

Candlelight Concert Society Presents

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

Mark Steinberg, violin Serena Canin, violin
Misha Amory, viola Nina Lee, cello

with **ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN**, clarinet

On-stage interview by Michael Kannen, the Director of Chamber Music at Peabody Conservatory and a founding member of Brentano Quartet.

Sunday, October 9, 2022, 4:00 pm
Smith Theatre, Horowitz Visual and Performing Arts Center
Howard Community College

This performance is sponsored by Residences at Vantage Point

CLAUDIO GIOVANNI ANTONIO MONTEVERDI (1567-1643)

Four Madrigals (from Book VI)

Arranged by Mark Steinberg

- I. *Lasciatemi morire*
- II. *Ohimè il bel viso*
- III. *Ditelo voi*
- IV. *Zefiro torna*

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Clarinet Quintet in A Major "Stadler," K. 581

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Larghetto*
- III. *Menuetto - Trio I - Trio II*
- IV. *Allegretto con Variazioni*

Featuring Alexander Fiterstein, clarinet

Intermission

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105

- I. *Adagio, ma non troppo - Allegro appassionato*
- II. *Molto vivace*
- III. *Lento e molto cantabile*
- IV. *Allegro non tanto*

The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists
www.davidroweartists.com, www.brentanoquartet.com



PROGRAM NOTES

FOUR MADRIGALS (FROM BOOK VI)

Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643)

(Arranged by Mark Steinberg)



Claudio Monteverdi, the father of the modern opera who wrote on the cusp between the Renaissance and the Baroque, was the composer of nine books of madrigals. In these astounding works he painted in sound the images and thoughts suggested by his selected texts. So it might seem strange to hear

these works in a textless setting, as a string quartet. What can I say other than I was overcome with jealousy towards those who get to live with this music? I recently saw a movie, *Reprise*, directed by Joachim Trier, in which there are some scenes where a conversation is heard in the background but one sees only gazes and glances between the characters involved. The import of the words is there even in their absence. Here, in this string quartet setting, Monteverdi's reflections of the words remain intact and the music is suffused with emotion every bit as specific as words allow. Rhetoric present in inflection can sometimes convey emotion even more honestly than the words it carries. We would like to think that much of the tenor of the text is still present here, and that the strengths of the string quartet medium closely parallel those of a vocal ensemble. We aim to give a convincing performance with shadow puppets.

This group of four madrigals is taken from the sixth book, a group of pieces that perhaps has autobiographical import as it follows the deaths of two women in Monteverdi's life: his wife and his favorite pupil, who had lived with him. Death and separation flavor the entire set.

Lasciatemi morire is the opening section of *Ariadne's Lament*, the text of which is "Let me die. How should I find comfort in this cruel fate, in this great suffering? Let me die." The painful yearning for oblivion is contrasted with the hope of peace.

Ohime il bel viso is a setting of a text by Petrarch. The text reads "Alas, the fair face, alas, the gentle grace. Alas, the graceful and noble bearing. Alas, the voice that humbled arrogance and cruelty, and made all cowards

brave. And alas the sweet smile, whence issued that dart which was my greatest joy in this world: regal spirit, most worthy of an empire, but that it came down to us too late. I must burn with love and sigh for you, for I was yours, and having lost you cannot be grieved by any other misfortune. With hope and desire you filled me when from my highest bliss I parted, but the wind carried away my words."

Ditelo voi is the second section of the group of madrigals entitled *Tears of a Lover at the Tomb of his Beloved*. The text is "Tell, O rivers, and you who heard Glaucus rending the air with cries upon her tomb, deserted meadows, Nymphs and Heaven, you know that grief has been my food, tears my drink, and since the ice-cold earth covered my beloved, your fair bosom, O blessed stone, has been my bed."

Zefiro torna is also on a Petrarchan text. "Zephyr returns and brings back the sweet season and grasses and flowers, his sweet companions, and twittering swallows and lamenting nightingales, And Spring, white and rosy. The meadows smile, the sky is blue once more. Jove gazes upon his daughter with delight. Earth, air and water are filled with love; every creature renews its courtship. But for me, alas, the heaviest sighs return, rising from the depths of my heart, drawn by the one who took its key with her to heaven. And birdsong and the meadow flowers, and the sweet actions of fair and honest women are as a wilderness and cruel wild beasts." Of special interest is the way in which the tempo and affect shifts as the poem speaks of the poet's inner world in contrast to his surroundings. The setting of the final line is of particular beauty and pathos.

Note by Mark Steinberg

CLARINET QUINTET IN A MAJOR "STADLER," K. 581

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)



"Never should I have thought that a clarinet could be capable of imitating the human voice as it was imitated by you. Indeed, your instrument has so soft and lovely a tone that no one can resist it."

So wrote Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to Anton Stadler, the renowned Viennese clarinetist and performer of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581. The two met nearly

a decade before the piece's premiere and became musical and personal friends, as well as fellow Freemasons. They were even close enough for nicknames; Mozart called Stadler "Nätschibinitschibi," a play on words combining "penny-pincher" and "foolish man."

Names aside, Stadler's musicianship enchanted Mozart, so he composed his only clarinet quintet for his friend to perform. Stadler premiered the work on December 22, 1789 at a benefit concert for the widows and orphans of musicians. Soon after, Mozart began referring to the work as the "Stadler Quintet," and gave the original manuscript to his friend. When Mozart passed away less than two years later, his widow Constanze asked Stadler for the manuscript, but the latter claimed it had been stolen. Modern scholars believe that Stadler had already pawned off the manuscript to pay off personal debts, but regardless, the original manuscript is considered lost. The work's modern version was reconstructed from fragments and first printings.

Stadler's Quintet is considered a showpiece for the clarinet, and it certainly has its moments of concert-like writing. For the most part, though, the work is purely chamber music, with equal interplay between all five parts. The first movement boasts a sonata-form, with three distinctive motifs expertly battled between instruments. The second movement slows to present a soulful *arioso* for the clarinet, its delicate and long-breathed phrases reminiscent of Mozart's operatic writing for voice. The third movement brings drama and contrast with its unusual structure: a minuet and not one, but two trios. Finally, the work reaches a sprightly conclusion through the folklike theme of its finale, which the quintet expands upon in six virtuosic variations.

Note by Mira Fu-En Huang

STRING QUARTET IN A-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 105 Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)



In the years between 1892 and 1895, Antonín Dvořák was across the ocean, forsaking his native Bohemia to become the director of New York's National Conservatory, and rather grandly to undertake the task of helping America articulate its own musical identity. It is uncertain if he helped accomplish the latter goal, but during his time in the United States

he was acclaimed and feted as a pre-eminent European composer and an Old World cultural ambassador. Besides his activities in New York, he was to spend time in the rural Czech community of Spillville, Iowa, and to be captivated by the rich traditions of African-American spirituals and Indigenous music. Few European figures of Dvořák's cultural stature had ventured to explore America in such depth, at a time when London, Paris and Vienna remained so much the center of artistic life. It is telling that, whereas Brahms quailed at the thought of journeying to England to accept an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University, Dvořák was enterprising enough to cross the ocean and remain abroad for three years.

Nevertheless, even Dvořák—an artist who identified deeply with his native land—became homesick. He was to return home in the summer of 1895, at first just for a visit, but ultimately for good, submitting his resignation to New York a few weeks later. He had been extremely productive while in the States, composing his famous Cello Concerto and his even more famous "New World" Symphony. Two of his best-known chamber works also date from this time - the "American" Quartet and the Viola Quintet, which is also nicknamed "American." In his final days before setting sail for home, he began work on his A-flat String Quartet, opus 105, but did not finish it until December, when he had been home for several months.

Listeners disagree on the flavor of the A-flat Quartet, composed on both sides of the Atlantic; some claim to hear persistent American strains in it, some hear an affirmation of the composer's Slavic roots, some just hear an expat yearning for home. Whatever its essence, this piece is one of Dvořák's chamber masterpieces, a showcase for all the traits that make him beloved: rich harmonizations, imaginative, layered textures, irresistible rhythmic verve. Couched in such a rich, darkly stained key, it nevertheless overflows with joy, a uniquely Dvořákian combination.

The first movement opens in minor-key shadows, starting deep down in the cello and traveling up the instruments; it recalls the opening of Beethoven's famous Op. 132 quartet at first, lost and searching, chromatically fraught. But Dvořák is not one to follow Beethoven too far into his philosophical labyrinths: where the earlier composer erupts into cascades of questions, the later one chooses to blossom miraculously into sunlight and celebration, an Allegro brimming with positive energy. The progress of this main section seems effortless,

a carriage ride in a new stretch of countryside on a perfect afternoon. At times motoric, at times sweetly touching, at times even mock-ferocious, every time the music turns a corner it seems to encounter more good news, a new delightful scenario.

Following this comes a *scherzo*, a dance with a darker, Furiant-like energy. This is spiky, whirling music; it flirts with demonic tendencies but always retains a suave balance, filled with grace and charm. The contrasting Trio section in the middle is an extraordinary episode, a kind of lovers' tryst: slightly removed from the dance scene but retaining its rhythmic sway, this is loving, wistful music, starting as duet between violin and cello but gradually becoming transformed into an ecstatic exchange between the two violins, amazing music from a master of string writing.

The slow third movement is hushed and choral; a simple and tender stanza is heard, then repeated as a variation; then a second stanza, the answer to the first, is stated and repeated in its own variation. Composed at Christmas in 1895, it is easy to imagine the glowing candlelight, the intimacy and peace of a scene at home or in church among loved ones. By contrast, the middle section of the movement is foreboding, hunted, restless; starting with feverish chromatic motion and constant changes of key, it eventually whips itself up to a crisis point. The thunder and lightning dissipate, and we find ourselves magically back in the clarity and simplicity of the opening material, this time adorned with second-violin birdsong, a kind of laughing disbelief at the bad dreams that came before.

The Finale is at first mock-menacing: the cellist as bad guy, his face muffled in a black cape. Not fooled for a minute, the first violin takes his material and transforms it into folksy celebration, a festive, friendly round dance. Filled with good cheer, ebullient but not urgent, the music irresistibly beckons us to cut a rug in the finest Bohemian tradition. Lyrical episodes intervene, a choral melody in simple rhythms, and later on a more undulating, lovely tune in triplets. Ultimately the movement spirals upward into a triumphant coda, wherein we hear these themes transformed, presented in a newly energized, blazing light, rocketing unstopably to a final cadence.

Note by Misha Amory

TONIGHT'S ARTISTS

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET



"[A] remarkable capacity for magical ensemble playing...effervescent."

The Washington Post

Since its inception in 1992, the **Brentano String Quartet** has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. "Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding," raves the *London Independent*; *The New York Times* extols its "luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism."

Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award and was also honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut. Since then, the Quartet has concertized widely, performing in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet maintains a strong interest in contemporary music, and has commissioned many new works. Their latest project, a monodrama for quartet and voice called *Dido Reimagined*, was composed by Pulitzer-winning

composer Melinda Wagner and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, and had its premiere in spring 2022 with soprano Dawn Upshaw. Other recent commissions include the composers Matthew Aucoin, Lei Liang, Vijay Iyer, James Macmillan, and a cello quintet by Steven Mackey (with Wilhelmina Smith, cello.)

The Brentano Quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. They have also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida. The Quartet has recorded works by Mozart and Schubert for Azica Records, and all of Beethoven's late Quartets for the Aeon label. In 2012, they provided the central music (Beethoven Op. 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists-in-Residence at the Yale School of Music. They were formerly the Ensemble-in-Residence at Princeton University, and were twice invited to be the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

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.

ALEXANDER FITERSTEIN, CLARINET

"Soulful and lovely...and firecely explosive."

The San Francisco Sentinel



Clarinetist **Alexander Fiterstein** is considered one of today's most exceptional artists. Fiterstein has performed in recital with distinguished orchestras and with chamber music ensembles throughout the world. He won first prize

at the Carl Nielsen International Clarinet Competition and received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant Award. *The Washington Post* has described his playing as "dazzling in its spectrum of colors, agility, and range. Every sound he makes is finely measured without inhibiting expressiveness" and *The New York Times* has described him as "a clarinetist with a warm tone and

powerful technique."

As soloist he has appeared with the Czech, Israel, Vienna, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestras, Belgrade Philharmonic, Danish National Radio Symphony, Tokyo Philharmonic, China National Symphony Orchestra, KBS Orchestra of South Korea, Jerusalem Symphony, Orchestra of St. Luke's at Lincoln Center, Kansas City Symphony, and the Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. He has performed in recital on the Music at the Supreme Court Series, the Celebrity Series in Boston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Kennedy Center, the Louvre in Paris, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Tel Aviv Museum, and NYC's 92d Street Y.

A dedicated performer of chamber music, Fiterstein frequently collaborates with distinguished artists and ensembles and regularly performs with the prestigious Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Among the highly regarded artists he has performed with are Daniel Barenboim, Yefim Bronfman, Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode, Emanuel Ax, Marc-Andre Hamelin, Pinchas Zukerman, and Steven Isserlis. Fiterstein performed with the Dover, Pacifica, Jerusalem, and Shanghai String Quartets as well as with Ensemble Wien-Berlin. He spent five summers at the Marlboro Music Festival and appeared at the Caramoor, Moab, Music@Menlo, Montreal, Toronto, Jerusalem, and Storioni Chamber Music Festivals.

Fiterstein is a founder of the Zimro Project, a unique ensemble dedicated to incorporating Jewish art music into chamber music programs. He performed as principal clarinet of the West-East Divan Orchestra at the invitation of Daniel Barenboim and has appeared as guest principal clarinet with the Israel Philharmonic with Zubin Mehta, KBS Orchestra with Yoel Levi, and with the St. Paul and Orpheus Chamber Orchestras.

Fiterstein has a prolific recording career and has worked with composers John Corigliano and Osvaldo Golijov and had pieces written for him by Samuel Adler, Mason Bates, Paul Schoenfield, and Chris Brubeck, among others. Fiterstein was born in Belarus and immigrated to Israel at the age of 2 with his family. A Juilliard graduate, he won first prize at the Young Concert Artists International Auditions and received awards from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation. He is currently Professor of Clarinet and Chair of Winds at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. Fiterstein is a Buffet Crampon and Vandoren Performing Artist.