

February 15, 2018 at 8:00pm
Pre-concert Talk by Professor Emeritus Scott Burnham at 7:00pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

CHARLES S. ROBINSON MEMORIAL CONCERT

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

Mark Steinberg Violin | **Serena Canin** Violin | **Misha Amory** Viola | **Nina Lee** Cello

with **JONATHAN BISS** Piano

**WOLFGANG
AMADEUS
MOZART**
(1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465 “Dissonance”

Adagio-Allegro
Andante cantabile
Menuetto (Allegretto)
Allegro molto

ANTON WEBERN
(1883-1945)
interspersed with
**FRANZ
SCHUBERT**
(1797-1828)

6 Bagatellen for String Quartet, Op. 9

Minuets, D. 89
Mäßig (Webern)
Minuet I (Schubert)
Leicht bewegt (Webern)
Minuet II (Schubert)
Ziemlich fleißend (Webern)
Minuet III (Schubert)
Sehr langsam (Webern)
Minuet IV (Schubert)
Äußerst langsam (Webern)
Minuet V (Schubert)
Fließend (Webern)

INTERMISSION

**SIR EDWARD
ELGAR**
(1857-1934)

Quintet in A Minor for Piano and String Quartet, Op. 84

Moderato-Allegro
Adagio
Andante - Allegro

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465
“Dissonance”

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
(1756–1791)

Note by Mark Steinberg

To enter into the opening of Mozart’s Quartet in C Major, K. 465, is to come upon a Samuel Beckett landscape, barren and austere, alone with the pulsating background radiation of the cosmos. Lonely voice upon lonely voice happen upon the scene, foreign visitors, and they clash, yearn toward resolution and are thwarted. This is the famous opening which earns the piece the nickname “Dissonance.” Mozart dedicated the set of six quartets from which this hails to Haydn, whose brilliant and groundbreaking Op. 33 quartets Mozart had just studied. Haydn was deeply impressed by the composer 24 years his junior, making his famous declaration to Mozart’s father “Before God, and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.” Yet he remained a bit flummoxed by this opening, saying only “if Mozart wrote it he must have meant

it.” This from the composer who, later on, would make a musical depiction of Chaos resolved into blinding C-major light in the “Creation Mass.”

Mozart’s upper lines here individually outline a turn, the most innocent ornamental figure of the time, but slowed down so as to be unrecognizable as such, the familiar stretched in the funhouse mirror. Not only is the harmony unstable, but the organization of the pulse as well, time that floats rather than flows. The first violin reaches upward and at the moment of arrival the foundation drops away and the alienated searching begins anew. The upward reaches, unfulfilled all, continue through the introduction. And then, in the face of existential crisis, Mozart chooses to look to the horizon rather than at his own navel. The appearance of the Allegro main part of the movement the ominous pulsation of the opening levitates, liberated from the ‘cello that tolled forth the prophecy of darkness. The melodic line again reaches upward and this time overleaps its landing point in order to sigh down into it, discovering its destiny only when shedding the necessity of climbing directly to it. Henceforth only the memory of shadows dares to shade the proceedings.

The Andante begins as a song spun from warmth and contentment. Once the singing has found temporary completion, the first violin and cello begin an exchange of tenderly questioning glances, privately musing, a wordless expression of wonder. Underlying this is a pulsation reminiscent of those in the first movement, now a marker of time that flows easily, never wanting to be anywhere but where it is. And this ushers in a passage where single notes vibrate and pulsate weightlessly, holding time as one instinctively holds breath, to savor the perfection of the present moment, tenderly tremulous, intimate and still. As paradisiacal as this moment is, its comfort proves illusory; toward the end of the movement, the currents that only hinted at flow now crash upon the shore, through painful dissonances and the darkest caverns one might fear to find inside. And yet, as Mozart and only Mozart knows how to do, all this is let go, allowed to drift away into the most magical occurrence of the piece. As the wonder-filled glances return, a new melody appears atop them, a discovery of a completion that had never been understood as a lack. Again, as in the first movement, Mozart does not wrestle with despair but, noting it, steps aside into a garden previously unnoticed that yet has been awaiting him. John Tarrant writes, in a book about Zen koans, “since joy

might be hiding anywhere, you would be willing to look with curiosity at sadness or fear, just in case.” Mozart is thus willing, a teacher for all of us.

In the Minuet, the repeated note idea returns, this time within the role of the coy, suggestive partner in a flirtatious exchange, a sort of provocative posturing, answered by an assertive, stubborn response. The figures dance around each other, masculine and feminine, the energy of the game paramount. In the contrasting trio section the repeated notes reappear as an undertow, and the back and forth takes on a mock ominous cast, all bluster and swirling storms on stage, one of Prospero’s storms that we know will lead, eventually and inevitably, to a double wedding.



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By the time we arrive at the Allegro molto last movement the repeated notes have taken on a launching role, ready for vaulting, leaping motion except when they don a serious countenance in good fun to play at interrupting the good cheer of the proceedings. At two points the music gets stuck in a furiously repeating pattern, from which Mozart escapes simply by lifting up above a stalled note as one lifts above cloud cover to see the perennially blue skies. Just as in the opening of the piece, he escapes trouble by levitating above it. Just as the piece readies itself to say goodbye, Mozart reintroduces the chromatically yearning idea from the introduction, but now it simply teases and is tossed aside.

With the recurring character of the repeated note binding the piece together Mozart evinces psychological acumen in his ability to see darkness and tame it. The piece takes and transforms dream images, making them both recognizable and new. It models a sort of lucid dreaming, where a wall becomes a gate because we choose to see it so. In *Invisible Love*, playwright Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt says “Happiness isn’t about hiding from suffering, but about integrating it into the fabric of our existence.” We could have no better guide to this integration than Mozart.

6 Bagatellen for String Quartet, Op. 9
Minuets, D. 89

ANTON WEBERN (1883–1945)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

Note by Mark Steinberg

In 1932 Anton Webern conducted and recorded his arrangements of six German dances by Schubert. The recordings are full of vibrant detail and freedom, and of evident love for and kinship with the music. Schubert, and perhaps particularly the visceral sweep, swoop and sway of the dance music, occupies a sizable branch of Webern’s genealogical tree. For the Second Viennese School composers (Schubert being part of the so-called First Viennese School), dance, meaning primarily the waltz and thus, reaching backwards, its precursor the minuet, represents the life force, the external, socially viable manifestation of archetypal impulses of the psyche. Webern’s Vienna, home of Sigmund Freud, was leading the way down a new path in understanding of the self. Poised between a veneer of accommodation and conventionality and the nascent flowering of investigation into the emotional mind, with its attendant associations and desires, a space for interior questioning was being pried open.

As the Schubert dances, written when the composer was just sixteen, fit and work their magic within a solid, architectural framework, the Webern pieces of Op. 9 create their form as a vapor spreads its smoky tendrils. They are catalogues of breaths, sighs and gasps; charged, compressed conversations of intimate gestural wisps. The alternation of Schubert and Webern is an oscillation between generations, between public and private expression, between the shapes of the body and the shapes of thoughts. It is also a new composite

structure within which gestures slip across the boundaries of time, mirroring each other, reflecting back and forth in unstill waters, betraying their common ancestry in a collective soul. The great violinist Felix Galimir used always to encourage young artists to search for and bring out in performance the element of dance in the music of the Second Viennese School. Clearly this was a concern for Webern himself, and in these intertwined works we can begin to feel the resonance in our somatic memories permeating it all.



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Piano Quintet in A Minor, Op. 84
SIR EDWARD ELGAR (1857–1934)

Note by Peter Laki ©2017

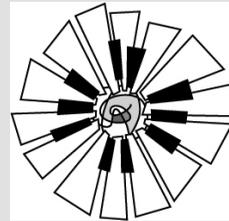
Edward Elgar, universally acknowledged as the greatest composer England had produced since Henry Purcell in the 17th century, was well aware of his historic status. His career had gotten off to a rocky start, but the resounding success of the “Enigma Variations” (1899) turned him into an international celebrity. Knighted by Edward VII in 1904, the son of a piano tuner and music-shop owner, died as Sir Edward Elgar, First Baronet of Broadheath, a title he received in 1931. His wife, the former Alice Roberts, was the daughter of a British general. Thus it is hardly surprising that *nobilmente* (nobly) should appear with such frequency as a performance instruction in Elgar’s works: he clearly regarded the attainment of nobility as the most important accomplishment of his life, owed entirely to his immense talent and hard work.

Elgar, who concentrated mostly on symphonic and choral music during his compositional career, wrote relatively little chamber music. The Piano Quintet is one of three major chamber works, written in close succession during World War I and

thus belongs to Elgar’s late period. (He composed very little after his wife’s death in 1920.) In 1918, the Elgars rented a country cottage in Sussex in the south of England, where he saw what his wife described in her diary as “sad ‘dispossessed’ trees and their dance and unstilled regret for their evil fate”—a reference to a legend, probably made up by the ghost-story writer Algernon Blackwood, a friend of the Elgars. Blackwood imagined some Spanish monks who had once lived in Flexham Park near the Elgars’ cottage; the monks were engaged in some sort of blasphemous practices and transformed into a group of twisted trees as punishment... Maybe this bizarre story goes some way towards explaining the unusual opening of the quintet, in which the first four notes of the Gregorian Salve Regina melody are set against some enigmatic, and slightly unsettling, brief staccato notes. After such a beginning, the first movement encompasses a wide range of characters including a languorous cello melody, a lighter theme that almost sounds like salon music, and some energetic chord progressions that seem to allude to the scherzo from the Brahms Piano Quintet. From these rather disparate materials, Elgar constructed a compelling movement that unites mystery, playfulness and drama.

The expressive melody of the central Adagio, first intoned by the viola, is extensively developed and brought to a passionate climax after which the music subsides again and ends quietly. George Bernard Shaw (who in his early years had been a prominent music critic) wrote in a letter to Elgar: “A fine slow movement is a matter of course with you: nobody else has really done it since Beethoven: at least the others have never been able to take me in. Intermezzos and romances at best, never a genuine adagio.”

The finale opens with a recall of the languorous cello theme from the first movement and continues with a dignified (Elgar writes *con dignità, cantabile*) melody that is soon fully “ennobled” (the instruction *nobilmente* appears over a variant of the main theme). The Salve Regina melody from the first movement returns as well, in a moment of quiet reflection before the recapitulation of the sweeping cantabile melody which leads to the glorious and grandiose ending.



BEYOND THE MUSIC

Pianist Jonathan Biss returns to campus next month for two FREE events.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists-in-Residence at Yale University. The Quartet also currently serves as the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. For 15 years, the Brentano Quartet was the

Edward T. Cone Artists-in-Residence at Princeton. Princeton University Concerts is thrilled to be able to continue to bring the quartet to campus. Their last appearance on our series was with mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato in 2015.

The Quartet has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie

Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York City; the Library of Congress in Washington, DC; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House. The Quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut.

In addition to their interest in performing very old music, the Brentano Quartet frequently collaborates with contemporary composers. Recent commissions include a piano quintet by Vijay Iyer, a work by Eric Moe (with Christine Brandes, soprano), and a viola quintet by Felipe Lara (performed with violist Hsin-Yun Huang). In 2012, the Quartet provided the central music (Beethoven Opus 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

The quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The Quartet has also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman and pianists Richard Goode, and Mitsuko Uchida.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved”, the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

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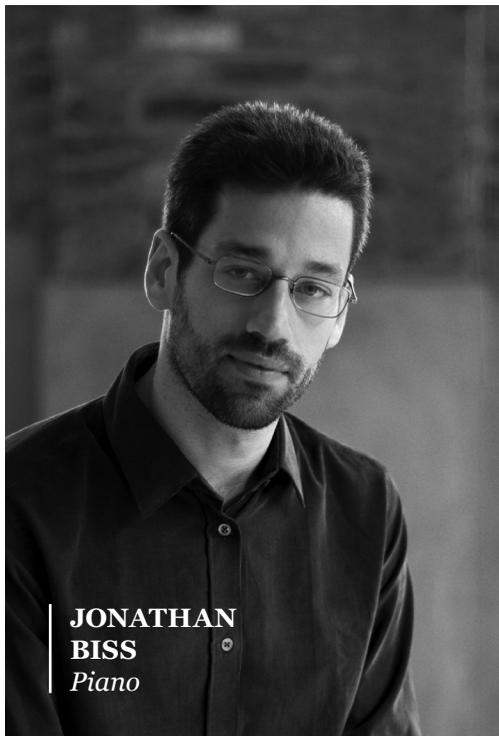
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Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned pianist who shares his deep musical curiosity with classical music lovers in the concert hall and beyond. In addition to performing a full schedule of concerts, he has spent eleven summers at the Marlboro Music Festival and written extensively about his relationships with the composers with whom he shares a stage. A member of the faculty of his alma mater The Curtis Institute of Music since 2010, Biss led the first massive open online course (MOOC)

offered by a classical music conservatory, *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, which has reached more than 150,000 people in 185 countries. Part 3 has just come out, and he will continue to add lectures until he covers all of the sonatas.

This season Biss continues his latest Beethoven project, "Beethoven/5," for which the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra is co-commissioning five composers to write new piano concertos, each inspired by one of Beethoven's. The five-year plan began with Biss premiering Timo Andres' *The Blind Banister*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music, which was followed by Sally Beamish's *City Stanzas* last season. This fall with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra he premieres Salvatore Sciarrino's *Il Sogno di Stradella*, paired with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4, and goes on to play it with the Cleveland Orchestra later in the year. The first two commissions continue to have a life, with *The Blind Banister* at the Jacksonville and New World Symphonies and Beamish's *City Stanzas* at the BBC Philharmonic, Orchestre de chambre de Paris, and Swedish Chamber Orchestra, highlighting Biss' commitment to building the repertoire. In the final two years of the project he will premiere concertos by Caroline Shaw and Brett Dean.

In addition to his involvement at Marlboro, Biss spent the summer of 2017 continuing his complete Beethoven piano sonata performance cycles at the Aspen and Ravinia Festivals, which he also begins at the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra this season. Audiences will be able to experience all the piano sonatas in seven concerts over several years. In early 2018 Biss tours with violinist Midori and cellist Antoine Lederlin across Switzerland, Germany, and England, and with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra in California.

Biss has embarked on a nine-year, nine-disc recording cycle of Beethoven's complete piano sonatas, and in early 2018 he releases the seventh volume, including

the sonatas Op. 2, No. 2; Op. 49, No. 2; Op. 31, No. 2 ("Tempest"), and Op. 109. Upon the release of the fourth volume, *BBC Music Magazine* said, "Jonathan Biss will surely take his place among the greats if he continues on this exalted plane." His bestselling eBook, *Beethoven's Shadow*, describing the process of recording the sonatas and published by RosettaBooks in 2011, was the first Kindle Single written by a classical musician. The recording cycle will be complete in 2020, at the same time as the final Coursera lectures on the sonatas.

Biss represents the third generation in a family of professional musicians that includes his grandmother Raya Garbousova,

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one of the first well-known female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his Cello Concerto), and his parents, violinist Miriam Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Biss began his piano studies at age six, and his first musical collaborations were with his mother and father. He studied at

Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at The Curtis Institute of Music with Leon Fleisher. Biss made his Princeton University Concerts debut in 2012. Later that year, he generously helped Princeton University Concerts select its concert Steinway piano. He plays on it tonight for the first time since the selection.