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CHAMBER MUSIC @ BEALL 2016-17



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UNIVERSITY OF
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School of Music
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DOVER QUARTET with AVI AVITAL

Joel Link, violin | Bryan Lee, violin | Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola
Camden Shaw, cello | AVI AVITAL, mandolin

Feb. 18, 2017 | 7:30 p.m. | Beall Concert Hall

Johann Sebastian Bach

Chaconne in D minor for Solo Mandolin

Bedřich Smetana

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, “From My Life”

David Bruce

Cymbeline for String Quartet and Mandolin

Sulkhan Tsintsadze

Six Miniatures for String Quartet and Mandolin

PROGRAM **NOTES BY** Elizabeth Schwartz**CHACONNE IN D MINOR FOR SOLO MANDOLIN**

“In his youth, and until the approach of old age, he played the violin cleanly and penetratingly ... He understood to perfection the possibilities of all stringed instruments. This is evidenced by his solos for the violin and for the violoncello without bass. One of the greatest violinists once told me that he had seen nothing more perfect for learning to be a good violinist, and could suggest nothing better to anyone eager to learn, than the said violin solos without bass,” – Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, remembering his father’s skill as a violinist.

That Johann Sebastian Bach played violin well may come as a surprise to those who think of harpsichord and organ as his primary instruments. C. P. E. Bach’s reminiscences about his father’s ability to play and write intuitively for the violin remind us that the elder Bach possessed a player’s understanding of the nuances of the violin. His solo sonatas and partitas, widely considered some of the finest and most difficult music in the solo violin repertoire, bear this out.

The power and depth of this Chaconne speaks to musicians and listeners across time and place. Many composers, including Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, and Ferruccio Busoni have arranged this compelling melody and its 64 variations for other instruments. Violinists, too, regard the D minor Chaconne as the ne plus ultra of the literature. Yehudi Menuhin once described the Chaconne as “the greatest



Acknowledged by *The New York Times* for his “exquisitely sensitive playing” and “stunning agility”, Grammy-nominated mandolinist Avi Avital is one of the world’s most exciting and adventurous musicians. He is deeply committed to building a fresh legacy for the mandolin through virtuosic performance in a range of genres and commissioning new works for mandolin.

Born in Be’er Sheva, southern Israel in 1978, he began learning the mandolin at the age of eight and soon joined the flourishing mandolin youth orchestra founded and directed by his charismatic teacher, Russian-born violinist Simcha Nathanson. He later graduated from the Jerusalem Music Academy and the Conservatorio Cesare Pollini in Padova, Italy where he studied the original mandolin repertoire with Ugo Orlandi.

Avital is the first mandolin player to receive a Grammy nomination in the category “Best Instrumental Soloist” (2010) for his recording of Avner Dorman’s Mandolin Concerto. He has won numerous competitions and awards including Germany’s ECHO Prize for his 2008 recording with the David Orlovsky Trio and the AVIV Competition (2007), the preeminent national competition for Israeli soloists.

Avital has released various recordings in the disparate genres of klezmer, baroque and contemporary classical music. He now records exclusively with Deutsche Grammophon and his debut release featured his own transcriptions of J.S. Bach Concertos for harpsichord and violin. His second disc “Between Worlds” introduced chamber music compositions from Ernest Bloch and De Falla to traditional Bulgarian Folk tunes and was released in 2014 to critical acclaim. He recorded Vivaldi Concertos with the Venice Baroque Orchestra, released in 2015.

The Dover Quartet's rise from being an up-and-coming young ensemble to occupying a spot at the top of their field has been "practically meteoric" (Strings). Catapulted to prominence after sweeping the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, the group has become a major presence on the international scene.

In the 2016-17 season the Dover Quartet will release its debut recording, featuring three works by Mozart: his two final string quartets and the Quintet in C minor. During the 2015-16 season, the Dover Quartet performed more than 120 dates around the world, including debuts at Carnegie Hall, Yale University, the Lucerne Festival, and as part of the Lincoln Center "Great Performers" series. The group also returned to Washington, DC, for four programs at Dumbarton Oaks, two of which showcased the world premiere of a new commission by Pulitzer Prize-winner Caroline Shaw. Additional season highlights saw the Quartet launch a newly created three-year faculty residency at Northwestern University, embark on its first tour of Israel as well as three European tours, and perform for many of the most important presenters in the United States. Two seasons ago the Quartet made its Kennedy Center debut, which was pronounced "a triumph" by the *Washington Post*.

The group's world-class collaborators have included pianists Anne-Marie McDermott, Marc-André Hamelin, and Jon Kimura Parker; violists Roberto Díaz and Cynthia Phelps; and the Pacifica Quartet.

All four Quartet members are consummate solo artists: first violinist Joel Link took first prize at the Menuhin Competition; violinist Bryan Lee and violist Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt have appeared as soloists with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Tokyo Philharmonic, respectively; and cellist Camden Shaw released a solo album debut on the Unipheye Music label. As *Strad* magazine observes, "With their exceptional interpretative maturity, tonal refinement, and taut ensemble," the Dover Quartet is "pulling away from their peers."

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structure for solo violin that exists." At roughly 15 minutes, the Chaconne takes up as much time as the preceding four movements combined. The simple four-measure theme repeats, with elaborations and variations of increasing inventiveness. Some of the variations are in D major, some in D minor, which obscures the listener's sense of a "home" key. Bach's biographer Philip Spitta summed up the impact of the Chaconne when he wrote, "The overpowering wealth of forms pouring from a few and scarcely noticeable sources displays not only the most perfect knowledge of the technique of the violin, but also the most absolute mastery over an imagination the like of which no other composer was ever endowed with."

STRING QUARTET NO. 1 IN E MINOR, "FROM MY LIFE"

"I wanted to depict in music the course of my life ... the composition is almost only a private one and so purposely written for four instruments which, as in a small circle of friends, talk among themselves about what has oppressed me so significantly." – Bedřich Smetana

By the 1870s, program music was an established genre within orchestral music, thanks to Franz Liszt, Hector Berlioz and other Romantic composers who often drew on non-musical inspirations for their compositions. Chamber music, on the other hand, was still considered "abstract" or "pure" music. Bedřich Smetana's E minor quartet, subtitled "From My Life," had a profound impact on chamber music, and broke new ground, particularly in the music of his Czech countrymen, with its deeply personal origins.

Smetana's family life was filled with loss; three of the four children from his first marriage died in infancy and his first wife Kateřina of consumption. Smetana himself suffered from a number of ailments caused by untreated advanced syphilis, including the loss of his hearing. By the time Smetana wrote the E minor quartet, he was totally deaf.

The turbulence of the Allegro vivo and its primary sighing motif that suggests sobbing eloquently expresses both the tragedies of Smetana's personal life and the heightened Romanticism of his

youth. “The first movement depicts my youthful leanings towards art, the Romantic atmosphere, the inexpressible yearning for something I could neither express nor define, also a kind of premonition of my future misfortune,” wrote Smetana. “The long, insistent note in the finale ... is the fateful ringing in my ears of the high-pitched tones which, in 1874, came to herald my deafness.”

Rather than a demure waltz, Smetana wrote an energetic polka for his second movement, which, as he explained, “recalls the joyful days of my youth when I composed dance tunes and was known everywhere as a passionate lover of dancing.” The Largo embodies Smetana’s love for Kateřina, although one can perceive an underlying sadness in the music, perhaps a foreshadowing of her untimely death. In the closing Vivace, Smetana celebrates his Czech heritage, “the discovery that I could treat national elements in music and my joy in following this path.” Partway through, the sigh motif from the first movement returns, signaling, in Smetana’s words, “the catastrophe of the onset of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery; but, remembering all the promise of my early career, a feeling of painful regret.”

CYMBELINE FOR STRING QUARTET AND MANDOLIN

David Bruce’s music draws on gypsy, flamenco, klezmer and other folk traditions; it also has a direct connection to the music of Stravinsky, Janáček, Berio and Bartók. During the 2013-14 season, Bruce served as Associate Composer for the San Diego Symphony, for whom he wrote several works, including Night Parade for the orchestra’s 2013 Carnegie Hall debut. Often witty and always colorful, pulsing with earthy rhythms, Bruce’s music has a directness rarely heard in contemporary music, combined with an emotional core of striking intimacy and sensitivity.

“Cymbeline is a new work for mandolin and string quartet, written specially for mandolin virtuoso Avi Avital,” writes Bruce. “The title is an old Celtic word meaning Lord of the Sun. I think the idea of the piece being about the sun emerged out of the colors of the string quartet and the mandolin together. Although I don’t think of myself as a synesthetic person, I kept having a strong sense of the color gold in the early sketches for the piece. The mandolin itself has always seemed to me to create a ‘golden’ sound, and when combined with the warmth of the strings it seems now obvious that I should be drawn towards something warm and golden.

“The sun was one of the first objects of worship and it has been surmised that the idea of a holy trinity ... relates to the three distinct positions of the sun - sunrise (father), noon (son), and sunset (spirit). Sunrise is ‘the father of the day;’ midday represents the fullness of energy – the son, and sunset is a time for contemplation and reflection – the spirit. To me, these three states represent not just “father, son and spirit,” but also perhaps, the reflection upon an action about to happen (sunrise), the action itself (noon), and the reflection on the action that happened (sunset).

“Cymbeline accordingly is in three movements, with two contemplative outer movements surrounding an energetic central movement. I see the piece as a contemplation of our relationship with this fiery giver of life, whose significance to us is often overlooked in the modern world, but who still really does rule over us all.”

SIX MINIATURES FOR STRING QUARTET AND MANDOLIN

Georgian composer Sulkhan Tsintsadze is best known for his 12 string quartets, which span the length of his compositional life. As a cellist, Tsintsadze had an insider’s affinity for the string quartet as both an ensemble and a genre. He also wrote other works for string quartet, including the three sets of Miniatures during the decade between 1945 and 1955, from which tonight’s selections are drawn.

Tsintsadze’s artful blend of classical and folk elements gives his music vitality and depth, like the music of his colleagues Béla Bartók, Zoltan Kodály, and other composers who also combined folk and classical influences. Unlike some of Bartók’s folk-inflected music, which featured harsh, almost savagely discordant passages, Tsintsadze’s Miniatures feature a directness and accessibility that draws the audience into his delightful Georgian soundscapes.

The Miniatures have been arranged for a variety of ensembles and instruments, and Tsintsadze’s use of folk string techniques in bowing and pizzicato enhance the folk origins of many of the melodies. The addition of the mandolin, with its clear, piercing range and ability to capture both joy and melancholy, enhances these tiny musical gems.