

FRIDAY, JUNE 23 :: 7:30 PM

Bach & Arvo Pärt

Livia Sohn, *violin* | Kerson Leong, *violin*

Ryan Roberts, *oboe*

Rockport Chamber Orchestra

Balourdet String Quartet

Clare Semes, *violin* | Byungchan Lee, *violin*

Barry Shiffman, *viola* | Lukas Goodman, *cello*

Jeffrey Beecher, *double bass*

Charles Clements, *double bass* | Max Levinson, *piano*

CONCERTO IN C MINOR FOR OBOE, VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA,
AFTER BWV 1060 (C1717-23)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

MORE OR LESS FOR PRE-RECORDED AND LIVE VIOLIN (2020)

Mark Applebaum (b. 1967)

FRATRES (1977)

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

:: INTERMISSION ::

TABULA RASA: DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR TWO VIOLINS,
STRINGS AND PREPARED PIANO (1977)

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

Ludus – Con moto

Silentium – Senza moto

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY DAVID SCUDDER

JUNE 23

CONCERTO IN C MINOR FOR OBOE, VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA, AFTER BWV 1060

Johann Sebastian Bach (b. Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; d. Leipzig, July 28, 1750)

Composed c. 1717-23; 14 minutes



With a family of gifted musicians, it is not surprising that Bach wrote concertos for one, two, three and even four harpsichords to showcase their talents. Tonight's concerto has come down to us as a concerto for two harpsichords. Performances took place at the Leipzig *collegium musicum*, a kind of mixed professional and gifted amateur concert-giving society that presented weekly concerts in a coffeehouse and, in the summer, in a coffee garden by the city gate. Bach organized music for the society, and his sons Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel were among the soloists, along with other gifted pupils. Like Bach's seven solo keyboard concertos, all the multi-harpsichord concertos are arrangements of existing music. No model survives for today's C minor Concerto, BWV 1060. Its two solo parts were clearly written with different solo instruments in mind, since one of them offers such violin-like passages as broken chords and fast alternations across adjacent strings, around a single note. The other offers more melodic, sustained lines and a range that does not go lower than the oboe's lowest note. So, Bach experts have long agreed that this C minor Concerto for two harpsichords had its origins in a lost concerto for oboe, violin and orchestra by Bach and that this concerto was probably written during Bach's years in Cöthen (1717-23). Tonight's reconstructed concerto follows the pattern of the standard three-movement Italian concerto. The opening movement presents the main theme in a myriad of variations before returning to its original form towards the end. The slow movement contains some of Bach's most poetic, melodically sustained music, heard over gently pulsing chords. The finale presents an elegantly worked-out dialogue on a dancing, Bourée-like theme.

MORE OR LESS, FOR PRE-RECORDED AND LIVE VIOLIN

Mark Applebaum (b. Chicago, IL, 1967)

Composed 2020; 5 minutes

Mark Applebaum writes:

"Was Shakespeare inconvenienced when he wrote his 150-some sonnets? One presumes that he was not 'put out' to express himself within the inherited form of the sonnet: fourteen lines comprising three quatrains and a couplet. One speculates that he was, in fact, inspired by the confines of the form. Constraint can be the artist's best friend.

Mozart willingly adopted the sonata allegro form, just as Monk embraced the 12-bar blues, and McCartney employed the contrasting verse-chorus song structure. Alongside their radical, experimental impulses, each of these giants worked—to brilliant effect—within the constraints of received forms.

The aforementioned examples are willing ones, circumstances in which the artist was happy to adopt a constraint. (When I accept a commission to write a string quartet, I don't add pipe organ.) But what about necessitated constraints? The pandemic got me thinking about them. I divide that territory into three categories: isolation (which was the most puissant artistic constraint during the pandemic), technical limitation and disability.

Olivier Messiaen did not ask to be a prisoner of war; but when, during his incarceration, he found only a clarinet, violin, cello and piano to make music with, he composed the brilliant *Quartet for the End of Time*. Would that piece have been better if he had unlimited instrumental resources? I suspect that the idea would never have occurred to him without the pressures of isolation.

John Cage invented the prepared piano because the theater space for his 1938 *Bacchanale* was not large enough to accommodate the percussion ensemble he preferred. Thank heavens Cage confronted this technical limitation and invented his through it: composers to this day willingly write for prepared piano.

This brings us to disability. Def Leppard drummer Rick Allen learned to play with one arm after losing the other in an automobile accident; jazz guitar virtuoso Django Reinhardt reformulated his playing after burning his fingers in a fire; and concert pianist Paul Wittgenstein, after losing his right arm in the first World War, magnificently performed Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* in D major written just for him.

So, when I learned that my dear friend Livia Sohn—among the world's greatest living violinists—lost the use of two of her left-hand fingers due to the neurological disorder focal dystonia, my first thought was 'there should be some

violin literature that uses just the other two fingers.' This led to *More Or Less*, a piece that can be played with just the first two fingers of the left hand. (Happy Update: after several years of rehabilitation, Livia is again playing with all of her fingers. So now she actually 'cheats' when playing my piece. That's a good thing, of course.)

The piece, dedicated to Livia Sohn with great admiration and affection, is scored for violin and pre-recorded violin. Because what could be better than one Livia? Two Livias: one live, and one pre-recorded. That's a lot of Livia. At the same time, this piece can be played with just two fingers of the left hand.

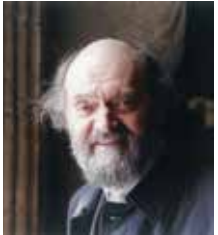
So less is more...well, more or less."

FRATRES, FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Arvo Pärt (b. Paide, Estonia, September 11, 1935)

Composed 1977, this arrangement 1980; 11 minutes

Consciously rejecting complexity, Estonian composer Arvo Pärt seeks to uncover a simple truth in his music, using repetition as a foundation for its building blocks. Religious or spiritual feeling, drawing on sources that go back to Gregorian chant, adds to its appeal. *Fratres*, originally composed in 1977 as three-part music without specified instrumentation, is one of his earliest pared-down pieces. Its Latin title meaning 'Brethren' adds to the quasi-religious feel underlining the music. Now among his most-arranged and most performed pieces, *Fratres* opens with a brilliant, across-the-strings prelude to an as-yet unstated theme. The solemn, modal melody then travels through a sequence of contrasting, emotionally wide-ranging variations over a skeletal, ever-present piano chant, punctuated by a tolling, deep bell-like piano note.



"Here I am alone with silence. I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements – with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation." *Arvo Pärt*

ARVO PÄRT: THE EARLY YEARS

- Grows up in provincial Estonia, notably Rakvere, initially under German occupation, then Stalin
- Close relatives are among tens of thousands deported to Siberia
- Mandatory military service in the Soviet Army (1954-56)
- Works as a sound engineer for Estonian Radio (1958-67)
- Student work *Nekrolog* (1960), Estonia's first serial composition, turns dissonance into a weapon of protest
- *Collage über B-A-C-H* (1964) journeys from transcription to destruction
- His angst-ridden *Second Symphony* (1966) ends by collapsing into a comforting spoonful of Tchaikovsky
- Pärt now leads a generation of innovative Estonian composers, to a growing reputation in the West, but predictable disapproval from the Soviet establishment
- *Credo* (1968) brings a stylistic crisis, while provocatively declaring religious faith in a then officially atheist state
- Soundtrack composition in the 1960s and 70s generates rubles for food (9 documentaries, 6 feature films, 20 puppet films)
- Eight years of outward creative silence (1968-76) generates 'thousands and thousands of pages of notes,' while Pärt digs deep into austere, measured Renaissance polyphony and the stark vocal lines of 13th century organum
- A 'simple' little piano piece, *Für Alina* (1976), becomes the fount of a radically new musical language which will drive the composer's creativity through the coming four decades
- Music of the 'little bells', which Pärt calls 'tintinnabuli' is introduced to those willing to listen. In it, melody and triad are fused, expanding tonal and modal possibilities, distilling musical material to its essence and opening up creativity through a return to first principles
- *Für Alina* is closely followed by *Tabula Rasa*, *Fratres*, *Summa* and the *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, all in 1977, with *Spiegel im Spiegel* in 1978
- All will become the foundation of Pärt's emerging immense popularity in the West. Pärt (now 'a traitor of the fatherland') and family are forced to leave Estonia in 1980, first for Vienna, then Berlin
- In 1984 *Tabula Rasa* launches Pärt's music to the world via an on-going collaboration with the ECM New Series label
- Since 2010, Pärt has returned to live permanently in Estonia, creating new music, revising old, with no further creative gaps. Major international premieres of important new works have flowed from his pen. Honorary doctorates in music and theology, and many other prestigious awards, have been awarded from around the world



Arvo Pärt visits a sculpture of a boy on a bicycle, marking his 75th birthday, in his hometown of Rakvere. The young Arvo Pärt would regularly ride to the town square on Fridays to listen to a radio concert broadcast from a loudspeaker on top of a telephone post.

TABULA RASA: DOUBLE CONCERTO FOR TWO VIOLINS,
STRINGS AND PREPARED PIANO

Arvo Pärt (b. Paide, Estonia, September 11, 1935)
Composed 1977; 27 minutes

Tabula Rasa was composed in 1977 to a suggestion from violinist Gidon Kremer for a concert that included Alfred Schnittke’s First Concerto Grosso, with similar instrumental resources to Pärt’s two solo violins, strings and prepared piano. Screws and felts placed between the piano strings generate a bell-like sonority, which can be amplified. Like the rest of Pärt’s mature music, the two contrasting movements of Tabula Rasa [Ludus (Game) and Silentium (Silence)] consciously explore direct, uncontrived communication built upon musical repetition. This is far removed from the goal-oriented music of an artist such as Beethoven. Pärt’s music is concerned with being, existing and evolving, rather than becoming.

The phrase tabula rasa has a long history, translating literally as a ‘blank slate.’ “Gregorian chant has taught me that a cosmic secret is hidden in the art of combining two or three notes,” Pärt said in 1988. He calls it his tintinnabula technique (from the Latin tintinnabulum = ‘bell’). A strict discipline and logic controls the movement of lines within the music. The first movement, Ludus (marked ‘with movement’) evolves over eight variations towards an intricately woven intense climax and cadenza. It is punctuated by silences and grounded throughout by a deep, tolling bell from the piano. In Silentium, (marked ‘without movement’), the bass voice moves at the quickest speed, while the lines above move progressively slower up to the slowest moving, the solo violins. The music meditates over gentle triadic oscillations, ascending and descending bass lines, and a recurring piano figure, every note speaking within an ever-shifting texture until this dies away into the depths. Speaking of the September 30, 1977 première in Tallinn, Estonia, Nora Pärt, the composer’s wife, recalls: “Never again have I experienced the hushed silence that took over the assembly hall after the première.”

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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FILM: LOS HERMANOS/ THE BROTHERS

FRIDAY, JUNE 30 :: 11 AM

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