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Brentano String Quartet
Mark Steinberg, violin | Serena Canin, violin
Misha Amory, viola | Nina Lee, cello
Dawn Upshaw, soprano

OH LET ME WEEP, FROM THE FAIRY QUEEN, Z. 629 (1692)
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

FANTASIA A 4, IN B-FLAT MAJOR, Z. 736 (1680)
Henry Purcell (1659-1695), arr. Mark Steinberg

SUITE NO. 2 IN D MINOR/MAJOR, FOR FOUR VIOLS:
FANTAZIE (c 1660)
Matthew Locke (1621-3 – 1677)

COME AGAIN, SWEET LOVE DOTH NOW INVITE (1597)
John Dowland (1563-1626), arr. Stephen Prutsman

SUITE NO. 2, FOR FOUR VIOLS: COURANTE (c 1660)
Matthew Locke (1621-3 – 1677)

CAN SHE EXCUSE MY WRONGS (1597)
John Dowland (1563-1626), arr. Prutsman

SUITE NO. 2, FOR FOUR VIOLS: SARABAND (c 1660)
Matthew Locke (1621-3 – 1677)

Program continues on the next page
INTRODUCTION TO THE PURCELL, DOWLAND, LOCKE, TOMKINS, BYRD AND JOHNSON SELECTIONS

Imagine yourself before a painting by Vermeer. The light is soft, yet penetrating. The captured moment is inward, almost clandestine, yet here we are gazing into it, in relationship with it. The scene is simple, mundane even, yet replete with intricate detail, rewarding close attention. The intimacy of the experience, unassuming and direct, can also be piercingly emotional. We see the painting; simultaneously it seems to see into us.

This blending of interiority with revelation, this clarity of vision melding the rational and the instinctive, is a quality often evinced by the English music of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. We, as a string quartet, have in our ancestry the plaintive, pungent voices of the viol family, as well as the idea of the viol consort as an intimate gathering of friends conversing, cawtering and entangling strands of sense and sound. Our group has long been enriched by exploring this repertoire, enjoying the vibrant camaraderie and the frisson of lines that lean into each other as they both frolic and keen. The song repertoire of the period is, if anything, even more vulnerable, delicate and disarmingly pellucid.

Gathering works here by composers Henry Purcell, John Dowland, Matthew Locke, Thomas Tomkins, William Byrd and Robert Johnson (who supplied music for Shakespeare’s productions) gives us a chance to shrink the concert hall into a parlor, to invite our audience to be our confidantes. The music combines elements of the public and the private; the listener can eavesdrop on the proceedings, can get drawn into the conversations and collisions, the friendliness and the frictions.

And with whom better to do this than Dawn Upshaw, a treasured collaborator of ours? When she sings, Dawn has a way of making you feel she is speaking plainly, with utter candor, right to you, so beautifully suited to music both confessional and personal. The first half of our collaborative program weaves together instrumental and vocal music, starting and ending with Purcell arias on love and loss. The final aria, the perennially beloved

And with whom better to do this than Dawn Upshaw, a treasured collaborator of ours? When she sings, Dawn has a way of making you feel she is speaking plainly, with utter candor, right to you, so beautifully suited to music both confessional and personal. The first half of our collaborative program weaves together instrumental and vocal music, starting and ending with Purcell arias on love and loss. The final aria, the perennially beloved 'Dido’s Lament', opens the door for the great new monodrama on the second half, Melinda Wagner and Stephanie Fleischmann’s 'Dido Reimagined', a reexamination of the archetypal figure of Dido, an operatic investigation drawn into the world of chamber music. It is with great gratitude for this new work and great excitement for the opportunity to discover it and bring it to life that we offer this program.

—Note by Mark Steinberg

ABOUT THE COMPOSERS

Henry Purcell (b. Westminster, London, England (?), September 10, 1659; d. London, November 21, 1695) was the finest and most original English composer of his day – and for a long time to come. Music for the court and Chapel Royal, including brilliant ceremonial music, birthday odes and funeral music, filled the main part of his career, while music for the Restoration theater dominated the last five years, until his tragically early death at 36. His Fantasias were written for private use (1680), while his only opera, 'Dido and Aeneas' (1689) was for performance by Josias Priest’s Chelsea boarding-school for ‘young gentlewomen’ (and invited tenors and basses).

Matthew Locke (b. Exeter, England (?), 1621–3; d. London, August, 1677). English composer and organist whose consort music forms the most substantial part of a large output in most of the sacred and secular genres of the time. The Fantazie comes from Locke’s Consort of Power Parts, which parliamentarian and historian Roger North described as "a magnifick consort of 4 parts, after the old style, which was the last of the kind that hath bin made."

John Dowland (b. London, England (?), 1563; bur. London, February 20, 1626) was a noted lute player, appreciated more abroad (causing him much irritation) than at home, until an appointment as one of the King’s lutes when almost 50. Dowland transformed the traditional themes of Elizabethan poetry into unsurpassed songs for performance by a single singer, or as partsongs, with lute or with viols, thanks to his brilliantly devised printed table format for his three Books of Songs or Ayres.

When Melinda Wagner and I first spoke about writing a contemporary Dido for Dawn Upshaw and the Brentano String Quartet, we knew immediately that our Dido would not partake of the depiction of women imprinted on us by men through the centuries. We knew, too, that Dido’s epic love for Aeneas and her self-immolation in response to what she perceived as his abandonment of her—romantic tropes devised by Virgil and militarized by Purcell and Tate for Aeneas post-dated Dido by anywhere between 50 and 400 years!—needed to metamorphose in our hands. We were compelled by the notion of an epic love in contemporary times. What form might that take for a powerfully strong, complex woman of today, who has long realized her full potential in terms of both career and family?

A woman whose experience of first love is but a distant memory. How does she allow herself to get so knocked off kilter, so swept off her feet? What is the fallout of that? In both Virgil and Purcell/Tate’s versions, Dido’s lovesickness is incited and meddled with by Venus and Juno. But in an era without any gods, where does that intensity of feeling come from? It seemed to us that there was no better medium than music with which to explore this question.

Dido of ancient times, whether real or fictional, had no choice. Our Dido, however, has the power to determine her own fate. I have been lucky enough to keep returning, over the years, to a writing retreat on an island where there are no cars, no shops, only a few houses, and a landscape strewn with ancient rocks, covered with windblown trees, and ringed by sea. Our Dido’s refuge was inspired by my time in this place. Our Dido does not choose death. She removes herself from the everyday world, she chooses solitude. She returns to nature, she becomes one with it.

Together, Melinda and I have attempted to make something between a song cycle and a monodrama. A piece of music drama that is simultaneously journey and meditation. A reflection on the power of love, on the passage of time, on loss, resilience, and the restorative power of a disappearing world.

—Note by Stephanie Fleischmann

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

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

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award. Soon after, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center invited them to be the inaugural members of Chamber Music Society Two. In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet has a strong interest in both very old and new music including works by Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung and others. In 1998, cellist Nina Lee joined the Quartet, succeeding founding member Michael Kannen. The following season the Quartet became the first Ensemble-In-Residence at Princeton University, where they taught and performed for fifteen years. In 2014, the Quartet became the Resident String Quartet at the Yale School of Music, succeeding the Tokyo Quartet in that position. The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved.”

DAWN UPSHAW, soprano

A five-time Grammy Award winner, Dawn Upshaw is a leading American soprano, known for her exceptional interest in contemporary music, and is highly active as a recitalist. Raised outside of Chicago, Upshaw attended Illinois Wesleyan and later the Manhattan School of Music studying with Ellen Faull before rising to national prominence in 1994 by winning the Young Concert Artist Auditions. A year later she won the prestigious Naumburg Competition and soon was receiving leading roles on many of the world’s most well-known opera stages (including more than 300 at the Met). In 2007, she was named a Fellow of the MacArthur Foundation, the first vocal artist to be awarded the five-year “genius” prize, and in 2008 she was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. She is featured on more than 50 recordings, including the million-selling Symphony No. 3 by Henryk Gorecki for Nonesuch Records.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

MELINDA WAGNER, composer

Melinda Wagner achieved widespread attention when her colorful Concerto for Flute, Strings and Percussion was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1999. Since then, major compositions have included Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra, for Joseph Alessi and the New York Philharmonic, and a piano concerto, Extremity of Sky, commissioned by the Chicago Symphony for Emanuel Ax and Elegy Flywheel, composed for the New York Philharmonic’s Project 19 series. Wagner has received a Guggenheim Fellowship as well as awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and ASCAP. She is currently Chair of the Department of Composition at The Juilliard School.

STEPHANIE FLEISCHMANN, librettist

Stephanie Fleischmann is a librettist and playwright whose texts serve as blueprints for intricate three-dimensional sonic and visual worlds. Her opera libretti, plays, and musical-theater works have been performed internationally and across the United States. She is in great demand for her libretti with some of the most recent being In a Grove and Another City. She has written numerous plays and musical theater works including Dio, Sound house and The Visitation, a sound walk. She received her B.F.A. from Wesleyan University, M.F.A. from Brooklyn College and taught playwriting at Skidmore College for 9 years.

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