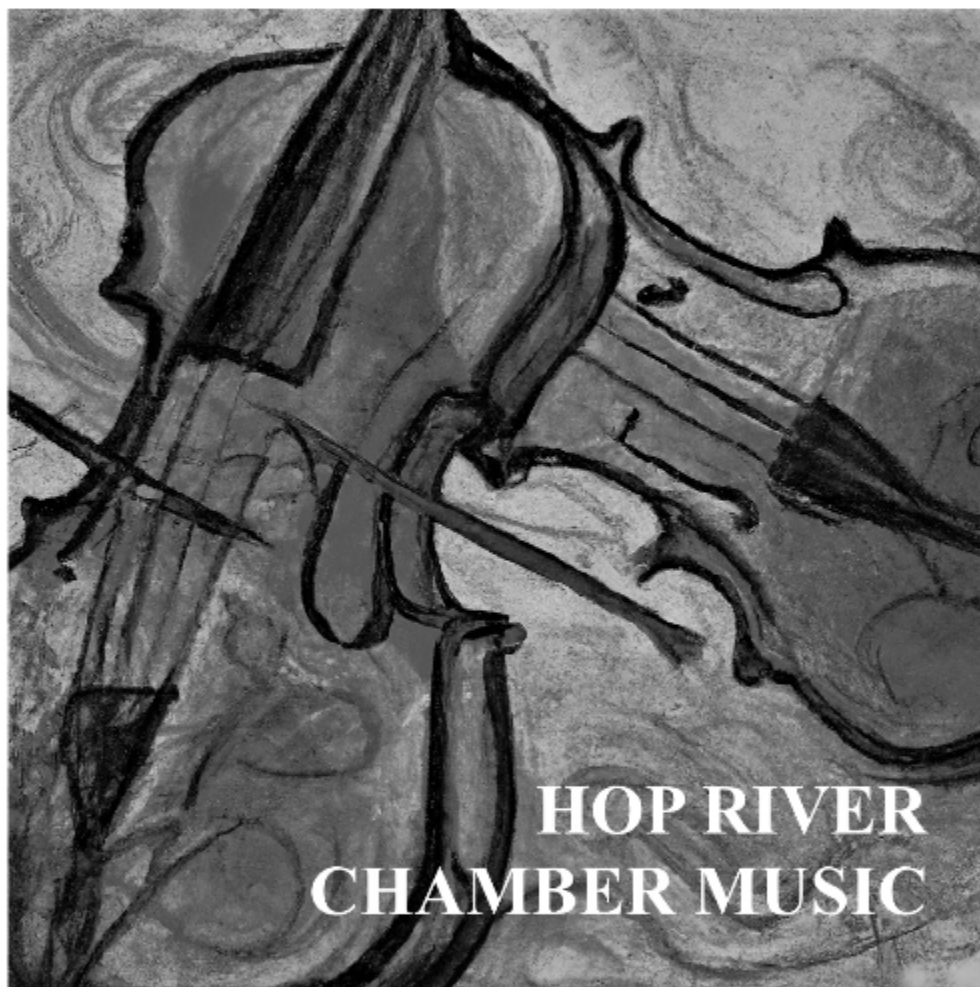


45th Season

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CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

July 20, July 27 & August 3, 2023



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Greetings, Friends!

It is a new place from which I am greeting you this year for the Hop River Chamber Music (HRCM) concerts. Come along with us as we enjoy a new venue in this 45th year of musical performances.

The Board of Directors is most grateful for use of the First Congregational Church, UCC, in Andover for more than forty years. We presented many concerts in that intimate space, with acoustics that enhanced the beautiful music performed, and gathered together afterwards for receptions. Now has become a time of change.

During the years of COVID-19, the Board began to consider the possibility of a new venue to draw additional people from eastern Connecticut to our concerts. With an enthusiastic response to our request for use of von der Mehden Recital Hall on the campus of the University of Connecticut, Abigail Golek, Theatre Operations Manager, worked diligently with Board Secretary Blair T. Johnson to arrange for this summer's concert season.

This recital hall is named for J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr. and was financed by a bequest from his widow. A movement from her husband's string quartet will be performed—perhaps for the first time—at our last concert on August 3rd. We hope that the hall will be available for our concerts in future years. As many of you know, it has just the right provisions for hearing music by our outstanding musicians.

HCRM's Board of Directors is listed in this program booklet. This year, Mary Ellen Briga joins Barbara Vaughan and Fran Bard as an Artistic Director. I am grateful to them and to the other Board members who give generously of their time to bring another concert season to you, our loyal followers and new attendees.

The Board ends each season with a conversation about the musical programs and details for their preparation. In the following January, the Artistic Directors meet to discuss programs for the coming summer. The Board meets in February to begin the planning process and to assign tasks to individual Board members; it meets again in April to finalize the newsletter and other details. For the past two years, we have met virtually via computers and smart phones, so it will be especially satisfying to join together in person at the concerts!

In my words for our 2023 newsletter, *The Hop River Times*, I repeat: “In our world so in need of beauty, hope, love and peace, we can depend on classical music and those who perform it to bring joy and encouragement to our lives.” Thank you, our audiences, for your financial support and attendance at performances of the Hop River Chamber Players!

Dr. Carolyn Lester
President, Board of Directors



J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr., San Francisco, c.1904

J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr. (1873–1954) was born in San Francisco, studied music at Leipzig and Yale, and spent most of his active musical life as a cellist and conductor in New York City from 1906 to the onset of World War II, when he and his wife took up permanent residence in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. His additional talents in the fields of transcription, orchestration and composition, already recognized in New York, occupied most of his time during the latter part of his life in Connecticut.

After [v]on der Mehden's death in 1954, his compositions were given to The University of Connecticut by his widow, Susan Evelyn Bates von der Mehden, who subsequently bequeathed her estate to this University for the establishment of a recital hall in his memory and in order that the unpublished compositions of Louis von der Mehden might be printed under the auspices of the University.

Excerpt from James R. Johnson's Forword to *The Collected Works of J. Louis von der Mehden (1873–1954)*, Volume I, Chamber Music. There are five additional volumes. Most of these works date from the early 1920s and do not constitute a representative sample of von der Mehden's large compositional output, most of which has now vanished. See "Lost Works" (pp.57–61) in John Paul Parakilas' M.A. Thesis, *Life and Works of J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr.* (UConn, 1974). Susan's bequest was \$500,000, about \$5.7 million in 2023 dollars; von der Mehden Recital Hall opened in 1965.

Hop River Chamber Music

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For more information about Hop River Chamber Music (HRCM), visit our website:

www.hoprvmusic.com



Our annual May newsletter, *The Hop River Times*, communicates details of our summer concerts. To announce the change of venue from Andover to Storrs in 2023, it was bulk-mailed to a large number of addresses in nearby towns. Such a mailing is expensive and may not be repeated in 2024.

To assure receiving the newsletter by e- or snail-mail, please use the Contact form at our website. Your address will be used solely for HRCM correspondence and will not be shared with other organizations.

Hop River Chamber Music

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July 20, 2023

7:30 P.M.

William Grant Still

Incantation and Dance

Benjamin Britten

Temporal Variations

- I. Theme. Andante, rubato
- II. Oration. Lento quasi recitativo – Animando
- III. March. Alla marcia
- IV. Exercises. Allegro molto e con fuoco
- V. Commination. Adagio con fuoco
- VI. Chorale. Molto lento
- VII. Waltz. Allegretto rubato
- VIII. Polka. Tempo di polka – Allegro
- IX. Resolution. Maestoso (non troppo lento)

Steve Wade, oboe
Gary Chapman, piano

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms

Piano Quartet in A, op.26

Allegro non troppo
Poco adagio
Scherzo. Poco allegro – Trio
Finale. Allegro

Leonid Sigal, violin
Michael Wheeler, viola
Tom Hudson, cello
Gary Chapman, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

Incantation and Dance

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

William Grant Still (Jr.) was born in a rural town in the southwest corner of Mississippi, where his parents taught school, but grew up in Little Rock (AR), to which his mother moved when her husband died four months later. There, teachers were better paid and African Americans could still vote. She taught English in the high school William would attend, saw to it that he studied, and (as Still later wrote) “constantly impressed me with the thought that I should achieve something worth while in life.”

She remarried in 1904. Her husband broadened his stepson’s musical experience beyond the hymns and spirituals heard in church by taking him to concerts (where he heard violinist Clarence Cameron White and other black artists) and playing records from his collection (among them, recordings of opera). Still would recall “learn[ing] at an early age to appreciate the better sort of music through the records he would buy.” By the time he finished high school, he’d had some violin lessons, learned to read music, and become interested in composing.

In 1911, his mother sent him to Wilberforce University (Dayton, OH) to study for a B.S. degree. It had no academic music program, and after a year Still asked if he might go to Oberlin instead. Her idea of a career in music was playing irregular gigs in disreputable places, and she would have none of it. “And so,” Still wrote, “I wasted time in college just barely making my grades; always in trouble for playing pranks; spending most of my time studying music, attempting to write and playing the violin.” He also learned oboe and cello. To his mother’s dismay, shortly before he might have graduated in 1915, he left Wilberforce to avoid expulsion for what he insisted was an innocent prank—joining other students of both sexes at an unauthorized picnic.

Still did eventually get to Oberlin for three semesters (1916–17) as a part-time work-study student, receiving instruction in violin, theory, and harmony, and hearing a good deal of live concert music. Later he studied composition privately with George Whitefield Chadwick of the New England Conservatory in 1922 (when the all-black musical *Shuffle Along*—for which Still played oboe in the pit orchestra—ran for 3 months in Boston), and with French-born, modernist composer Edvard Varèse (1883–1965) in New York (1924–25).

But until the 1930s, when he’d gained recognition as a composer, Still made his living (as had J. Louis von der Mehden) in theatre and commercial music. Among other jobs, he arranged music for W. C. Handy (“father of the blues”) in Memphis and toured in the South playing oboe with his band (1916); orchestrated stride pianist James P. Johnson’s music for *Runnin’ Wild* (1923), a successful all-black musical, which ignited the national craze for dancing “The Charleston”; and composed, arranged, and conducted for Harry Pace’s Black Swan Recording Company (1923–24).

Black Swan turned out to be Still's entrée to the white world of concert music. When the company received a letter from Varèse inquiring about promising black composers who might be interested in avant-garde music, Still signed up to study with Varèse. His compositions *From the Land of Dreams (For Chamber Orchestra and Three Female Voices Treated Instrumentally)* (1924) and *Levee Land ("Humorous Suite")* (1925), performed at Aeolian Hall under the auspices of Varèse's International Composers Guild, brought Still to the (not entirely favorable) notice of music critics and (more important for his career) of conductors like Howard Hanson.

The reception of these pieces led Still to consider what he wanted to achieve as a composer. He didn't want to compose music that audiences didn't know what to make of, as was the case with the first of them. While he had great respect for Varèse, he concluded that "[i]t is not Still but Varèse who speaks in *From the Land of Dreams*. The realization of this fact enabled me to see that it was necessary for me to find an idiom that would be modern but not so much so that it would fail to be recognized at once as Negroid."

When he turned to composing his *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), it was with the intention "to demonstrate how the *Blues*, so often considered a lowly expression, could be elevated to the highest musical level." This symphony, the first by an African-American composer to be performed by a major American orchestra (the Rochester Philharmonic under Howard Hanson in 1931), led to commissions that enabled Still to concentrate on composition.

In 1934, having received a Guggenheim fellowship to compose an opera, Still moved to Los Angeles, where he would live for the rest of his life. *Blue Steel* (1934-35) failed to interest the Met or any other opera house. But his next opera, *Troubled Island* (1937-41), set in Haiti during the slave rebellion of 1791, with a libretto (mostly) by Langston Hughes, was eventually produced in 1949 by the New York City Opera. The work might have been subtitled "Troubled Libretto" for the disagreement between Still and Hughes about its conclusion that contributed to its delayed production and the acrimony between them following its premiere, at which Hughes did not appear with Still to acknowledge enthusiastic applause from the audience.

Most of Still's many compositions (including four symphonies) were composed in Los Angeles, including *Incantation and Dance*, the short chamber work on this program. Written in 1941 for Still's instrument, the oboe, and piano and dedicated to Lloyd and Betty Rathbun, it was premiered in 1942 by Lloyd, an oboist who taught at University of Southern California.

It is difficult to discern anything recognizably "Negroid" in this piece, a musical commitment that Still by this time thought he had sufficiently honored. Increasingly, he became something of an 'odd man out' in American music. As Catherine Parsons Smith observes in *William Grant Still* (2008), p.86:

Still wanted to be thought of as a composer who happened to be African American. That was a luxury he seldom enjoyed. More often, he was seen as a black person who happened to be a composer, and who insisted on composing concert music.

Temporal Variations

Benjamin Britten (1913–76)

Born on St. Cecilia's Day in Lowestoft, Suffolk, Benjamin Britten was introduced to music by his mother, an amateur singer and pianist, who brought other musicians into the house for readings and musical soirées. As a child, he studied piano and viola, and began composing on his own. Composer Frank Bridge (1879–1941) was sufficiently impressed by Britten's unschooled efforts to take him on as a composition student in 1927. Under Bridge's tutelage, which continued while Britten studied at the Royal College of Music (1930–33), his great talent for vocal and instrumental writing was developed. He subsequently became, if not quite the 'the fourth B' (after Bach, Beethoven, Brahms) his mother dreamed he would be, the most celebrated English composer since Henry Purcell.

Finished in December 1936, just a couple of days before its London premiere by Natalie Caine and Adolph Hallis, *Temporal Variations* is the last of three early chamber works by Britten featuring the oboe. {The others: *Phantasy Quartet in f* for oboe and string trio (1932), heard in the 2019 Hop River Chamber Series with Steve Wade playing oboe, and *Two Insect Pieces* for oboe and piano (1935).} When the *Variations* got a lukewarm welcome from the London critics, Britten put his manuscript score aside and went on to other things. The piece was not heard again until 1979, after his death; it was published the next year in an edition by Colin Mathews.

Britten didn't explain the title he affixed to this suite. Perhaps it simply calls attention to sections of varied tempi and metre. However, their names and character suggest an interpretation along the lines of 'Theme and variations reflecting our times.' In 1935–37, Britten composed for the BBC and was certainly troubled by the rise of Hitler and the Spanish Civil war. In "Benjamin Britten's *Temporal Variations*: An Enigma Explored" (*The Double Reed* 42.2), George Caird argues:

The movement titles . . . indicate that the work has a story to tell, beautifully structured into a symmetrical and near-mirror structure. The Theme is followed by three 'sinister' variations that seem to indicate a descent from idea through movement to malign action, balanced by three 'reactive' variations that seem to ascend from parody through anger to a reserved 'resolution'. In the centre of the work the stark and powerful *Commination*, full of fury, is balanced by a peaceful and reflective *Chorale*.

Not a word one hears often, 'Commination' refers to a recital of God's wrath against sinners that forms part of the Anglican liturgy for Ash Wednesday.

For a program in which Britten segues to Brahms, the temptation to note Britten's distaste for the music of Brahms is irresistible: "It's not bad Brahms I mind, it's good Brahms I can't stand." His answer to those who asked why was essentially: I don't care for tomatoes either.

Piano Quartet in A, op. 26

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, where his father made a poor living playing contrabass and other instruments in cafés and similar venues. Wishing something better for his son—an orchestral position—he began instructing him at age 4 in violin, cello, and valveless horn. Johannes, however, wanted to play piano and eventually wore his father down, beginning lessons in 1840. He was fortunate in his piano teachers: the first, having taught Johannes all he knew, prevailed upon a more distinguished teacher to take him on in 1843; he in turn, realizing that Johannes was probably not destined for fame as a virtuoso, encouraged his interest in composition and gave him a thorough grounding in its principles.

In May 1853, Brahms met violinist Joseph Joachim, just two years older but already famous, and played some of his piano compositions for him. Years later Joachim would recall, "Never in the course of my artist's life have I been more completely overwhelmed." Joachim gave Brahms an introduction to composer Robert Schumann and his wife Clara, a piano virtuoso, who were similarly impressed when Brahms presented himself to them in Düsseldorf. Clara wrote in her journal: "Here again is one who comes as if sent from God! He played us sonatas and scherzos of his own, all of them rich in fantasy, depth of feeling, and mastery of form." Robert was more succinct in his diary: "Visit from Brahms (a genius)." But he expanded on this theme in a rhapsodic article "Neue Bahnen" ['New Paths'] published in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (28 Oct 1853), which portrayed Brahms (though not in so many words) as a Messiah who would raise music to new heights, particularly "in the region where the capacity of masses in chorus and orchestra can lend him its powers."

It took Brahms years to free himself from the burden of such expectations. He destroyed works he thought not good enough or labored to recycle them. His *Piano Concerto No. 1 in d* (1858), evolved over five years from an unsatisfactory sonata for two pianos (1854), repurposed first as a symphonic movement and then as a concerto. Brahms' initial reward for all this work was polite applause at its January 1859 premiere in Hanover, and stony silence broken by hissing when he finished playing it in Leipzig later that month. Fortunately, the popular and critical reception in his native city, where Brahms performed it under Joachim's direction to a sold-out house in March, restored a measure of confidence that he hadn't wasted his time. In the 1860s, he turned to chamber music, gaining recognition by composing many of the chamber works for which he is now celebrated.

Brahms composed three piano quartets, the first two finished in 1861: *No. 1*

in g, op. 25, premiered the same year in Hamburg with Clara Schumann, piano, and the one on this program, *No. 2 in A*, premiered in Vienna a year later, with Brahms himself at the piano. The famed (and notorious) Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick heard Brahms play this concert. In his review he observed that the compositions of Brahms “are hardly to be counted among those immediately enlightening and gripping works which carry the listener along with them in their flight,” as Schumann’s “*Neue Bahne*” might well lead one to expect from Brahms. In the quartet in particular, “[t]here is a continual pulling together and taking apart, preparation without objective, promise without fulfillment.”

For a glimpse of what bothered Hanslick, compare the melodic line of the piano at the beginning of Wolfgang Mozart’s *Quartet in g for Klavier and String Trio* (K. 478, 1785):



with that of the corresponding measures of Brahms’ *Piano Quartet in A*:



Mozart gives us a straightforward melodic statement in 4/4 extending over 4 measures. In Brahms we have instead an unsettled 5-bar introduction ascending from C[#] to E by alternating triplet-8th- or 8th-figures starting off-the-beat. As Jan Swafford observes in *Johannes Brahms* (from which most of the other quotations in this note are taken), “A Brahmsian movement is often made of succinct melodic ideas that begin to transform as soon as we hear them, and continue to evolve and recombine throughout, accompanied by the sort of abrupt key changes that used to be confined to the development section.”

Mozart’s *Quartet in g* is usually considered the first piano quartet ever composed. Only by his time had the fortepiano—essentially, a mechanical hammer dulcimer—been developed into an instrument loud enough to hold its own against a string trio. Piano virtuosi always wanted more sound from their instrument, and they got it in the 1830s, as advances in metallurgy permitted replacing iron piano wire with steel wire that could handle far greater tension. By the time Brahms composed his G-minor piano quartet, nearly eighty years after Mozart’s, a piano could easily overwhelm a string trio, a complete reversal of the situation before Mozart. In 1937, Arnold Schönberg would transcribe Brahms’ op. 25 for orchestra, explaining that “It is always very badly played, because the better the pianist, the louder he plays, and you hear nothing from the strings. I wanted once to hear everything, and this I achieved.” (Quoted in LA Phil program notes by John Mangum.)

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July 27, 2023

7:30 P.M.

Antonín Dvořák

Terzetto in C, op. 74

Introduzione: Allegro ma non troppo
Larghetto
Scherzo: Vivace
Tema con variazione

Mary Ellen Briga, violin
Lu Sun Friedman, violin
Arthur Masi, viola

Ingolf Dahl

Concerto a Tre (1947)

Allegretto comodo
Assai moderato, esitando
Presto

Chris Howard, clarinet
Lu Sun Friedman, violin
Jacob Nordlinger, cello

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms

Clarinet Quintet in b, op. 115

Allegro
Adagio
Andantino
Con moto

Chris Howard, clarinet
Lu Sun Friedman, violin
Mary Ellen Briga, violin
Arthur Masi, viola
Jacob Nordlinger, cello

PROGRAM NOTES

Terzetto in C, op. 74

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)

Publication of Antonín Dvořák's *Slavonic dances*, op. 46 (1878), for piano four hands and for orchestra by Franz Simrock in Berlin made the composer famous in his native Bohemia and beyond. The work sold well, and Simrock wasted no time in asking for more of the same. Dvořák initially demurred but finally gave in and produced a second set of six Slavonic dances, op. 72, in 1886. He had just finished orchestrating them when he turned to the work on today's program, written in just a few days early in January 1887.

At the time, a chemistry student who was learning violin had a room in Dvořák's house in Prague. Hearing him practice with his teacher gave Dvořák the idea of composing a trio for two violins and viola that they could all play together. When this work proved too difficult for the student, Dvořák quickly produced an easier piece for the group to play. To Simrock he wrote: "I'm now writing little 'bagatelles,' just think: for 2 violins and viola. I'm enjoying the work as much as if I were writing a big symphony, what do you say to that?" What Simrock said to that was essentially, "I'll take both the original trio and the bagatelles!" The former was published as *Terzetto in C*, op. 74, the latter—arranged for the more popular combination of violin and piano—as *Romantic pieces*, op. 75.

When Dvořák returned the proofs of these works with corrections to Simrock in April 1887, he requested a title page in both Czech and German, in order (he claimed) to facilitate sales to people in his native Bohemia who knew no German. Simrock did not comply, but neither did he give the trio a German title (which would have been "Terzett C-dur," judging from Dvořák's reference to it as "Das Terzett" in a letter to Simrock). In her Preface to the Henle urtext edition, Annette Oppermann notes that use of the Czech language at this time was associated with nationalism stirring in Bohemia and would have alienated German-speaking customers. She suggests that Simrock chose the Italianized "Tercetto" to finesse the problem by removing the piece to sunny Italy.

"Terzetto" is a fancy name for a short trio, usually vocal. When applied—rarely—to instrumental trios, it suggests something a little out of the ordinary. "Terzetto" appears on Beethoven's autograph manuscript for his trio for two oboes and English horn (1795), and Gustav Holst so-titled his trio for flute, oboe, and viola (1925).

Concerto a Tre (1947)

Ingolf Dahl (1912–70)

Born "Walter Ingolf Marcus" in Hamburg, Dahl studied briefly (1930-32) at the Cologne Hochschule für Musik before leaving Germany for Switzerland to seek relief from asthma. He attended classes (some of them in music) at the University of Zürich and worked at the Zürich Opera, helping to prepare its premieres of Alban Berg's *Lulu* in 1937 and Paul Hindemith's *Mathis der*

Mahler in 1938, and rising to the position of assistant conductor. Dissatisfied with his prospects there, which may have been limited by anti-semitism, he emigrated to the United States in 1939 to join the (then) love of his life in Los Angeles. There, as “Ingolf Dahl” (he made it official in 1943), he circulated in the community of expatriate European musicians and composers who took refuge from Naziism in Southern California, and worked as a musical jack-of-all-trades—transcribing Stravinsky’s *Dances concertantes* for two pianos, playing piano for ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, conducting and arranging for Victor Borge, preparing a performing translation of Arnold Schönberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, instructing Benny Goodman in the classical repertoire, training a chorus for Otto Klemperer, etc. From 1945 until his death he was professor of music at USC, where he taught composition, conducting and music history, and conducted the USC Symphony Orchestra in numerous West Coast premieres. Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas remembers him (in Deena & Bernard Rosenberg, *The music makers*) as “an inspiring teacher; over and above the subject matter, he showed his students the practical value of humanism, that is, how to let humanistic concerns infuse your daily existence.”

Concerto a Tre was composed in 1947 and premiered the following year by Benny Goodman (cl), Eudice Shapiro (vn), and Victor Gottlieb (vc). Dahl explains that its “basic thematic idea . . . consists of six notes: E^b B^b B^b C F F. The character of the work is *concertante* and playful but at the same time very strictly organized on the basis of [this] ‘thematic germ.’ These notes are almost ever-present in harmonic and melodic guises too numerous to mention: they are contracted (as at the very end) or expanded (as at the beginning); they are transposed, inverted, telescoped, and also hidden under elaborate melodic designs. It is not the intention of the composer that the manipulations of the ‘thematic germ’ be consciously experienced by the listener. They form the inner-musical mechanism which is a means to an end: the expressive and intellectual musical whole.” (Quoted in Los Angeles Philharmonic program notes by Orrin Howard)

Clarinet Quintet in b, op. 115

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Johannes Brahms composed this quintet, along with the *Trio in a for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano*, op. 114, in the summer of 1891, thirty years after he wrote the A-major piano quartet performed at last week’s HRCM concert. In the intervening interval he had won over the Viennese music critics and concert-goers, who no longer found his music difficult to enjoy, and secured his place as a worthy successor to Schumann and Mendelssohn in a line of composers extending back to Bach.

However, in the summer of 1890, his creative energy at low ebb, Brahms decided to call it quits, explaining to a friend:

I’ve been tormenting myself for a long time with all kinds of things, a symphony, chamber music and other stuff, and nothing

will come of it. Above all I was always used to everything being clear to me. It seems to me that it's not going the way it used to. I'm just not going to do it any more. My whole life I've been a hard worker; now for once I'm going to be good and lazy. (Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms*, p. 566)

Fortunately, his retirement from composition did not last long. The enthusiastic reception of his *String Quintet in G* at its premiere in Vienna in November would surely have reminded him that his hard work was much appreciated. But it was a visit to Meiningen, a small city about halfway between Frankfurt and Leipzig, for an arts festival in March 1891 that provided the inspiration to resume composing. There he heard the clarinet played, as if for the first time, by Richard Mühlfeld of the Meiningen Court Orchestra, in performances of Carl Maria von Weber's *Clarinet Concerto in f* (1811) and Wolfgang Mozart's *Clarinet Quintet in A* (K. 581, 1789).

The two chamber works for clarinet that Brahms composed quickly in the following summer are dedicated to Mühlfeld, but evidently owe their form to Mozart, who composed works for his friend, clarinetist Anton Stadler, employing almost exactly the same instruments (his *Trio in E^b for Clarinet, Viola, and Piano* (K. 498, 1786) calls for a viola instead of a cello). In December 1891 they were premiered in Berlin by Mühlfeld, Joseph Joachim's string quartet, and Brahms himself at the piano for the trio. He must have been gratified by their reception.

Of the quintet, Jan Swafford writes (op. cit. at 573–74):

The music so clearly looks back on lost love But it is also a song to new love. It is Fräulein Klarinette ['Miss Clarinet'] herself that seems to create the sweetness, and the staccato contrasts. The sighing quality of the music is made from nuances unique to the clarinet. When a flurry of notes sweeps up from low to high, it sweeps through the colors of the instrument from the lush low tones to the delicate high ones. The urgent moments are the urgency of the high register when it is loud and piercing. The vertiginous gypsy melismas of the second movement arise from another mood of the instrument, and likewise, the third movement combination of a flowing *andantino* and arhythmical *presto* with sharp-tongued staccatos. The finale's variations are portraits of the clarinet in its nuances of timbre, articulation, and dynamics, ending on a dying series of chords, piercingly lonely.

Notes compiled by S. K. Lehmann



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August 3, 2023

7:30 P.M.

J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr. *String Quartet No. 1 (“Motive”)*

III. Fuga: Maestoso con moto, ma quasi scherzando

Aleksandr Borodin *String Quartet No. 2 in D*

Allegro moderato
Scherzo. Allegro
Nocturne. Andante
Finale. Andante – Vivace

Barbara Vaughan, violin
Mary Ellen Briga, violin
Laurel Thurman, viola
Fran Bard, cello

INTERMISSION

Felix Mendelssohn *String Quartet in D, op. 44, no. 1*

Molto allegro, vivace
Menuetto. Un poco Allegretto
Andante espressivo ma con moto
Presto con brio

Mary Ellen Briga, violin
Barbara Vaughan, violin
Laurel Thurman, viola
Fran Bard, cello

PROGRAM NOTES

Fuga

J. Louis von der Mehden, Jr. (1873–1954)

Material in this note is drawn largely from John Parakilas M.A. thesis, cited above on p.2.

J. (for ‘Jacob’) Louis von der Mehden, Jr. was born in San Francisco, but information about his life before 1906 is sparse. His father was a German immigrant, which may account for Louis, Jr.’s being schooled in music—theory, composition, cello, and piano—at the Royal Conservatory in Leipzig (1892–94) rather than somewhere closer to home. It may have been the only higher education he had. In 1915, he would enroll in a correspondence course offered by the University of Chicago toward a Bachelor of Laws degree (eventually achieved in 1927), the first part of which aimed at high school equivalency.

In 1899, he married Susan E. Bates in Palo Alto. They would have no children, but entries in the joint diaries they kept from at least 1908 (which took the form of letters to one another) testify to a happy marriage. Internet search affords two glimpses of Louis and Susan at this time.

“Society’s Summer Outing” in *The San Francisco Call*, 30 June 1901, notes their arrival at Camp Yosemite in the previous week. Located near Wawona and the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias, this Camp served as headquarters for the U.S. Army unit that administered Yosemite before creation of the National Park Service (1916). Perhaps this visit inspired Louis’ *Two Symphonic Concert Etudes for Piano*: “By the Brooklet” and “In the Forest (Among the Giant Sequoias)”, one of the “Lost Works” listed in Parakilas’ thesis.

Another of them has since turned up at imslp.org: sheet music (1904) of the piano version of *Eldory: Ballet Intermezzo*, from which the photo of Louis with his cello on p.2 is taken. Here we see an entrepreneur in the music business, identified on its cover both as Writer and Music Publisher (at 26 O’Farrell, near Union Square). The back cover displays the first page of four other “Sure winners” for piano and voice, “Words and Music” by Louis, plus a come-on (“Just out and all the rage”) for “Rattletrap,” a march in 6/8.

This phase of their lives came to an abrupt end at 5:12 AM on 18 April 1906 with the magnitude 7.9 earthquake and ensuing fire that destroyed much of San Francisco, including the von der Mehdens’ home. They joined thousands of other people leaving the city, moved to New York, and started over.

Louis worked in NYC until 1918 as cellist, conductor, composer, arranger, and orchestrator, mostly for theatres and the nascent recording industry. His operetta *The Debutante, or the Belle of Vassar* (1908–10) failed to interest a producer; orchestrating piano scores for others proved to be a more reliable source of income. He had better luck selling other compositions, which led to commissions for arrangements from music publishers Carl Fischer and Ricordi.

In summer 1911, Louis and Susan vacationed in Connecticut, bought land in Old Saybrook, and arranged to have a summer house built there. Until 1926, when Susan retired from her position in sales for The Embossing Company, a manufacturer of toys and games, they maintained an apartment in NYC. But after 1918, Louis quit playing cello gigs and conducting in the city and worked at the Old Saybrook house on commissions and his own compositions, revising earlier works and composing new ones in established forms.

The string quartet (ambitiously titled “No. 1”) from which the fugal movement that opens this concert is taken dates from this time. Begun in 1915, taken up again in 1919, reworked and completed in 1921, it is subtitled “Motive” and represents Louis’ attempt to unify the separate movements of a string quartet around a single musical motif.

Such compositions, which included *Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues for Piano* (1920), departed radically from the kind of music he’d been called upon to write in New York, and it is not clear why he wrote them. Curiosity about old forms and what he could do with them? A realization that serving popular taste, as he had in the music business, was unlikely to leave a lasting mark in the world? We don’t know—the diaries he and Susan kept are strangely silent about his motives generally. (He seems never to have done anything with the law degree in which he’d invested so much time and effort.)

Whatever his objectives, he may have concluded that some guidance would be helpful. In August 1922, he applied to Yale University for admission to its Music School and was welcomed with an individualized program of study consisting of auditing music history lectures and submitting compositions to Stanley Smith, Dean of the School, for criticism. The arrangement stimulated a flurry of composition in 1923: *Piano Quartet No. 1* (“Cycle”), *Quintet for Piano and String Quartet*, *Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano*, *Symphony No. 3* (“Yale”), two symphonic poems: *Paul Revere’s Ride* and *Halcyone*.

Unfortunately, Louis’ experience at Yale did not end on a high note. To honor him, Dean Smith announced that the commencement concert would feature *Halcyone*, played by the student orchestra under the composer’s direction. Louis was not enthusiastic: “I did my best to get out of it, but he is the boss and I had to say yes.” The performance went badly: the piece is demanding, and the student orchestra was far less capable than the ensembles of professional musicians he’d conducted in New York. It must have been a humiliating experience, which perhaps explains why Susan’s bequest (p. 2) was not to Yale.

Save for his piano concerto (1924-25) and a violin sonata (1933, now lost), Louis did not compose additional works of the sort he had written for Yale. There was no *String Quartet No. 2*, for example. His last composition, dedicated to Susan, was *Our Golden Wedding March* for voice and piano (1949).

String Quartet No. 2 in D

Aleksandr Borodin (1833–87)

Unlike Louis von der Mehden, Aleksandr Borodin didn’t make his living

from music. He enjoyed a distinguished career as an organic chemist and professor at the St. Petersburg Academy of Medicine. A lover of music from childhood, he is now known—outside the field of organic chemistry, to which he made important contributions—primarily for pieces he composed in his spare time. There was not much of this, given his domestic responsibilities, academic duties, scientific research, and other projects—particularly his efforts to open the field of medicine in Imperial Russia to women. Consequently, he completed only a small number of compositions, of which, however, many are memorably melodic. They include his tone poem *On the Steppes of Central Asia* (1880), this string quartet, and his *Symphony No. 2 in b* (a seven-year project, finished in 1887 shortly before his death).

Born in St. Petersburg, Borodin was the illegitimate son of a Georgian prince, who as usual in such cases had the boy registered as the child of one of his serfs—hence his patronymic, ‘Borodin’, a gift to those who write program notes and would otherwise have to identify him as ‘Aleksandr Gedevanishvili’. This made the boy legally a serf of his biological father and barred him from school. In Aleksandr’s case, these odd conventions had little effect. The prince set his mother up in a house with the wherewithal—including private tutors—to bring the boy up, and in due course formally emancipated him.

As a child, Borodin was beguiled by both music and science. Without much formal instruction, he learned to play flute and piano, and later, violin and cello. He turned his bedroom into a chemistry lab. In 1850, he began studies at St. Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy, concentrating on organic chemistry. His advisor there looked askance at time his brilliant student took from studying chemistry to hear and play music, which he likened to chasing two hares at once. The composers with whom Borodin was later associated would take a similar view of time he devoted to scientific research.

After receiving his degree in 1858, he went to Heidelberg for additional study and research in chemistry. There he met pianist Ekaterina Protopova and heard chamber music by Mendelssohn, perhaps the very work that concludes this program. He would return to Russia in 1862 to assume a professorship in organic chemistry and marry Ekaterina. He is said to have written this quartet (1881) for her to commemorate their meeting in Heidelberg twenty years before. You can hear an echo of Mendelssohn in its Scherzo.

Once back in Russia, Borodin renewed an acquaintance with Modest Mussorgsky, whom he had met during his medical residency. Mussorgsky introduced him to Mily Balakirev, a pianist and composer interested in getting Russian composers to stop looking to Western Europe for musical inspiration and instead turn to Russian folk traditions. Borodin joined in this enterprise, along with composers César Cui and Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, to make up what critic Vladimir Stasov in 1867 dubbed ‘The Mighty Handful’. Borodin received valuable instruction in composition from Balakirev, whose criticism

however often took the form of transforming a composition from Borodin into something he himself would have written. So it took some time for Borodin to apply what he learned from Balakirev in the service of his own voice.

In 1869, Borodin allowed himself to be talked into composing an opera based on a 12th century saga, “The Lay of Igor’s Host,” though he had misgivings about being able to pull it off that turned out to be well-founded. He worked on the opera off and on until his death but never completed it. Only through the heroic efforts of Rimsky-Korsakov and Aleksandr Glazunov was a more-or-less presentable version of *Prince Igor* assembled from Borodin’s papers for an 1890 premiere in St. Petersburg.

String Quartet in D, op. 44, no. 1 Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Born into a wealthy Berlin banking family, Felix Mendelssohn didn’t really need to work for a living, but he nevertheless enjoyed a very successful (albeit sadly brief) career as a pianist, composer, and conductor.

Mendelssohn composed six mature string quartets, the first two of them (which pay homage to Beethoven) before his 21st birthday. His last string quartet—*No. 6 in f*, op. 80—written in anguish over the death of his elder sister Fanny in May 1847, was completed less than two months before his own death six months later. In between are the three quartets of op. 44 (1837–38).

Unfortunately, numbering of Mendelssohn’s works in this genre got off to a bad start—the quartet in E^b , op. 20 (1829) was titled *No. 1*, the earlier quartet in a, op. 18 (1827) became *No. 2*—and didn’t improve with op. 44. Only his last quartet got the number corresponding to its place in order of composition.

In March 1837, Mendelssohn married Cécile Jeanrenaud and, being a bit of a workaholic, started composing his 3rd string quartet (*No. 4 in e*, op. 44, no. 2) during their honeymoon in the Black Forest. He completed the next one, his 4th (*No. 5 in E^b*, op. 44, no. 3), on the day before his son Carl was born in February 1838. The string quartet on this program (*No. 3 in D*, op. 44, no. 1) is his 5th, completed in July 1838. Shortly after, Mendelssohn wrote to violinist Ferdinand David, a good friend and concertmaster of his Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, whose quartet had premiered the two earlier works from this period:

I’ve finished my third quartet in D major and take great pleasure in it; I only hope that you will like it as much as I do. But I’m almost certain that you will, for it seems to me that it is more passionate than the others and more gratifying for the players.

(Tr. by Ernst Herttrich, Preface to the Henle Urtext edition. I’ve altered his literal translation of *dankbarer* as “more grateful” to make better sense of the second sentence.) David’s ensemble premiered this one as well. Here the Scherzo movement so typical of Mendelssohn is replaced by its classical predecessor, the Menuetto, to avoid too much of a good thing, given the work’s Scherzo-like finale.

Notes by S. K. Lehmann

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The Musicians

Cellist **Fran Bard** has played with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for many years. A familiar face to Hop River audiences, she has also performed extensively as a chamber musician. Ms. Bard was responsible for the reinstatement of the Elementary String Program in the Windsor Public Schools in 1996, and in 2003 was named conductor of the Windsor High School String Orchestra. In 2012, she retired from the Windsor school system and now teaches Elementary Strings and Orchestra in the Glastonbury Public Schools. Originally from Chicago, Ms. Bard received her B.Mus. from the Chicago Musical College and her M.M. and Music Educator's Certification from The University of Connecticut. Her cello training was under the tutelage of Channing Robbins, Aldo Parisot, Raya Garbousova, Karl Fruh, and Mary Lou Rylands.

Violinist **Mary Ellen Briga** received her B.Mus. from Bowling Green State University and her M.M. in violin performance from The University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music. She freelances as a chamber and symphonic violinist and performs with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and the New Haven Symphony.

Pianist **Gary Chapman** has performed in many American & European venues. His keyboard experience ranges from touring as accompanist with both soprano Dawn Upshaw and baritone Richard Lalli to playing works of Pierre Boulez under the composer's supervision and performing on synthesizer for national Broadway touring productions. With Lalli, Mr. Chapman recorded his own arrangements of popular songs for the companion CD to Allen Forte's *Listening to Classic American Popular Songs* (Yale, 2001). His orchestral arrangements of Gershwin songs were featured in *Pardon My English: A Portrait of the Gershwins*, performed in 2007 by Orchestra New England with Mr. Chapman as soloist. He is a founding member of Elite Syncopation, which performs ragtime and early jazz; a member of Mirror Visions, a group devoted to commissioning and performing new vocal works; and co-director of Norwich's summer chamber-music series, Sundays in the Parlor at Park. Mr. Chapman has recently recorded new works by Tom Cipullo and Christopher Berg for Centaur and transcribed recordings made by Ives in the 1930s and 40s for the Charles Ives Society. He studied composition with Arnold Franchetti and piano with Paul Jacobs, Nadia Boulanger, and Virginia-Gene Rittenhouse.

Violinist **Lu Sun Friedman** began violin studies at age seven in Beijing, China, and traveled alone to the United States at the age of twelve. She received a full scholarship to study at the Crowden School in Berkeley, California. At the age of fourteen she performed for Aaron Copland and made her solo debut with the San Francisco Symphony at age seventeen. As a chamber musician, she has performed with members of the Tokyo String Quartet. In recent years she was a member of the orchestra at the Opera House in Valen-

cia, Spain, under the direction of Lorin Maazel. She earned her Bachelor of Music from Indiana University and has studied with the Tokyo String Quartet and the Cleveland Quartet. She currently plays with the Hartford Symphony, Springfield Symphony, and Sarasota Opera Orchestra.

Christopher Howard performs regularly as an orchestral and chamber clarinetist across New England and is Instructor of Clarinet at Eastern Connecticut State University. He performs frequently with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and periodically with the Vermont and Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestras. Chris spent 20 years as a clarinetist with service bands in the United States Navy and Coast Guard, performing in more than 30 states, Canada, Japan and Taiwan, often as a concerto soloist. As a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Clarinet Quartet, Chris performed concerts at Carnegie Hall's esteemed Weill Recital Hall and appeared regularly in International Clarinet Association annual conventions. He has served as principal clarinetist of the Bremerton Symphony Orchestra in Bremerton (WA) and second and solo E-flat clarinetist with the Tallahassee Symphony in Tallahassee (FL). Chris is the owner and operator of Howard Woodwind Company, a specialty clarinet workshop based in Glastonbury. He apprenticed as a clarinet technician with Pete Rodriguez in San Antonio (TX) and has studied woodwind instrument repair with Kristin Bertrand and Mark Jacobi. He holds degrees in clarinet from The University of Texas and Florida State University, and lives in Glastonbury with his wife, Kacey, his two children, a cranky cat, and a hyperactive dog.

Originally from Des Moines, Iowa, cellist **Tom Hudson** is a busy performer and teacher in the Connecticut area. He earned his Bachelor's degree from Drake University and his Master's degree from the Juilliard School. Tom has studied with William Pleeth in London and spent many summers at the Aspen Music School. He has performed with the Spoleto Festival, the Jacksonville Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic, and currently plays in the Hartford and New Haven Symphonies.

Violist **Arthur Masi**'s love of music and pathway to a musical career began with an old upright piano that sat in the basement of his childhood home. His father used to peck out popular songs from the 1940s and 1950s on the piano and would try to teach them to his children. Arthur's skill with the piano soon surpassed his siblings' — and his dad's — and formal lessons began in the fourth grade and continued through high school. Sensing a musical talent, his middle school orchestra director suggested Arthur pursue the viola along with the piano, and a budding violist was born. Arthur attended the Manhattan School of Music as a piano major, leaving after one year to begin serious viola study under the tutelage of the late Rosemary Glyde. He graduated from the Hartt School of Music with a bachelor's degree in viola as a student of renowned chamber musician Scott Nickrenz. He participated in the Chautauqua Institution Music Festival for several years and the Yellow Barn Music Festival in

Putney, VT. Arthur has been a member of the viola section of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra since 1980 and continues to enjoy playing in various local orchestras and ensembles. He resides in West Hartford with his spouse.

Cellist **Jacob Nordlinger** is an active performer and teacher currently based in New York City. He has a passion for chamber music collaborations and won first prize in the Ruth Widder String Quartet Competition at Manhattan School of Music. He also is a past winner of the Yonkers Philharmonic Concerto Competition, Wagner College Young Artist Competition as well as the Fuchs Chamber Music Competition. Jacob has performed throughout New York in venues such as Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Symphony Space, The National Arts Club as well as the United Nations. He completed his Bachelor's degree in 2015, also at Manhattan School of Music, studying with David Geber where he received the Hugo Kortschak Award for Outstanding Achievement in Chamber Music upon graduation. In February 2017, Jacob joined the faculty of the VerArte String Academy in Arequipa, Peru, and is currently pursuing his Doctor of Music Arts degree under the tutelage of Sophie Shao at The University of Connecticut.

Violinist **Leonid Sigal** is Concertmaster of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra (HSO). Born in Moscow, he began violin studies at the age 5, and was accepted by the renowned Gnessin Academy of Music. He went on to study with Maya Glezarova at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory, from which he graduated with excellence. Winner of several violin competitions and recipient of the 1993 Meadows Artistic Scholarship Award, he moved to the United States, where he studied with Erick Friedman and had master classes with Isaac Stern and Pinchas Zukerman. In 1995, he was invited by Michael Tilson Thomas to accept a prestigious fellowship at the New World Symphony, where he was one of the principals and was also coached as conductor. Appointed HSO Concertmaster in 2005, Mr. Sigal regularly performs as soloist with the orchestra, most recently playing Saint-Saëns' *Violin Concerto No. 3* early in spring 2023. In 2011, he premiered and later recorded Stephen Michael Gryc's *Harmonia Mundi: Concerto for Violin & Orchestra*, commissioned for him by the HSO. Since August 2012, at the invitation of Music Director Gerard Schwarz, he has been part of the Emmy Award-winning and nationally syndicated program All-Star Orchestra alongside fellow concertmasters and principals from major American orchestras. A passionate chamber musician, he is Artistic Director of the HSO's Sunday Serenades chamber music series at the Wadsworth Atheneum, which he inaugurated in 2007.

Violist **Laurel Thurman** received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the University of Memphis, and was awarded a Doctor of Musical Arts in violin performance from the University of Arizona. Her research in string pedagogy has taken her to England and Japan, where she studied with Sheila Nelson and Shinichi Suzuki. Ms. Thurman has taught strings and pedagogy in

public schools in Arizona and Connecticut, and at Northern Illinois University and the University of Connecticut. Active as a chamber and orchestral musician, Ms. Thurman has been a member of the Hartford, Memphis, Tucson, and Rockford (Illinois) Symphony Orchestras, the Ravinia Festival Orchestra in Chicago, and most recently the Connecticut Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra.

Violinist **Barbara Vaughan** received her B.Mus. degree from the Manhattan School of Music and her M.M. from UConn. She has performed with numerous orchestras throughout the eastern United States, including the Savannah Symphony, Augusta Symphony, the Florida Festival Orchestra, the American Philharmonic Orchestra, Newport Jazz Festival, Summer Music at Harkness Park and the New Haven Symphony Orchestra. As a chamber musician, Ms. Vaughan was a regular member of the UCONN Chamber Players from 1984 to 1991, and she has performed annually with Hop River Chamber Music since 1986. She recently retired from the Mansfield Public Schools, where she directed the Suzuki string program. She still plays regularly with the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, and teaches violin and viola at her home studio.

Oboist **Stephen Wade** received his bachelor's degree from the University of Lowell College of Music and his master's degree from the New England Conservatory. Having retired in 2012 as Principal Oboe of the U.S. Coast Guard Band after a 30-year career, he is now Assistant Principal Oboe of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra and an adjunct faculty member at Westfield State University (MA). Mr. Wade has performed with many other New England ensembles, including Connecticut Opera Orchestra, Symphony Pro Musica, Monadnock Music Festival Orchestra, Nashua Symphony Orchestra, Boston Virtuosi, Cape Ann Symphony, Orchestra New England and Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra. He has been the featured soloist in concerti by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Vaughan Williams, Barber & Bolcom. Mr. Wade premiered Thomas Briggs' Concerto for Oboe and Wind Ensemble in 2011 with the Coast Guard Band, improvising large areas of the solo part, and has recorded Bach's Concerto for Oboe, Violin & Strings, BWV 1060R, with violinist Katheryn Winterstein and the Boston Virtuosi.

Michael Wheeler, now Principal Viola of the Hartford Symphony Orchestra, studied at Indiana University, Juilliard, and the New England Conservatory. He began his professional career in the New World Symphony under the leadership of Michael Tilson Thomas. Prior to joining the HSO he was a member of the San Antonio Symphony. He has performed recently as the Acting Principal Viola to the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra (New London) and also with the Goodspeed Opera House. He enjoys teaching at the Hartt School Community Division and at Miss Porter's School.



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