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PROGRAM NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and Strings, K. 581

While Mozart reportedly did not care for the sound of the flute, he felt a special fondness for the clarinet. He first heard the newly invented instrument at the age of seven while on a visit to Mannheim, and his fascination with the clarinet’s mellow sonority and wide range stayed with him throughout his life. Mozart was one of the first composers to use the clarinet in a symphony, and the instrument figures prominently in such important late works as his Symphony No. 39 (1788) and the operas *Così fan tutte* (1790) and *La Clemenza di Tito* (1791).

Part of Mozart’s fascination with the clarinet late in life resulted from his friendship with the Austrian clarinet virtuoso Anton Stadler (1753–1812), one of the composer’s fellow Freemasons in Vienna. It was for Stadler that Mozart wrote his three great works featuring the clarinet: the Trio, K. 498, the Quintet, K. 581, and the Concerto, K. 622. Stadler played the basset horn, a clarinet-like instrument of his own invention, which could play four pitches lower than the standard clarinet of Mozart’s day.This unfortunately resulted in a number of corrupt editions of Mozart’s works for Stadler, as editors rewrote them to suit the range of the standard clarinet. Subsequent modifications have given the A clarinet those four low pitches, and today we hear these works at the pitches Mozart originally intended.

Mozart wrote the Clarinet Quintet during the summer of 1789, just before he began work on *Così fan tutte*, finishing the score on September 29; the quintet had its first performance in Vienna the following December 22, with Stadler as soloist and Mozart a member of the quartet. Simple verbal description cannot begin to suggest the glories of the quintet—this is truly sovereign music, full of the complete technical mastery of Mozart’s final years and rich with the emotional depth that marks the music from that period. The strings have the first theme of the Allegro, and the clarinet soon enters to embellish this noble opening statement. The second subject, presented by the first violin, flows with a long-breathed lyricism, and the movement develops in sonata form.

The Larghetto belongs very much to the clarinet, which weaves a long cantilena above the accompanying strings; new material arrives in the first violin, and the development section is Mozart at his finest. Particularly impressive here is the careful attention to sonority, with the silky sound of muted strings set against the warm murmur of the clarinet. The Menuetto is unusual in that it has two trio sections: the minor-key first is entirely for strings, while in the second the clarinet evokes the atmosphere of the Austrian countryside with a *ländler*-like dance. In place of the expected rondo-finale Mozart offers a variation movement based on the violins’

opening duet. The five variations are sharply differentiated: several feature athletic parts for the clarinet, the fourth is a soaring episode for viola over rich accompaniment from the other voices, and the fifth is an expressive Adagio. The Clarinet Quintet concludes with a jaunty coda derived from the first half of the original theme.
—*Eric Bromberger*

BEDŘICH SMETANA (1824–1884)
String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, “From My Life”

By the autumn of 1876 when he penned “From My Life,” Smetana was totally deaf and could work no more than an hour at a time, due to a loud high-pitched sound in his ears.Around the time of his second quartet in 1883, he suffered a complete mental breakdown, a condition that echoes in the mood of that piece. In April 1884, he was admitted to a mental hospital in Prague and died a few weeks later on May 12, 1884, leaving behind a corpus of musical works still largely unknown outside his homeland.

About his Quartet no. 1, Smetana wrote, “It stands apart form the hitherto accepted quartet style. I had no intention of writing a quartet according to recipe; with me, the form of each composition is the outcome of the subject.And thus it is that this quartet has made its own form; I wanted to paint in sounds the course of my life.”

Although “From My Life” is more formally conventional than this pronouncement would suggest, the Prague chamber music society rejected it as impossible to play.This was a particular blow to a man who had just resigned himself to lifelong deafness, even though he had numerous major works yet to compose.

Tragedy is foreshadowed in the opening viola passage, described by Smetana as the “call of fate.” The restless accompaniment may refer to the 1848 revolution that had so profound an effect on the then-young composer.The second subject in this sonata-form Allegro vivo appassionato portrays Smetana’s romantic attitudes toward life, music, and love and conveys his striving for still-unformed goals. The years he spent in Prague composing dances for the parties held by his aristocratic friends are depicted in the second movement, Allegro moderato à la polka.A lover of travel and a skilled dancer himself, Smetana poured considerable joy into this picture of some of his happiest memories.

The slow movement, Largo sostenuto, is a tender tribute to Kateřina Kolářová, his first wife, who died prematurely of tuberculosis in 1859, the tenth year of their marriage.The finale features two lively themes contrasting with a quieter but still happy third. Here, Smetana celebrates his musical successes and the realizations of his mission as a Czech national composer.The tragedy presaged in the first movement becomes manifest in the coda of the finale when a high-

pitched E intrudes over agitated accompaniment. This was Smetana’s translation into musical terms of the ringing in his ears that marked his deafness. Brief reprises of the themes from the first two movements, resignation to fate, and a ray of hope all fade away in the concluding pizzicato chords.

—*Jay Weitz*

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898–1937)
Porgy and Bess Concert Suite for clarinet and strings
arr. Franck Villard

Porgy and Bess was written to a libretto by Ira Gershwin and Edwin DuBose Heyward, based on DuBose Heyward’s novel *Porgy* (1925), which the author and his wife, Dorothy, had already adapted into a play in 1927 and which depicts the lives led by African Americans in the fictitious neighborhood of Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, in the early 1920s. The premiere took place in Boston on September 30, 1935, although it was only in the 1980s that the work was recognized as a legitimate opera. Today it stands as a classic of the American repertoire.

Porgy and Bess tells the story of Porgy, a crippled beggar living in Charleston’s slum district, who tries to rescue Bess from the clutches of her violent lover, Crown, and save her from the advances of Sportin’ Life, a dope peddler. The Concert Suite for clarinet and strings comprises five movements. It conveys the opera’s main themes and follows the same chronology.

The first movement presents three episodes from Act I, Scene 1. First is the opening, as the curtain rises on Catfish Row one summer’s evening: Jasbo Brown is improvising on a honky-tonk piano, then Clara sings a lullaby to her baby (“Summertime”) while the men prepare for a craps game. Clara’s husband, Jake, also tries to lull the baby (with “A Woman Is a Sometime Thing”), but his singing has little effect.

The second movement brings together various passages from the second scene of Act I. The following night, the family and friends of Serena’s husband, Robbins, killed by Crown during a fight over the craps game, gather and sing a spiritual: “Where Is Brudder Robbins? – Gone, Gone, Gone. . .” A saucer is placed on the dead man’s chest to collect money for his burial:“Overflow.” Then Serena gives way to her grief in “My Man’s Gone Now.”

Movement three corresponds to Act II, Scene 1. In Catfish Row a month later, Jake and the other fishermen are preparing to leave on a long and risky fishing trip:“It Take a Long Pull to Get There.” Clara asks Jake not to go and to come with her to a picnic instead, but he tells her they are in desperate need of the money. This pushes Porgy to sing about his outlook on life in “I Got Plenty o’ Nuttin’!” Sportin’ Life asks Bess to go with him and start a new life in New York, but she refuses. Bess and Porgy are left alone and admit their love for one another in “Bess, You Is My Woman Now.”

Movement four reflects Act II, Scene 2. On Kittiwah Island later the same day, the picnic is in full swing. The chorus sings “I Ain’t Got No Shame.” Sportin’ Life then expresses his cynical take on the Bible in “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” leading Serena to chastise him. Crown arrives to talk to Bess and reminds her that her relationship with Porgy is only “temporary.” Bess wants to leave Crown for good (“What You Want wid Bess?”), but Crown persuades her to go with him.

A cadenza for the solo clarinet featuring several motifs from the opera acts as a transition to the final movement, which covers firstly the introduction to Act II, Scene 3, “Honey, Dat’s All de Breakfast I Got Time For,” then an instrumental section from Act III, Scene 3, opening into “Sleepy Negro,” and finally Porgy’s theme, heard for the first time here: Porgy returns to Catfish Row with plenty of money, having won a craps game in jail with loaded dice. He brings presents for his friends and cannot understand why they all seem so unhappy. He sees Serena with Clara’s baby, for which Bess was caring after her friend’s death, and asks where she is:“Oh, Bess, Oh Where’s My Bess?” He discovers she has left for New York with Sportin’ Life:“Where Bess Gone? – Noo York.” Porgy throws down his crutches and sets off in search of her:“Oh, Lawd, I’m on My Way.”

I have taken great pains in my transcription to stay as close as possible to Gershwin’s original harmonies, melodies, and orchestral colors. I chose the passages based on their suitability for adaptation to this particular instrumental ensemble (solo clarinet and string orchestra), and brought them together in this purely instrumental format, which I hope listeners will find convincing. I wanted to achieve as much variety as possible in the string writing, creating different textures by using *divisi*, solo sections, and so on. The clarinet part, meanwhile, comes from a free combination of the opera’s vocal lines and elements of its instrumental parts.
—*Franck Villard*
(translated by Susannah Howe)

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn on September 26, 1898. His older brother, Ira, was to become his principal lyricist. George showed an early interest in music; his tastes ranged from classical music to popular songs, especially the rhythms of black American music. He left high school at the age of 15 to become a “song plugger” and later a vaudeville accompanist and rehearsal pianist. His songs brought him to the attention of publisher Max Dreyfus, who hired him as part of his team of composers.

In 1919 George’s first full score, *La, La, Lucille*, opened on Broadway. His first big hit song was “Swanee” (1919), which was taken up by Al Jolson for his touring revue. Gershwin was then commissioned to write the music for five of the annual *George White’s Scandals*. Gershwin’s 1922 *Scandals* music included a 20-minute jazz opera, *Blue Monday*, which was cut after opening night

but caught the ear of bandleader Paul Whiteman, who encouraged Gershwin to write a piece in classical structure but jazz style. The result was *Rhapsody in Blue*, first performed in February 1924, with Whiteman on the podium and Gershwin at the piano.

From 1924 onwards the Gershwins created hit show after hit show. George followed up the success of *Rhapsody in Blue* with the *Concerto in F* (1925), *An American in Paris* (1928), and the *Second Rhapsody* (1930). In 1935, his opera *Porgy and Bess* premiered in Boston. A year later, the brothers turned to Hollywood, where some of their works had already been filmed. While composing for the film *The Goldwyn Follies*, George began to suffer from the symptoms of a brain tumor: He died on July 11, 1937, in Beverly Hills, California.

GUEST ARTISTS

Marji Danilow, double bass

Active as a chamber artist, orchestral musician, and period-instrument player, Marji Danilow is widely acclaimed for her musical versatility. Now in her 20th season with the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Danilow has also performed with the La Jolla SummerFest, Bargemusic, Smithsonian Chamber Players, and Santa Fe’s Pro Musica Bach Festival, to name a few. Danilow has toured, performed, and recorded with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra since 1984.

As a period-instrument player, Danilow has been featured in numerous recordings on Sony Classical with Anner Bylisma and L’Archibudelli, including Schubert’s *Trout* Quintet and Octet, and Dvorak’s Quintet. As an orchestral musician, Danilow performs regularly with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and is associate principal bass of the New York City Ballet Orchestra. She joined the double bass faculty at the Mannes School of Music in 2001. Danilow’s instruments include a Paolo Maggini (c. 1620) and a Carlo Guiseppe Testore (c. 1692).

Michel Lethiec, clarinet

The French clarinetist Michel Lethiec holds a leading position in his field. In addition to his numerous concert and festival performances worldwide, as a soloist with major orchestras and as a chamber musician, he is also devoted to teaching and participates actively in research and promotion of clarinet repertoire. As well as classical works for clarinet, he has played pieces and concertos, including premieres, by composers such as Penderecki, Corigliano, Denisov, Maratka, Ballif, Landowski, Narita, Brotons, Dalbavie, and others. His recordings include about 30 CDs, including a notable recording for Naxos of chamber music by Penderecki (Naxos 8.557052). He teaches at the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique and at the Nice Conservatoire and participates regularly in international competitions (Geneva, Leipzig, Prague, Munich, Crusell, and Seville) as a jury member. He is the

artistic director of the prestigious Festival Pablo Casals in Prades. North American Artist Representative: Joanne Rile Artists Management, www.rile.com

Franck Villard, arranger

Born in France in 1966, Franck Villard studied in Paris at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique. He has conducted numerous operas at venues across France as well as the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille, the Orchestre de Bretagne, and the Orchestre des Pays de Savoie, among many others. He has also worked as chorus master at the Zurich Opera alongside Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Michel Plasson, becoming the latter’s assistant conductor in Toulouse. He has continued to work closely with Plasson, acting as his assistant at the Opéra National du Rhin, the Wiener Konzerthaus, Palermo’s Teatro Massimo, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the Athens Megaron, among others. Villard is the composer of *Neuf Répons des Ténébres du Jeudi Saint* for a cappella chorus; *Quasi una Fantasia* for organ (premiere in Paris in 2008); the dramatic monologue *Ariadne Theseo*; and the *conte lyrique L’Enfant et la Nuit*.

ABOUT THE SHANGHAI QUARTET

Renowned for its passionate musicality and impressive technique, the Shanghai Quartet has become one of the world’s foremost chamber ensembles. Its elegant style melds the delicacy of Eastern music with the emotional breadth of Western repertoire, allowing it to traverse musical genres from masterpieces of Western music to cutting-edge contemporary works.

Formed at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1983, the Shanghai Quartet has worked with the world’s most distinguished artists and regularly tours the major music centers of Europe, North America, and Asia, from the Beijing International Music Festival to Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center. Among innumerable collaborations with noted artists, they have performed with the Tokyo, Juilliard, and Guarneri Quartets, Yo-Yo Ma, Lynn Harrell, and Peter Serkin.

The Quartet has a long history of championing new music and has premiered works by such composers as Krzysztof Penderecki, Chen Yi, Bright Sheng, and Zhou Long. Their extensive discography includes more than 25 recordings, the most recent of which are the complete Beethoven String Quartets on Camerata.

The Shanghai Quartet currently serves as Quartet-in-Residence at Montclair State University and Ensemble-in-Residence with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. They are visiting guest professors at the Shanghai Conservatory and the Central Conservatory in Beijing.

Music

Music

Music

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Marji Danilow, double bass

PROGRAM

Quintet in A Major for Clarinet and Strings K. 581 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
 Allegro
 Larghetto
 Menuetto
 Allegretto con variazioni

String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life" Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884)
 Allegro vivo appassionato
 Allegro moderato à la polka
 Largo sostenuto
 Vivace

~~Intermission~~

Porgy and Bess Concert Suite for clarinet and strings George Gershwin (1898-1937)
 arr. Franck Villard

Since 2002 the Shanghai Quartet has been "Quartet-in-Residence" at Montclair State University. The Shanghai Quartet proudly coaches chamber music, teaches individual lessons, and acts as coordinator of the strings department of the John J. Cali School of Music.

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted inside the theater.

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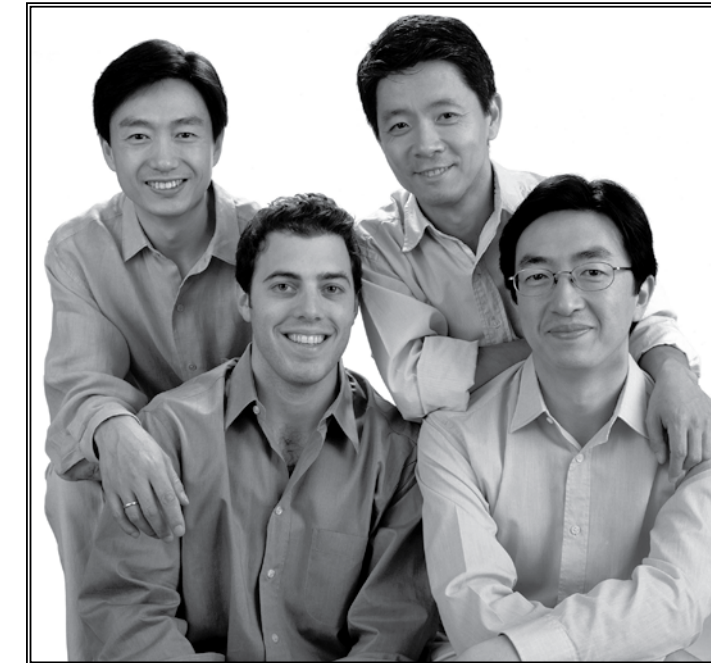
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Peak Performances

SEASON
11/12



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Shanghai Quartet
with Michel Lethiec, clarinet
Marji Danilow, double bass
December 17, 2011 • 8:00pm
Alexander Kasser Theater
Montclair State University