the first where the actors played their own instruments while acting, singing, and dancing. Recently, in New York, she has been music director for EnOB New York, reaching out to people who are disabled and hospitalized.



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