

MARLBORO MUSIC

MITSUKO UCHIDA & JONATHAN BISS, ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

PREVIEW NOTES

WEEK FIVE • PERSONS AUDITORIUM

Saturday, August 1 at 8 pm

Viola, D. 786 (1823)

Franz Schubert

Born January 31, 1797, Vienna, Austria • Died November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria

Duration: approx. 8 minutes

Composed in March 1823 on a 19-verse poem by Schubert's close friend Franz von Schober, this expansive song—subtitled “A Flower Ballad”—tells the story of a delicate flower who rushes to greet the bridegroom Spring, only to wither before he arrives. Schubert shapes Schober's text into a kind of miniature cantata, its returning refrain giving the song a rondo-like structure even as the music tracks the flower's journey from serene anticipation through mounting panic to quiet devastation. The virtuosic piano writing paints each turn of the story, from rustling grasses to the chill of encroaching dread.

Participants: *Evan Luca Gray, bass-baritone; Solomon Ge, piano*

Once Upon a Time... (2015)

Jörg Widmann

Born June 19, 1973, Munich, Germany

Duration: approx. 29 minutes

Composed in 2015 for clarinetist Jörg Widmann himself, together with violist Tabea Zimmermann and pianist Dénes Várjon (all of whom have spent summers at Marlboro), these five character pieces take their cue from Robert Schumann's Märchenerzählungen, written for the same trio of instruments. Widmann has described his own fascination with fairy tales as tinged with unease as much as nostalgia, and the five movements—from a shimmering “Fata Morgana” to an icy, glacial interlude—trade the genre's comforting glow for something stranger and more unsettled. The final movement's ironic “happily ever after” arrives only after real darkness has passed through.

Participants: *Jonathan Leibovitz, clarinet; Hsin-Yun Huang, viola; Changyong Shin, piano*

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2 (1873)

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany • Died April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

Duration: approx. 32 minutes

Completed in the summer of 1873 alongside its C Minor companion, this quartet carries a private code in its opening movement: Brahms answers the motto of his friend, violinist Joseph Joachim—“Frei aber einsam” (free but lonely)—with his own “Frei aber froh” (free but glad), spelling out the pitches F-A-E and F-A-F in the melodic material. The

quartet's lyricism owes much to Joachim's Hungarian-inflected violin style, most audible in the second movement's canon and the finale's csárdás-like flourish. Warmer and less combative than its companion in C Minor, it remains one of Brahms's most personal chamber statements.

Participants: Leah Amory, violin; Clara Neubauer, violin; Sofia Gilchenok, viola; Marcy Rosen, cello

Sunday, August 2 at 2:30 pm

Contrasts, BB 116 (1938)

Béla Bartók

Born March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Romania) • Died September 26, 1945, New York, USA

Duration: approx. 18 minutes

Written in 1938 at the joint request of violinist Joseph Szigeti and clarinetist Benny Goodman, *Contrasts* began life as a much smaller commission: Goodman wanted a two-movement showpiece short enough to fit on both sides of a single 78 rpm record. Szigeti's encouragement pushed Bartók toward something far more ambitious, adding a central movement and expanding the harmonic and rhythmic language considerably. Built from Hungarian and Romanian dance idioms, the outer movements bookend a hypnotic, static "Relaxation," and each surrounding movement carries a soloistic cadenza—for clarinet in the first, violin in the last—that lets both dedicatees shine.

Participants: Ayane Nakajima, piano; Arthur Stockel, clarinet; Meesun Hong Coleman, violin

String Quartet in A Minor, D. 804 (1824)

Franz Schubert

Duration: approx. 30 minutes

This quartet takes its nickname, "Rosamunde," from the second movement's serene theme, borrowed from Schubert's incidental music for the play of that name, written the previous year. It was the only string quartet performed and published in Schubert's lifetime. Composed the same year as the "Death and the Maiden" Quartet, this A Minor work channels a gentler, more resigned melancholy—"Do you know any happy music? I don't," Schubert reportedly said around this time—its sighing opening theme shadowed by an undercurrent of unease that never fully resolves.

Participants: Oliver Neubauer, violin; Leah Amory, violin; Laura Liu, viola; Alice Neary, cello

Piano Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97 (1811)

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn, Germany • Died March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

Duration: approx. 40 minutes

Sketched in the summer of 1810 and completed the following March, this trio takes its nickname, "Archduke," from its dedicatee, Archduke Rudolph of Austria, Beethoven's most steadfast pupil, patron, and friend. Its 1814 premiere, with Beethoven himself at the piano, proved to be his final public performance as a pianist: his hearing had deteriorated so far that composer and violinist Louis Spohr reported him pounding fortissimo passages into inaudibility and losing entire phrases in the pianissimo ones. None of that struggle survives in the music itself, which unfolds with unhurried nobility, from a broadly lyrical opening theme through a puckish scherzo to a finale of irrepressible high spirits.

Participants: Jonathan Biss, piano; Anatol Toth, violin; Macintyre Taback, cello
