FRIDAY, JULY 8 :: 7:30 PM

Danbi Um, violin
Christopher Costanza, cello
Stephen Prutsman, piano

SONATA IN E-FLAT MAJOR, FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO,
OP. 18, TRV 151 [1887]
Richard Strauss (1864-1949)
Allegro ma non troppo
Improvisation: Andante cantabile
Finale: Andante - Allegro

:: INTERMISSION ::

PIANO TRIO IN B MAJOR, OP. 8 [1853-4, REV. 1889]
Johannes Brahms (1833-97)
Allegro con brio
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro

This concert is made possible by contributing sponsors Naomi and Jeff Stonberg.
SONATA IN E-FLAT MAJOR, FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 18, TRV 151
Richard Strauss [b. Munich, Germany, June 11, 1864; d. Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, September 8, 1949]
Composed 1887; 29 minutes

It took Richard Strauss some time to throw off the conservative ways of thinking that his father encouraged in his musically gifted son. Wagner’s music, with its progressive use of harmony, was banned in the Strauss household until the young Richard was in his teens. Even then, Strauss wrote later in his life: “It was not until, against my father’s orders, I studied the score of Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde that I entered into that magic world. I can well remember how, at the age of 17, I positively wobbled down the score of Tristan as if in a trance.”

The result of his formal training was that Strauss became well-grounded in traditional sonata writing. In the 1880s, he composed the only instrumental sonatas of a lengthy career, including sonatas for piano, for cello and for violin, together with a string quartet. The Violin Sonata was the last of the group. It was Strauss’s swansong to chamber music at the ripe old age of 23. Thereafter, he was to draw inspiration from literary and other extra-musical forms, beginning one year later with Don Juan, the first of the great tone poems.

The Sonata opens with a thoroughly Straussian gesture: a bold, fanfare-like theme in the heroic key of E-flat, as compact in delivery as it is ripe for thematic development. The movement develops three main ideas before culminating in a coda of operatic proportion. The slow movement was the last to be written.

Titled Improvisation, perhaps as a reflection of its free middle section, the movement is a heartfelt song-without-words. The opening phrase echoes the slow movement of Beethoven’s Pathétique Sonata, but with a few other tunes, too.

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PIANO TRIO IN B MAJOR, OP. 8
Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; d. Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897)
Composed 1853-4, rev. 1889; 37 minutes

Brahms took his chamber music seriously and re-energized the medium for the latter 19th century, raising it to the highest level of achievement. His original plan was to bookend his output with two versions of a piano trio, written 35 years apart—and then retire. But the expressive musicality of Richard Mühlfeld, the Meiningen Court clarinetist, propelled him to add a coda of four more glorious chamber works as the finale to his creative life. With an overall catalogue of 24 widely varied chamber compositions spanning four decades, it’s arguably the piano trios that best marry the medium with the message. Before Brahms, Beethoven had found his voice in the string quartet; Schubert, for the most part, found his in the string quintet and Schumann his, in the piano quintet. The piano trio gave Brahms the most comfortable, natural vehicle for his carefully crafted compositions.

The Piano Trio in B Major, Op. 8 is both the first and last work Brahms wrote in the medium of piano trio. He wrote the first version in 1853–4 and published it as his Op. 8, not long after being proclaimed a musical genius by Schumann – “springing forth like Minerva, fully armed from the head of Jove in Schumann’s words. Then, late in life, in 1889, when a new publisher acquired rights to several of his chamber music compositions, Brahms took the opportunity to re-write a piece first conceived by an up and coming 20-year-old. “It will not be so wild as before,” he wrote to Clara Schumann, who had helped workshop the earlier version. He tightened his expansive style, simplified its structure and used its themes as the building blocks of what is, essentially, a new work, one third shorter than the original. What is striking is that Brahms, who assiduously destroyed his sketches and early drafts, entered the process knowing that a work that had been in circulation for nearly 40 years could not be deleted from his catalog. Striking, too, is the skill with which Brahms sustains the youthful energy of the first version. “I did not provide it with a wig,” he said in a manner calculated to confuse. “I just arranged its hair a little!” It is this revised version, written after a lifetime of composition and after almost one hundred published works, that is usually played today. Brahms jokingly referred to it as his Op. 108, rather than his Op. 8.

In the new Op. 8, Brahms retains the lyrical opening theme. It is instantly recognizable as Brahmsian, being characteristically nutty brown in texture, somewhat wistful in mood. Its expansive nature, on the scale of Beethoven’s Archduke Trio, ensures that the broad sweep of the opening movement will remain, though this is virtually all that does remain from the earlier version of the trio. Other Brahmsian thumbprints, like hemiola patterns and additional rhythmical shifts, add new energy, direction and tautness to the music. The deftly scurrying Scherzo pays homage to Mendelssohn. Together with its broadly lilting, waltz-like trio, it is virtually unchanged from the 1854 publication. The slow movement is built upon a solemn, expansive chorale-like opening, again showing the influence of the Archduke trio but now speaking in Brahms’s mature voice – the more so with a new, autumnal second theme. The questioning B minor cello theme that opens the finale, introduces a note of restlessness. But it immediately gives way to a brightly assertive D major second theme that introduces a valedictory tone to the movement. Although the music ends in the minor, its mood is confident and hard-won.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Danbi Um, violin

Violinist Danbi Um captivates audiences with her virtuosity, individual sound and interpretive sensitivity. As a Menuhin International Violin Competition Silver Medalist, a winner of the prestigious 2018 Salon de Virtuosi Career Grant, and a recent top prizewinner of the Naumburg International Violin Competition, she showcases her artistry in concertos, solo recitals and in collaboration with distinguished chamber musicians. In 2000, the Seoul-born violinist moved to the United States to study at the Curtis Institute of Music, where she earned a Bachelor’s degree. She also holds an Artist Diploma from Indiana University.

Stephen Prutsman, piano

A pianist, composer and conductor, Stephen Prutsman explores music of all cultures and languages. Stephen has served as Artistic Partner with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra as well as Artistic Director of the Cartagena International Festival of Music. In the early 90’s, he was a medal winner at the Tchaikovsky and Queen Elisabeth Piano competitions, and received the Avery Fisher Career Grant. Since then Stephen has performed as soloist with the world’s leading orchestras and has an extensive, critically-acclaimed classical discography. A former student of Aube Tzerko, Leon Fleisher and Jack Wilson, he studied at the University of California at Los Angeles and the Peabody Conservatory of Music. Passionate about the value of music for all, Stephen actively promotes music and arts education, especially projects that create enjoyable artistic environments for autistic children and their families.

Christopher Costanza, cello

For three decades, cellist Christopher Costanza has enjoyed a varied and exciting career as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. A winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions and a recipient of a prestigious Solo Recitalists Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, Mr. Costanza has performed to wide critical acclaim around the world. He has been with the St. Lawrence String Quartet since 2003 and tours extensively with that ensemble. As a member of the St. Lawrence, he is an Artist-in-Residence at Stanford University, where he teaches cello and chamber music and performs a wide variety of formal and informal concerts each season.

JULY 8 :: 9:45 PM
CABARET: ROMANI MUSIC

Danbi Um, violin
Stephen Prutsman, piano
Members of Dover Quartet

Join for an exciting evening of string virtuosity and fun with classical works inspired by Romani music including Hubay’s Scènes de la Csárda, No. 3 and the Rondo alla Zingarese from Brahms’s Piano Quartet in G minor.

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