

TUESDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 14, 2023, AT 7:30 ▶ 4,356TH CONCERT

Alice Tully Hall, Starr Theater, Adrienne Arsht Stage Home of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN, piano JUHO POHJONEN, piano PAUL HUANG, violin JAMES THOMPSON, violin SIHAO HE, cello PAUL WATKINS, cello

LANDMARK TRIOS

FANNY MENDELSSOHN

(1805-1847)

Trio in D minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 11 (1847)

- ▶ Allegro molto vivace
- Andante espressivo
- ▶ Lied: Allegretto
- ▶ Finale: Allegro moderato BROWN, THOMPSON, WATKINS

CLARA SCHUMANN

(1819-1896)

Trio in G minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 17 (1846)

- ▶ Allegro moderato
- ▶ Scherzo: Tempo di Menuetto
- ▶ Andante
- ▶ Allegretto

BROWN, THOMPSON, HE

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

Trio in B major for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 8 (1854, rev. 1889)

▶ Allegro con brio

▶ Scherzo: Allegro molto

▶ Adagio

▶ Allegro

POHJONEN, HUANG, WATKINS

The Jerome L. Greene Foundation is the 2023–2024 CMS Season Sponsor.

All CMS digital programming is supported by the Hauser Fund for Media and Technology.

This concert features members of the Bowers Program, CMS's residency for outstanding early-career musicians. The Bowers Program is supported by **Ann S. Bowers**. Additional support by the **Marion F. Goldin Charitable Fund** and **Colburn Foundation**.

The Chamber Music Society acknowledges with sincere appreciation **Ms. Tali Mahanor**'s generous long-term loan of the Hamburg Steinway & Sons model "D" concert grand piano.

ABOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Dear Listener,

When Clara Schumann (wife of Robert) and Fanny Mendelssohn (sister of Felix) composed their piano trios, in 1846 and 1847 respectively, they likely could not even dream that some 177 years later their trios would be performed sideby-side at one of the world's most prestigious performing arts centers, nor that their works would now be frequently performed by major artists worldwide. It therefore gives us great pride to present these two piano trios today for the first time on the Alice Tully Hall stage, and to pay tribute to these two phenomenally gifted musicians whose contributions to the piano trio genre are truly landmarks.

A fitting juxtaposition to the trios of Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann is the iconic B-major trio of Johannes Brahms, composed only a few years later, in 1854. Brahms would revise it heavily in 1889, and it subsequently took on its own landmark status in the chamber music repertoire. But its genesis lies in the same realm as the Mendelssohn and Schumann trios, all three providing a fascinating slice of chamber music history, during which compositions of historic significance were born.

Finally, it gives us further pleasure to welcome three trios of performers to our stage today. Each musician comes to this concert with a fiercely dedicated passion for the music and great excitement to be presenting this unusual and historic concert together. Please give them your warmest welcome.

Enjoy the concert,

David Finckel
ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Wu Han

ARTIST PERSPECTIVE

You know that moment when time seems to stand still, allowing you to forget about work, that unfinished email, or what to have for dinner? It's just a fleeting 30 seconds, when you can finally pause and immerse yourself in beautiful stillness—with a spaciousness that feels eternal. This is the sentiment I aim to evoke in the piano solo opening the second movement of Fanny Mendelssohn's trio. The line rises, the line falls, she tries it again in a different key and you can feel her world in your hands. If you find yourself welling up with emotion at this moment, all the better for me. And if not, my talented colleagues, who echo this phrase, will surely elicit those tears.

Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann both conjure a myriad of complex feelings with their trios, and they'll certainly quicken your heart rate too (especially mine during the relentlessly difficult passages throughout). Let me share a little secret with you—pianists don't get paid per note, but we do it because every day we are alone in conversation with our musical friends from the past.

- Michael Stephen Brown

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Nicky Swett

Trio in D minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 11

FANNY MENDELSSOHN

- ▶ Born November 14, 1805, in Hamburg
- Died May 14, 1847, in Berlin

- Tonight is the first CMS performance of this piece.
- Duration: 26 minutes

Premiered in 1847

Fanny Hensel (née Mendelssohn) started work on her D-minor piano trio in the mid-1840s, and it saw its first performance in 1847 at one of her popular Sunday salons. The premiere was something of a family affair: she wrote the piece to celebrate her sister Rebecka's birthday, and her brother Paul, a banker and skilled amateur cellist, played. The trio was published

posthumously as Hensel's Op. 11, a relatively low number that conceals the hundreds of compositions, including songs, sonatas, piano miniatures, and chamber music, that she wrote over the course of her life. It (likely deliberately) shares a key with her other brother Felix's popular 1839 piece for the same instruments, but her work differs in striking ways from the other

Mendelssohn's D-minor piano trio.

Hensel's melodic style is quite chromatic. The murmurs of the piano in the opening theme, echoed in the strings shortly thereafter, follow the contours of scales in D minor. But as the transitional passage begins, we hear more and more out-of-key pitches, which point to many different tonalities. The most characterful moment of the secondary theme, an optimistic tune in F major introduced by the cello, is its third note, an off-scale pitch that propels the music upward. The movement's conclusion likewise depends on chromatic exploration. A cello line, colored by piano off-beats, descends almost a complete chromatic scale, then leaps down and does the same thing in the opposite direction. It's an 1840s hint of the melodic compression of 12-tone music. Those narrow intervals eventually give way to wider spacing-first in virtuosic, scalar runs in the piano, and then finally a transcendent D-minor arpeggiocreating a breathtaking release.

The Andante espressivo establishes the closest connection with the corresponding movement in Felix's earlier trio. The piano plays a lyrical theme in the style of Felix's Songs Without Words, and the strings join and embellish on a repetition of that tune. Then the music moves toward a serious passage in minor mode, in which the keyboard sings melancholically above

staccato arpeggios in the strings. When the sweet initial melody returns, it is corrected by interruptions of the minorkey tune, its harmonies expressively varied by the intrusion of this other music. For the third movement, she wrote not the usual minuet or scherzo. but another song, explicitly marked Lied and peppered with quotations from Felix's 1846 oratorio Elijah. Hensel's sister Rebecka, the trio's dedicatee, was a talented singer. We might hear in this short movement the composer alluding not only to Songs Without Words and to her brother's recent work, but also to Rebecka's role as the first performer for so many of the siblings' vocal songs.

The opening minute of the finale is keyboard music: first a short cadenza, and then a nostalgic theme punctuated by floating arpeggios. Hensel was a great admirer of Frédéric Chopin, an influence we hear clearly in this rocking lullaby, whose pianistic blend of melody and accompaniment begs for expressive rubato. 1 The strings kick up the tempo and lead the group through some cheerier interludes. But the sadness of the movement can't truly be shaken until the very end, when that soaring, chromatically-inflected secondary theme from the first movement is proudly brought back by the strings in octaves, tying together the threads and allusions of this wideranging trio.

¹ Fluctuation in rhythm or tempo. From the Italian for "robbed," implying "stolen time."

Trio in G minor for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 17

CLARA SCHUMANN

- ▶ Born September 13, 1819, in Leipzig ▶ Died May 20, 1896, in Frankfurt
- Composed in 1846

In the summer of 1846. Clara Schumann went with her husband Robert to the guiet island of Norderney in the northwest of Germany to help him recover from a health crisis. While there, she put the finishing touches on her Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17, her first major chamber work and one of just two four-movement compositions she completed before she stopped writing music in 1853. She expressed plans to dedicate the piece to Fanny Hensel, whom she visited in Berlin in March of 1847, feeling "especially attracted to her in regard to music, we almost always harmonize with each other, and her conversation is always interesting." It is likely that they compared notes on trio writing, as Hensel was at the time finishing up her own Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 11. But she did not get around to the dedication before Hensel died of a sudden stroke that May.

At the start of Schumann's trio the violin grabs the ear right away, with a theme in G minor supported by undulating piano figures. After a couple of measures, we hear a short, dotted figure that leads the phrase to a resting point. That dotted figure consumes the remainder of the melody, and it is the source of drama in the transitional passage, which is full of arresting, rhetorical pauses. This agitated, rhythmic refrain creates a stark contrast with the secondary tune, a spacious, syncopated idea

- First CMS performance on October 28, 2010, by pianist Juho Pohjonen, violinist Yura Lee, and cellist Andreas Brantelid, in CMS's Rose Studio
- Duration: 28 minutes

intermittently supported by chromatic lines that weave around the empty space of the floating melody.

In the second movement, a Scherzo marked to be played in the tempo of a minuet, Schumann shows a knack for violin-piano writing that she would develop further in her later Romances, Op. 22. The violinist hops around on a reverse dotted figure, often referred to as a "Scottish Snap," while the piano comments and pulls on the melody with intermittently dissonant harmonic support. The transporting trio section is more cellofocused, but in affecting phrases the two strings band together to glide over the keyboard's contrapuntal commentary. The slow movement is likewise in A-B-A form. The outer sections build to touching duets for the strings, while a central agitato passage involves violent, dotted outbursts from all three players.

Many early listeners, including Felix Mendelssohn and violinist Joseph Joachim, admired the fugue in the trio's final movement. Great fugue writing is as much about the episodes, the material that sits between sections in which voices discuss the fugue's musical subjects, as it is about the working out of the fugue's main melodic idea. Schumann's episodes make use of the other theme of the movement, along with textural and motivic allusions to other parts of the work. The result is that this passage

of developmental density becomes a climax for the entire piece, which renders the ensuing drive to the finish extremely satisfying. Though she was sometimes critical of this trio, Schumann was nonetheless quite happy when it was first performed, admitting that "there is nothing greater

than the joy of composing something oneself, and then listening to it."
The raucous energy of the work's conclusion, which turns to the major key only at the very last moment, is indeed a joyous thing to hear, and leaves us wishing only that she had left behind more music like it.

Trio in B major for Piano, Violin, and Cello, Op. 8

JOHANNES BRAHMS

- ▶ Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg ▶ Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna
- Composed in 1854, revised in 1889
- ▶ First CMS performance on January 5, 1973, by pianist William Masselos, violinist Charles Treger, and cellist Lynn Harrell
- Duration: 34 minutes

In 1853, in the journal Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, Robert Schumann stated in prophetic terms that a composer "would suddenly appear, called to give voice to all that needed to be expressed in the spirit of the times . . . one whose mastery would not unfold in stages but . . . would spring forth fully armed. He has arrived, a young blood. . . . His name is Johannes Brahms."

The young Brahms anxiously got to work trying to live up to this pronouncement. He soon published piano sonatas, songs, and other shorter pieces, but he felt that he needed to compose something of the grand scale implied by Schumann's endorsement. The first massive work he completed in this period was the behemoth Piano Trio in B major, published in 1854 as his Op. 8. The first movement alone, nearly twenty minutes in length, contained three contrasting subjects, an array of different key areas, a fugue-almost enough musical ideas to occupy an entire symphony. Brahms wasn't completely satisfied with the trio, but he allowed its publication nonetheless and moved on to other projects.

In 1889, Brahms's new publisher purchased the rights to his early works, and the composer viewed the re-release of his juvenilia as an opportunity to address the shortcomings he had observed in this youthful trio. He claimed a light hand in revision—"I didn't put a wig on it, but combed and tidied its hair a bit"-but in fact, he cut around ten minutes of music and completely re-worked the first and final movements. This "new edition," the version of the Op. 8 trio typically heard in concert today, is a tighter, more thematically condensed composition, but one that maintains much of the majesty and playfulness of the original.

The first movement opens with a broad, rising cello theme in the home key of B major, but the inward contrasting subject begins and ends in G-sharp minor. This rare major-to-minor move underscores the trajectory of the whole work. The mischievous minor-mode *Scherzo*, complete with a lush, singing trio section, features euphoric piano flourishes that hint at Brahms's strength as a player. In the third

movement, the piano and strings trade off sections of a heavenly chorale, which melodically and texturally inverts the heroism of the opening movement. The finale is based on an ambiguous, chromatic theme, and it leads to a resounding B-minor finish, completing the major-to-minor process implied by the first movement's pivotal contrast.

The premiere of the 1889 version featured cellist David Popper, who wrote numerous concertos, short works, and a book of etudes that remains the cello technique bible to this day. According to Brahms, Popper "liked my changes so much that he begged me to revise all *his* works for him." Alas, no Brahms edition of Popper's *High School of Cello Playing*

exists, a loss to every living cellist. Our experience of Johannes the Reviser is limited to this Trio in B major, where the youthful grandeur of his themes meets the ruthless efficiency of his late style. But it's worth noting that many of the most striking moments of the trio in its final form—the sublime opening cello solo, the sparkle of the *Scherzo*, the yearning harmonies of the chorale, the B-minor turn at the close—were there in 1854, springing forth from a "fully armed" Brahms. •

Cellist, writer, and researcher Nicky Swett is a PhD Candidate and Gates Scholar at the University of Cambridge.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ANELA BENCE SELKOWITZ

MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN

▶ Winner of a 2018 Emerging Artist Award from Lincoln Center and a 2015 Avery Fisher Career Grant, pianist Michael Stephen Brown is an alum of CMS's Bowers Program. He makes regular appearances with orchestras such as the National Philharmonic and the Seattle, Phoenix, North Carolina, and Albany symphonies, and recently has made European recital debuts at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn and the Chopin Museum in Mallorca. He has received commissions from many

organizations and some of today's leading artists, and recently toured his own Piano Concerto around the US and Poland with several orchestras. He performs regularly with his longtime duo partner, cellist Nicholas Canellakis, and has appeared at festivals worldwide. Brown was the composer- and artist-in-residence at the New Haven Symphony for the 2017–19 seasons, and earned degrees in piano and composition from the Juilliard School.



SIHAO HE

▶ Sihao He first came to international prominence as a 14-year-old cellist winning first prize at the International Antonio Janigro Cello Competition. He is also the grand-prize winner of the prestigious 3rd Gaspar Cassadó International Cello Competition. As soloist, he has performed with leading orchestras including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, and Brussels Philharmonic. As a chamber musician, he has appeared at Music@Menlo,

Bravo!Vail, and the Meadowmount School of Music. As a member of the Galvin Cello Quartet, he won the 2022 Victor Elmaleh Competition and joined the Concert Artists Guild roster. He is a faculty member at the Robert McDuffie Center for Strings at Mercer University and a member of CMS's Bowers Program.



PAUL HUANG

▶ Recipient of a 2015 Avery Fisher Career Grant and a 2017 Lincoln Center Award for Emerging Artists, violinist Paul Huang's recent appearances included the Detroit Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic, and Houston Symphony. In the 2023–24 season, he returns to Taiwan's National Symphony Orchestra and makes debuts with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and the San Francisco, Pacific, Vancouver, Dallas, BBC, and NHK Symphonies. In fall 2021, he

became the first classical violinist to perform his own arrangement of the US national anthem for the opening game of the NFL to an audience of 75,000. His recent recital appearances included those at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Aspen, and Lucerne Festivals. He plays on the legendary 1742 ex-Wieniawski Guarneri del Gesù on loan through the Stradivari Society of Chicago.



JUHO POHJONEN

▶ Pianist Juho Pohjonen is in demand internationally as an orchestral soloist, recitalist, and chamber performer. An ardent exponent of Scandinavian music, Pohjonen's growing discography showcases music by Finnish compatriots such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Kaija Saariaho, and Jean Sibelius. Recent engagements include the German Radio Philharmonic; Taiwan, BBC, and Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestras; Cleveland and Minnesota Orchestras; the Symphonies of San

Francisco, Atlanta, New Jersey, and Colorado; and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra of London, and Mostly Mozart Festival. He made his London debut at Wigmore Hall and has played recitals throughout Europe and the US, and is an alum of CMS's Bowers Program. In 2019, Pohjonen launched *MyPianist*, an Al-based app that provides interactive piano accompaniment.



JAMES THOMPSON

▶ Violinist James Thompson is on faculty at Music@Menlo and has been a member of CMS's Bowers Program since 2021. He has performed for prestigious chamber music organizations across the country, including the Four Arts Society, Parlance Chamber Concerts, the Perlman Music Program, and the Taos School of Music. Solo engagements include appearances with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra, the Cleveland Pops Orchestra, and the Blue Water

Chamber Orchestra. He has been invited to speak at a variety of concert series and has recently served as a teaching fellow at the Encore Chamber Music Festival and the Western Reserve Chamber Music Festival. Thompson holds bachelor's, master's, and artist diploma degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music.



PAUL WATKINS

▶ Paul Watkins enjoys a varied and distinguished career as soloist, chamber musician, and conductor. The cellist of the Emerson String Quartet from 2013 until its recent disbanding, he is also the Artistic Director of the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and in 2019 he was appointed Professor of Cello at the Yale School of Music. He has performed as concerto soloist with prestigious orchestras throughout the world. A dedicated chamber musician, he was a member of

the Nash Ensemble from 1997 until 2013 and is a regular guest artist at CMS. Watkins has held the positions of Music Director of the English Chamber Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra. His extensive discography as a cellist includes more than 70 recordings, and his first recording as a conductor, of the Britten and Berg violin concertos with Daniel Hope, received a Grammy nomination.

JÜRGEN FRANI

ABOUT THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS) was founded in 1969 under the leadership and patronage of Alice Tully and the artistic direction of Charles Wadsworth, beginning a new era for chamber music in the United States. Through its many performance, education, and digital activities, CMS brings the experience of great chamber music to more people than any other organization of its kind. The performing artists constitute a multi-generational and international roster of the world's finest chamber musicians, enabling CMS to present chamber music of every instrumentation, style, and historical period. The Bowers Program, our competitive three-season residency, is dedicated to developing the chamber music leaders of the future and integrates this selection of extraordinary early-career musicians into every facet of CMS activities. CMS reaches a growing global audience through a range of free digital media, including livestreams, an online archive of more than 1,000 video recordings, and broadcasts that are distributed to millions of listeners around the world

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Updated on October 6, 2023

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