Gidon Kremer, violin
Yulianna Avdeeva, piano | Madara Pētersone, violin

HOMMAGE À J. S. B., FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO (QUASI ECO) (2009)
Valentin Vasilievich Silvestrov (b. 1937)
Andantino –
Andantino –
Andante

CHAConNE FOR PIANO (1942)
Sefia Gubaidulina (b. 1931)

REQUIEM, FOR VIOLIN SOLO (2014)
Igor Loboda (b. 1956)

SONATA NO. 4, FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 39 (1947)
Mieczyslaw Weinberg (1911–96)
Adagio
Allegro ma non troppo –
Adagio tenuto molto rubato - Adagio primo

:: INTERMISSION ::

Alfred Schnittke (1936–98)

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 3, IN D MINOR, OP. 108 (1886–8)
Johannes Brahms (1833–97)
Allegro
Adagio
Un poco presto e con sentimento
Finale: Presto agitato

THREE PIECES FOR 2 VIOLINS AND PIANO (PUBL. 1970)
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–75); arr. Levon Atovmyan
Prelude,
Gavotte
Waltz

This concert is made possible by contributing sponsors Naomi and Jeff Stonberg.
PROGRAM NOTES

In the opening Andantino of his Homage to J.S.B., the violin echoes figurations from what might be the Bach Chaconne while the piano, marked ‘synchronously’ in the score, reinforces the implied harmony of each fragment. In a second Andantino, which follows without break, the chords are gentle chords in a fragmented sequence of notes. Following again without break, the closing Andante opens as a gentle lullaby, almost like Brahms at times, with a resonantly echoing final reflection on the opening Andantino, which ultimately evaporates into silence. “Music is not a philosophy,” Silvestrov says, “but a song sung by the world about itself, sort of a musical testimony of existence.”

CHACONNE FOR PIANO
Sofia Gubaidulina (b. Chistopol’, Tatar Republic, Soviet Union, October 24, 1931)
Composed 1962; 10 minutes

Exiled since March 2022 to Berlin, after 84 years living in Kyiv, “a refugee from bombs and missiles,” Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov continues to fight for his country with blunt words and ‘quiet, cautious music.’ “Cherish this quiet, cherish this peace,” he says. His Majdan cycle of hymns, elegies and prayers dates back to the initially peaceful 2013-14 Kyiv street protests which led to the Revolution of Dignity and the ousting of President Yanukovitch. Recently, he has written more Elegies. Now 85 and a winner of the Shevchenko National Prize, his country’s highest award for an artist, Silvestrov has distilled a creative dialogue with composers from the Western musical past as diverse as Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Mahler, Wagner and Glucka. “I do not write new music,” Silvestrov says, “my music is a response to and an echo of what already exists.”

Although viewed by the composer as a student work, the Chaconne is an impressive piece. “I am a religious Russian Orthodox person and I understand ‘religion’ in the literal meaning of the word, as ‘re-lige’, that is to say the restoration of connections, the restoration of the ‘legato’ of life. There is no more serious task for music than this.” – Sofia Gubaidulina

Born in the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, Gubaidulina entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1954, one year after Stalin’s death, thereby dodging the more extreme of the hardships inflicted on her graduation examiner, Dmitri Shostakovich. “My wish for you is that you should continue on your own, incorrect way,” Shostakovich quietly told the determinedly independent composer, both well aware of the irony behind the comment. Gubaidulina’s twin passions for the Western musical avant-garde and religious symbolism won her few friends in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev, Brezhnev and the bleak years of the early 1980s. With Gorbachev’s reforms, however, Gubaidulina was eventually allowed to travel to the West, where Gidon Kremer’s advocacy of the violin concerto Offertorium that she wrote for him paved the way for her recognition as Russia’s best-known woman composer. In a flood of music since leaving her home country, she has written for most of the world’s great orchestras. Now 91, she has resided in a village outside Hamburg, Germany for the past three decades. Her greatest wish, her publisher says, remains that she should continue to write music, quietly and at home.

Valentin Yasilevich Silvestrov (b. Kiev, Ukraine, September 30, 1937)
Composed 2009; 6 minutes

SONATA NO. 4, FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 39
Mieczyslaw Weinberg (b. Warsaw, Poland, December 8, 1919; d. Moscow, February 2, 1996)
Composed 1947; 18 minutes

The fourth of Weinberg’s six violin sonatas is a cyclical work in two halves of equal length: a long first movement and joined second and third movements which, finally, return to the atmosphere and material of the first. The piano writing is at first sparse and tonally unclear. The violin then joins in an introspective three-part dialogue with the piano, the latter roaming widely over the keyboard, the bass line providing a ground-like anchor. The second shows the influence of Shostakovich as Weinberg takes the pomposity and nationalistic element out of a march and its militaristic fanfares, by introducing a scurrying, maniacal element to its progression. [The borrowing was mutual; Shostakovich would also borrow Polish and Jewish elements from Weinberg.) As the music builds to a climax, piano chords herald a violin cadenza and then the concluding Adagio primo. Here, a serene melody high on the violin over pulsing piano chords leads into the first movement theme and a quiet fade out over pizzicato violin notes, recalling the very opening of the sonata.

REQUIEM, FOR VIOLIN SOLO
Igor Loboda (b. Tbilisi, Georgia, 1954)
Composed 2014; 8 minutes

Loboda’s Requiem for violin solo was commissioned by Georgian violinist Lisa Batashvili in 2014 after the Russian annexation of Crimea. Both Georgia and Ukraine have been victims of Russian aggression, and of wars in both recent and more historical times. Gidon Kremer regularly dedicates Loboda’s Requiem for violin solo “to the endless sufferings of Ukraine.” Requiem is a short, but powerful piece which graphically takes the listener inside those horrendous visual images of a war we have been witnessing day by day in real time. The piece opens with stark open fifths, then octaves presenting a bleak landscape. This then resolves into the music that lies at the heart of the piece, a simple, loving Ukrainian folk melody telling of the river Dniiper. Loboda struggles to re-establish the folk song against a barrage of double- and triple-stopped chords, both bowed and plucked, tremolos, an anguished intense vibrato, and an ever-present threatening low G drone.

The Warsaw-born 20-year-old pianist-director of the Jewish theater, where his father was a violinist and composer, fled the Nazi occupation alone, traveling to Minsk, where he continued his studies, and then Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Shostakovich was then impressed by the first of Weinberg’s 26 symphonies and invited him to Moscow, where he remained from 1943 to his death. Shostakovich was to remain a friend and ally. “I count myself my pupil, his flesh and blood,” Weinberg said. Meanwhile, all his close family and many from his wider family were murdered during World War II, and this was to haunt many of his subsequent works. These include 7 operas, including the only successful opera about the Holocaust (The Passenger), 26 symphonies, 17 string quartets and nearly 30 sonatas for various instruments, plus vast quantities of music for film, theater and radio, by which Weinberg was forced to make his living.

Gidon Kremer is a long-time champion of the music of Polish-born composer Mieczyslaw Weinberg. "Weinberg is very important for the development of music, a composer with the distinct voice," he says. "People need to discover him.” The Warsaw-born 78-year-old pianist-director of the Jewish theater, where his father was a violinist and composer, fled the Nazi occupation alone, traveling to Minsk, where he continued his studies, and then Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Shostakovich was then impressed by the first of Weinberg’s 26 symphonies and invited him to Moscow, where he remained from 1943 to his death. Shostakovich was to remain a friend and ally. “I count myself my pupil, his flesh and blood,” Weinberg said. Meanwhile, all his close family and many from his wider family were murdered during World War II, and this was to haunt many of his subsequent works. These include 7 operas, including the only successful opera about the Holocaust (The Passenger), 26 symphonies, 17 string quartets and nearly 30 sonatas for various instruments, plus vast quantities of music for film, theater and radio, by which Weinberg was forced to make his living.
This is the earliest of four versions of Schnittke’s Moz-Art, his ‘game with music,’ a piece based on the sole surviving violin part from Mozart’s otherwise lost pantomime suite, K. 416d, originally composed for the pre-Lenten carnival week of 1783. It is treated in a playful manner as a musical joke, a humorous collage of Mozart’s music via Schnittke’s polytonality. Together with Gidon Kremer, Schnittke provided tonight’s version of Moz-Art with the following dedication, written with an appropriately antique pen: “Loose pages from an almost lost score by the Viennese Court Composer, Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart. Composed by the same, by his very own hand, in February of the year 1783, and after almost two hundred years of neglect, heard in wondrous fashion in a Viennese tradition and a city where he first studied, while his roots simultaneously run deep in Russian culture. His catalog includes three operas, nine symphonies, ballets, concertos, concerti grossi and sonatas for various instruments, mostly composed while he was not creating music for 60 films. His probing, wildly successful music continued to probe further towards what he called the ‘even tension’ of the tonal fabric itself, even when a series of jokes left him without speech for the last four years of his life and writing with a non-dominant hand.”

In his Third and final Violin Sonata, Brahms structures the music meticulously, bar by bar, phrase by phrase. He works within the traditional four-movement sonata structure, building in recurring themes and motifs, bringing a feeling of unity and wholeness to the score. Tension underscores the first movement – a compressed tension that builds as the movement progresses, fueled by sonorous, restless piano writing, only partly offset by a radiant second theme, and by the soaring violin writing. The two middle movements bring some release. The violin sings in unbroken song in the slow movement, its thoughts contemplative and personal, until released in a burst of joy and double-stopping at the climax of the melody. A brief scherzo has an enigmatic quality, perhaps even a touch of irony. With the finale, marked agitate, the restlessness of the opening movement returns, now more assertive and goal oriented. Even a broad, chorale-like second theme cannot dislodge the progression of the music as it drives forward to a determined D minor conclusion.