

SKRIDE PIANO QUARTET

BAIBA SKRIDE, violin

LISE BERTHAUD, viola

HARRIETT KRIJGH, cello

LAUMA SKRIDE, piano

FRANK BRIDGE

(1879-1941)

Phantasy for Piano Quartet, H. 94

One movement in three sections

Andante con moto

Allegro vivace

Andante con moto

DORA PEJAČEVIĆ

(1885-1923)

Piano Quartet in D Minor, Op. 25

Allegro – Poco meno Allegro – Tempo I

Adagio

Minuetto. Allegretto.

Rondo. Allegro.

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833-1897)

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 26

Allegro non troppo

Poco adagio

Scherzo. Poco allegro – Trio.

Finale. Allegro.

SKRIDE PIANO QUARTET

Photo: Marco Borrogiève



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cello

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piano

Since its formation in 2016, the Skride Piano Quartet has enjoyed success on three continents with regular performances throughout Europe, North America, and Australia. The Quartet brings together four soloists – sisters Baiba and Lauma Skride, Lise Berthaud, and Harriett Krijgh – who all share both a musical kinship and close friendships that go back decades. Recent highlights include performances at the Concertgebouw, Wigmore Hall, the Louvre, Melbourne Recital Centre, Library of Congress, and the Tanglewood Music Festival.

Violinist **Baiba Skride**'s natural approach to her music-making has endeared her to some of today's most important conductors and orchestras worldwide. She is consistently invited for her refreshing interpretations, her sensitivity, and her delight in the music. The list of prestigious orchestras with whom she has worked include the Berlin Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic, and the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. Notable conductors with whom she collaborates include Christoph Eschenbach, Thierry Fischer, Paavo and Neeme Järvi, Vasily Petrenko, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, John Storgårds, and Kazuki Yamada.

In February 2016, Baiba Skride made her debut with the New York Philharmonic with Christoph Eschenbach. In the 2017-18 season Baiba Skride appeared with the Chicago Symphony and Cleveland Symphony, as well as with the Boston Symphony for the American premiere of Sofia Gubaidulina's Triple Concerto for violin, cello, and bayan.

Lise Berthaud has been unanimously praised as a leading violist on the international music scene and was a member of BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists Scheme from 2013-2015. As a soloist, Lise has played with all BBC orchestras, including for her BBC Proms Debuts in 2014 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Andrew Litton. Other solo engagements include the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de Belgique, les Musiciens du Louvre, Sao Paulo Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre

de Chambre de Paris, Hong-Kong Sinfonietta, and various orchestras in France, with conductors including Leonard Slatkin, Andrew Litton, François Leleux, Paul McCreech, and Marc Minkowski.

The young Dutch artist **Harriet Krijgh** is one of today's most exciting and promising cellists. Her grace and expressiveness touch her audiences as soon as she is on the concert platform. She has played with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, and Sydney Symphony Orchestra. She is also a regular guest at international festivals such as the Heidelberger Frühling, Grafenegg Festival, and the Schubertiade Hohenems. As "Prizewinner in Residence" of the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Harriet Krijgh performed in about 20 concerts in the 2019 summer festival.

Lauma Skride's playing is "wonderfully sensitive, with marvelous tone quality, and always with highly virtuosic vigor," according to a review by the Bavarian Broadcasting Service. With her brilliant technique, Lauma Skride captivates audiences on major concert stages throughout the world, both as a soloist and chamber musician. Awarded the Beethoven Ring in 2008, Lauma is highly acclaimed for her interpretations of Germanic classical and romantic repertoire and has appeared with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Hamburg Symphony Orchestra, and Dresden Philharmonic. She has performed with such conductors as Andris Nelsons, Kristjan Järvi, John Storgårds, Pedro Halffter, Yan Pascal Tortelier, and Cornelius Meister.

The Skride Piano Quartet released its first album together for the Orfeo label that includes repertoire by Mahler, Mozart, and Brahms.

NOTES

FRANK BRIDGE: *PHANTASY FOR PIANO QUARTET IN F-SHARP MINOR,* H.94

IN BRIEF

BORN: February 26, 1879, Brighton, Sussex, United Kingdom

DIED: January 10, 1941, Eastbourne, United Kingdom

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 13 minutes

After centuries of comparative musical drought, England was blessed with a bumper crop of gifted composers at the turn of the 20th century. Frank Bridge's music has taken a back seat to the works of his more famous contemporaries Edward Elgar, Friedrich Delius, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Gustav Holst. Even lesser known compatriots such as John Ireland and Arnold Bax may be more familiar to music-lovers. Yet Benjamin Britten, at age 10, later recalled being “knocked sideways” by Bridge’s *The Sea* when he heard a 1924 performance in Norwich. He responded especially strongly to the “Moonlight” movement. The event was seminal in young Britten’s decision to become a composer, and to seek instruction from Bridge.

Bridge has earned his place in music history largely as having been Benjamin Britten’s composition teacher. Britten paid him homage in several ways, including writing *Variations for String Orchestra on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10* (1937). But while the importance of Bridge's tutelage should not be undervalued, we do him a disservice if we limit our consideration of him to that role. He was an excellent composer in his own right.

The ninth of 12 children, Bridge studied violin with his father, who taught in boarding schools and played in regional theatres. Young Frank started composing songs at age 12, soon moving on to instrumental and orchestral pieces. As a teenager he played in his father’s theatre orchestras, and then won a scholarship to study with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford for four years at London’s Royal College of Music. Stanford, a conservative taskmaster, was one of the greatest influences on Bridge's developing style. The other was Johannes Brahms, whose rich late

romanticism had an impact on almost every composer of Bridge's generation. The result, in Bridge's compositions, is music of a decidedly romantic cast—with a surprising dash of French seasoning. Anthony Payne, author of “Music of Frank Bridge,” has written:

From the outset of his career Bridge had possessed an exceptionally fluent and logically ordered technique which stemmed from 19th-century German methods and was tempered by a Gallic clarity and lightness.

Bridge switched early to viola, and earned a reputation as a superior chamber musician. In 1906 he was called in on short notice to play with the Joachim Quartet when the violist became indisposed; later he joined the English String Quartet, performing with it until 1915. While the list of Bridge's own works includes some stage music and a sizeable collection of orchestral and vocal pieces, the compositions with the most staying power are those for chamber ensemble, particularly the piano trio, the *Phantasy Quartet* that opens this program, and various works for string quartet. Bridge's chamber music provides the best overview of his development as a composer.

Bridge composed the *Phantasy Quartet* at the behest of Walter Willson Cobbett, a wealthy British industrialist and amateur violinist. Cobbett sought to enrich the repertoire of single-movement works for chamber ensemble. Simultaneously, he wished to revive the English tradition of a free-form phantasy, a genre that had flourished centuries earlier. Cobbett sponsored competitions in 1905 and 1907. (Bridge won first prize in the 1907 competition for his *Phantasy Piano Trio*.) In 1910, Cobbett commissioned 12 composers to write single-movement phantasies for varied instrumental combinations. Bridge's contribution, for traditional piano quartet, is arguably the finest of the works that Cobbett commissioned.

A modified arch form, the *Phantasy Quartet* comprises a single movement with three sections and a coda [A-B-C-B'-A'-coda], easily discernible even on a first hearing. After a resolute unison opening to establish the home key of F-sharp minor, the first section unfolds nocturne-like, in a gently rocking 9/8 meter of melancholy character. The

central section—approximating a scherzo/trio—switches to a brisk *Allegro vivace* in D minor. Strings and piano exchange skittering, scampering material that dances at near-breakneck speed. A brief interlude (the central trio, now in E-flat major) calms to flowing arpeggios in the keyboard as backdrop to the strings' elongated melodies. After a reprise of the gossamer scherzo, Bridge uses a brief cello recitative as transition back to the tempo of his introduction and a return of the opening music. His luminous coda recalls the scherzo music, now tranquil and slow, in heavenly F-sharp major. It is an inspired close to a gorgeous work.

DORA PEJAČEVIĆ:
PIANO QUARTET,
OP. 25

IN BRIEF

BORN: September 10, 1885, Budapest, Hungary

DIED: March 5, 1923, Munich, Germany

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 21 minutes

Though born in Budapest, Dora Pejačević was Croatian. Her father, Count Theodor Pejačević, was a civil governor; her mother, Lilla Vay de Vaya, was a Hungarian baroness. Both parents were artistic, and Vay de Vaya was an accomplished actress and musician. Dora studied piano, violin, and composition at Zagreb's Croatian Music Institute, and then in Dresden and Munich; however, biographers describe her as essentially self-taught. Her aristocratic birth and family means allowed her to travel to Europe's liveliest *belle époque* cultural centers, including Budapest, Vienna, Prague, and Munich. During the Great War, she volunteered as a nurse in her ancestral home of Nasice in eastern Croatia. She married the Bavarian military officer Ottomar von Lumbe in 1921, and made her home in Munich until her untimely death at age 37 from complications of childbirth.

Her most productive years as a composer were the war years, but the Piano Quartet pre-dates them. Prior to writing it, she had composed primarily songs and piano miniatures. The Quartet was more ambitious and reflects a growing confidence with large forms. Cast in four substantial movements, the Quartet adheres to traditional sonata form in the opening Allegro. The swirling piano part stays busy throughout in textures often reminiscent of Mendelssohn. Pejačević's soaring late romantic themes, however, are far more harmonically adventurous than Mendelssohn's, frequently taking unexpected turns. She gives most of the melodies to the strings, relying on dense piano writing to fill out the texture with Schumannesque phrasing.

The Adagio in B-flat major is a tender, lovely movement. Elements of chorale in its piano introduction return at the close. In the central section, the piano provides ascending arpeggios to anchor the shifting harmonies implied in the strings. Once again, the lion's share of the melodic material belongs to the strings.

Pejačević's coy title of Minuetto for her third movement is a conscious throwback to the late 18th century. Her take on it is a synthesis of German dance and scherzo, delivered with humor and a light touch. For the more sedate Trio, she switches from the Minuetto's A major to the key of D major. Subtle syncopations in the piano part underscore foursquare phrasings in the strings.

The finale is a rondo in D minor with strong connections to folk music. The recurring A-section is dance-like, slightly varied at its recurrences. Elements of peasant stomping enliven the music, along with pizzicato in the strings and rhythmic variety in the keyboard. Pejačević's romantic core blossoms in the episodes, whose dwelling in major mode lends an affirmative character that ultimately prevails, despite the muscular final D minor chords.

JOHANNES
BRAHMS: PIANO
QUARTET NO. 2 IN
A MAJOR, OP. 26

IN BRIEF

BORN: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

DIED: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

FIRST PERFORMANCE: November 29, 1862, in Vienna

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: January 14, 1987, Bowdoin Trio

DURATION: 47 minutes

This quartet is the lesser-known sibling of the famous G minor Piano Quartet, Op. 25, celebrated for its exciting Hungarian finale. Where the G minor work is dark and stormy, the A major celebrates the joys and intimacies of youth, love, and nature's beauty bursting forth in springtime.

Brahms probably began work on both quartets in the late 1850s while employed at the princely court of Detmold. He finished them in 1861, and took both scores with him on his first trip to Vienna the following year. Joseph Hellmesberger, first violinist of Vienna's prominent Hellmesberger Quartet, was particularly impressed with the A major Quartet, proclaiming Brahms as "Beethoven's heir." Hellmesberger's performances and support did much to establish Brahms's reputation in the Austrian capital.

The Viennese critics also preferred the A major to the G minor Quartet. Interestingly, so did Clara Schumann; perhaps she heard strains of her late husband's influence in the finale. She certainly recognized Brahms's growing mastery of chamber music, and his effective deployment of the piano quartet to express undeniably symphonic thoughts. His formal command is also evident. Three of the four movements are in admirably executed sonata form, indicating a preoccupation with musical architecture already fully developed at this early stage of his career.

With its rich fount of melody, the expansive first movement shows Brahms's debt to Schubert. Its length—a generous 15 minutes—is a reflection of Brahms's fertile thematic imagination. A distinguishing feature is the juxtaposition of two beats against three, a device that Brahms often favored. It dominates the main theme of this *Allegro non troppo*, and is integral to the fabric of the entire movement.

The slow movement has echoes of Schumann and, surprisingly, Mendelssohn, a composer who figured less prominently than either Schumann or Schubert in Brahms's sphere of influence. Strings are muted for much of its duration, which is again nearly a quarter of an hour. The Scherzo that follows is more closely related to a well-mannered Haydn minuet than to a brisk Beethovenian inner movement. Brahms's canonic passages also point to Haydn, suggesting this piano quartet's deep bow to the 18th century.

Listeners may perceive some eastern European flavor in the finale's syncopated, flirtatious rhythms. More persuasive is an identification of this delicious, folk-like *Allegro* with the cabaret society of fashionable Vienna. Brahms's melodies initially tempt us to dance, yet his expansive and carefully wrought treatment of those themes yields an enormous movement whose triumphant close is a thrill to hear.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2023

UPCOMING CONCERT

**LEILA JOSEFOWICZ,
VIOLIN
JOHN NOVACEK,
PIANO**

WED, MAR 22, 2023

7:30 PM

Gates Concert Hall



Photo: Tom Zimberoff

Winner of
the 2018
Avery
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Prize,
violinist

Leila Josefowicz returns to perform on our Chamber Series. A passionate advocate for contemporary music, her diverse program features a recent work by Erkki-Sven Tüür, as well as the delightful Violin Sonata by Claude Debussy. Josefowicz will be performing with Grammy-nominated pianist John Novacek.

Tickets are \$40 each; \$15 for patrons under 30, and \$5 for current students (with ID).

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Wed, Mar 22, 2023 | 7:30 pm

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Wed, Apr 26, 2023 | 7:30 pm

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Wed, May 10, 2023 | 7:30 pm

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Lírios Quartet

Sun, Mar 12, 2023

11:00 am & 1:00 pm (identical concerts)

Clyfford Still Museum

1250 Bannock Street, Denver

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Sun, May 14, 2023

11:00 am & 1:00 pm (identical concerts)

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