

# About the Music.

T.S. Eliot believed that “April is the cruellest month” because of the chaotic awakening of spring after a long, sleepy winter. For classical musicians, whose off-season is the summer, that time of year is autumn. As the world lumbers into cool temperatures and warm oranges and reds, the musician’s schedule picks up at a dramatic clip.

So when Artistic Director Marcy Rosen invites eight up-and-coming musicians, as well as two established mentors, to spend a week at Caramoor to perform the two Evnin Rising Stars concerts, it’s a welcome and special opportunity. “It’s like a retreat where we get to work in depth on this incredible music for a week,” she said.

The invited performers concur. “I’m in an orchestra now, and it’s a nice way to get away and forget about everything and make real music,” said violinist Cherry Choi Tung Yeung, one of the early-career musicians who is returning this year.

“It’s sort of this festival vibe,” added pianist Evren Ozel, another returnee, “but it’s not during the summer, and it’s not three months long.”

To join the eight early-career musicians, Rosen has invited violinist Ani Kavafian, a longtime performer with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Rebecca Albers, principal violist of the Minnesota Orchestra. Each mentor takes the lead on two works, guiding rehearsals to get everything performance-ready in just a week’s time.

The three works on this afternoon’s concert also resonate with the theme of retreat. Whether in the form of a literal retreat to a secluded Spanish hamlet or a metaphorical retreat into the private sphere, all three composers found in chamber music the opportunity to develop their own authentic compositional voice.

Born in Italy, **Luigi Boccherini** spent half his life working in Spain, having secured a formal position — and title — in the court of Infante Luis Antonio Jaime of Bourbon, brother of King Carlos III. Following royal machinations in which King Carlos attempted to block his inheritance, Don Luis moved his court to the hamlet of Arenas de San Pedro. Like any loyal courtier of the time would, Boccherini relocated and lived the rest of his life in Arenas, even after Don Luis died.

Often compared to Haydn, who liberated himself from his court position to find success in the public concert scene in London, Boccherini has been viewed as a marginal figure who worked in seclusion. However, he developed a deeply original style that was widely admired and demonstrates broader diversity than eighteenth-century Classicism beyond the central Viennese cannon. His music often eschews melody in favor of intentional ambiguity that plays at the edges of sensibility, and frequently follows its own narrative rather than remaining beholden to the strict formal conventions of repeating themes and phrases. Moreover, in comparison to

Haydn, who increasingly adjusted his style toward wit, charm, and humor to find commercial success among the masses, Boccherini remained free to express darker emotions and ideas because his position and livelihood at court were fundamentally secure. He had little concerns for the whims of a fickle public.

His **Quintet in D Minor, Op. 13, No. 4, G. 280**, from 1772 is a case in point. “It’s got mixed emotions. It is a little stormy and has some anxiety in it,” Rosen said of the piece. The fact that it is in a minor key some ten years after the heyday of the *Sturm und Drang* (“storm and stress”) period of the central European composers shows Boccherini’s indifference to trends. The orchestration of his quintets featuring two cellos was a specific (even if mostly practical) formulation for him and the musicians on staff.

The first movement opens mysteriously, and only upon the recapitulation does the ambiguity take on a feeling of cogency in the larger context. The second movement features soloistic lines and a very high cello part that is at once both haunting and sentimental. While eighteenth-century convention would dictate concluding with a lighter, optimistic sonata movement, Boccherini instead chose a fugue, a style that was then considered at best erudite and cerebral and at worst archaic and conservative.

Ultimately, for Boccherini, chamber music and the larger court

environment of his employment offered him a retreat from serving cosmopolitan whims in favor of writing music that was truly individual.

The foremost Argentinian composer of the twentieth century, **Alberto Ginastera** had a unique talent for winning over major institutions of the global art-music scene, in both the more niche avant-garde world and the larger classical milieu. He held major teaching positions at schools in Argentina. He won a Guggenheim award that allowed him to visit Juilliard, Eastman, and Yale, and he took Aaron Copland’s composition course at Tanglewood. He participated in the Music Council of UNESCO and founded Argentina’s chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). He composed in a range of genres, both large-scale public works such as symphonies, concertos, and film scores, and also smaller chamber pieces.

Ginastera himself identified three style periods for his music, which he called Objective Nationalism, Subjective Nationalism, and Neo-expressionism. The first focused on mainly tonal and accessible music with references to the Argentinian landscape, especially the Pampas region and its *gaucho* (“cowboy”) culture, and he found success in large public genres. Starting in 1947 he turned inward looking for a more personal — or as he called it, “subjective” — interpolation of his heritage by abstracting various

Argentinian cultural symbols and folk elements and integrating them into the more experimental and avant-garde. His **String Quartet No. 1, Op. 20**, of 1948 initiated a turning point in his style toward Subjective Nationalism, and ultimately cemented his status among the global avant-garde.

Across the four movements of the quartet, Ginastera takes the audience on a sprawling journey. “Ginastera used words like anxiety-ridden, lyrical, contemplative, mysterious, nocturnal, and surrealistic,” Rosen explained. “Those are his words describing the quartet, and that’s an amazing range of emotion and atmosphere that he’s giving us.” Within this evocative tapestry, he uses a variety of Argentinian symbols and folk elements, although they are always absorbed into his larger artistic ambitions.

For example, Ginastera recognized the crucial role of the guitar in the *gaucho* imagery. Rather than make literal references to the guitar-like strumming, Ginastera developed his “guitar chord” based on the open tuning of the guitar’s strings (E, A, D, G, B, E’), which provides a foundational harmony for the work. He also often evoked the malambo, a competitive gaucho dance known for stomping and elaborate footwork, but integrated this into a Scherzo in the second movement. In the Finale, he abstracts the 6/8 malambo rhythms into increasingly complex and irregular rhythms for a rousing conclusion.

Like Béla Bartók, the elder statesman of the previous generation, Ginastera’s work always feels thoroughly contemporary, modern, and relevant despite his reliance on tradition, folk idioms, and national symbols. Venturing away from larger public genres to something more intimate and free with his First String Quartet, he was able to his shift away from his more obvious Objective Nationalism to a more subtle Subjective language.

**Johannes Brahms** was only twenty in 1853 when Robert Schumann declared him the “chosen one” of music, “like Minerva, springing fully formed from the head of Cronus.” For the next twenty years, the weight of such great expectations left Brahms mired in self-doubt. His performing career as a pianist and conductor more than lived up to Schumann’s gush; yet as a composer, he shied away from showy public genres like concertos and symphonies, premiering only three orchestral works before the 1870s.

Instead, he focused his creative energy on chamber music, which always carried with it connotations of privacy and intimacy between audiences and performers (even though it was increasingly being programmed on public concert stages by the middle of the nineteenth century). The seven chamber works Brahms composed between 1859 and 1865, including his 1861 **Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 26**, encapsulate what music theorist Donald Tovey termed Brahms’s “first maturity,” wherein he fully absorbed and integrated

influences of Schubert and Beethoven while creating a wholly original style.

Chamber music may have provided a retreat for Brahms to create music with less fear of criticism, but it was hardly able to hide his light under a bushel. The two piano quartets from this period show the breadth of his experimentation as he pushed beyond the confines of small-scale works. They're both monumental in scale, but his second is the largest of all (including in comparison with his third, from 1875). Despite the scope of the work, Brahms's economical style of composition holds it all together, as each phrase or musical idea is organically related to the other at the cellular, motivic level and at a macro, formal level.

The inauspicious opening of the first movement, for example, becomes a kind of refrain marking major formal areas, which are easily audible. Less easily heard (though easily seen in the score) is the way in which this opening also provides the germinal seeds from which the subsequent musical ideas of the movement develop. As the work continues in the remaining three movements, it seems to push beyond the confines of a small chamber work, sounding more and more orchestral.

The slow second movement features evocative effects as the piano's arpeggiation against the string ensemble creates changing colors. In the Scherzo, a lyrical triple-meter melody at the beginning establishes a lighter mood, only to grow increasingly impassioned until

arriving at a dramatic Trio with pounding staccato eighth notes.

For the Finale, Brahms evokes a peasant dance with a stamping accompaniment focusing on beats three and four at the beginning. As it progresses, Brahms expands the range of the ensemble, reaching the highest registers for a triumphant conclusion.

For all its breadth and depth, Brahms's tight compositional construction and variety of styles never gets dull. As Rosen says, "What can you say about Brahms, except 'It's wonderful'?" You really get to be absorbed for forty-five minutes of fantastic music." Indeed, that very feeling of absorption into the music is perhaps Brahms's greatest achievement — retreating into the private and intimate world of chamber music allowed him to keep his pesky inner critic at bay and become fully present in his compositional powers.

— Eric Lubarsky

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