



Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston

Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

25th Anniversary Season

chamber series 1: Vienna Dreams

Saturday, October 1, 2022, 8 PM at First Church in Boston

Sunday, October 2, 2022, 4 PM at First Church in Boston

Program:

Aaron Jay Kernis, *Mozart en Route (or, A Little Traveling Music)* for string trio

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Quartet in D Major for flute & strings, K. 285

Elliott Schwartz, *Vienna Dreams* for clarinet, viola & piano

Arnold Schoenberg, selections from *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* for soprano & piano, Op. 15

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

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

Pulitzer Prize and Grammy-Award winning composer **Aaron Jay Kernis** (b. 1960) draws artistic inspiration from a vast and often surprising palette of sources, among them the limitless color spectrum and immense emotional tangle of the orchestra, cantorial music in its beauty and dark intensity, the roiling drama of world events, and the energy and drive of jazz and popular music. All are woven into the tapestry of a musical language of rich lyric splendor, vivid poetic imagery, and fierce instrumental brilliance, and he has been praised for his “fearless originality [and] powerful voice” (*The New York Times*).

Among the most esteemed musical figures of his generation, Kernis is dedicated to creating music which can be meaningful to other people’s lives and extending communication among us to make an emotional connection with listeners – while frequently challenging audiences and performers alike. That connection has brought his music to major musical stages world-wide, performed and commissioned by many of America’s foremost artists, including sopranos Renee Fleming and Dawn Upshaw, violinists Joshua Bell, Pamela Frank, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and James Ehnes (for whom he wrote his Grammy Award-winning violin concerto), pianist Christopher O’Riley, and guitarist Sharon Isbin; and such musical institutions as the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra (for the inauguration of its new home at the Kimmel Center), Walt Disney Company, Rose Center for Earth and Space at New York’s American Museum of Natural History, The Knights, Ravinia Festival, the San Francisco, Melbourne, Dallas, Toronto, London, and Singapore Symphonies, London Philharmonic, Lincoln Center *Great Performers* Series, Minnesota and Royal Scottish National Orchestras, American

Public Radio, Orpheus, Los Angeles, and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestras, Aspen Music Festival, and beyond. Recent commissions include his 4th Symphony for the New England Conservatory (for its 150th anniversary), Bellingham Festival, and Nashville Symphony, which recorded it; concerti for cellist Joshua Roman, violist Paul Neubauer, and flutist Marina Piccinini; a quartet for the Borromeo String Quartet; a series of works for Tippet Rise Art Center; and a horn concerto for the Royal Liverpool Orchestra and Grant Park Music Festival.

One of America's most honored composers, Kernis won Northwestern's Nemmers Award (2011) and was inducted into the Classical Music Hall of Fame. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he received the coveted Grawemeyer Award in Music Composition (2002) for the cello and orchestra version of *Colored Field*, and the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for his String Quartet No. 2 (*musica instrumentalis*). He has also been awarded the Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Rome Prize, an NEA grant, a Beams Prize, and a New York Foundation for the Arts Award. He is the Workshop Director of the Nashville Symphony Composer Lab, and for 11 years served as New Music Adviser to the Minnesota Orchestra, with which he co-founded and directed its Composer Institute for 15 years.

Kernis first came to national attention in 1983 with the acclaimed premiere of his first orchestral work, *dream of the morning sky*, by the New York Philharmonic at its Horizons Festival. He was born in Philadelphia on January 15, 1960 and began his musical studies on the violin; at age 12 he began teaching himself piano and, the following year, composition. He attended the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and Manhattan and Yale Schools of Music. Leta Miller's book-length portrait of Kernis and his work was published in 2014 by University of Illinois Press as part of its American Composer series. He has taught composition at Yale School of Music since 2003.

Mozart en Route (or, A Little Traveling Music) is a brief string trio composed in 1991, inspired by a letter Mozart wrote describing a bumpy carriage ride: "for two whole stages I sat with my hands dug into the upholstery and my behind suspended in the air." Kernis' playful pastiche quotes Mozart's Divertimento for Strings, K.563, and also evokes country fiddling and Nashville-style popular music.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) is a more familiar figure to the general public than most composers, if for no other reason than the tremendously successful play and movie *Amadeus*, exaggerated though they may have been. Born in Salzburg, Austria to Leopold Mozart, a well-respected musician himself, he was the most prodigious of child prodigies, coming to the attention of Europe's musical elite both as a performer and a composer well before his tenth birthday. He of course had to struggle to earn a decent living, serving as concertmaster in the orchestra and then organist for the Archbishop of Salzburg before moving to Vienna, where he eventually attained the position of composer of the Imperial and Royal Chamber. Somehow, even with a busy performing schedule, he managed to write an absolutely staggering amount of music in his short life; his catalog includes 21 stage and opera works, 15 Masses, over 50 symphonies, 25 piano concertos, 12 violin concertos, 27 concert arias, 17 piano sonatas, 26 string quartets, and many other pieces. Mozart died of rheumatic fever just short of his 36th birthday.

In 1777, having reached twenty-one years old, Mozart was feeling limited by the pedestrian musical tastes of the Archbishop in Salzburg and set out on tour to look for another post. In Mannheim he was fortunate to meet the virtuoso flutist Johann Baptist Wendling, a member of the court orchestra, who gave him a room, a piano to work at, and a number of helpful connections and recommendations. One of those was to a wealthy amateur flutist named Willem Van Britten Dejong (though Mozart referred to him as De Jean), a surgeon for the Dutch East India Company. Dejong asked him for “three short, simple concertos and a couple of quartets for the flute,” and offered a nice fee of 200 gulden. Apparently the commission was not as easy a task as it might have seemed; Wolfgang wrote to his father as follows:

It is not surprising I’ve been unable to finish all the pieces for Monsieur De Jean. I never have a single quiet hour here, so that I can only compose in the late hours of the night. Then, of course, I cannot get up early as well. Besides, one is not always in the mood for working. I could, to be sure, scribble off things the whole day long, but a composition of this kind goes out into the world, and naturally I do not want to be ashamed of my name on a title page. Moreover, you know I become quite powerless whenever I must write for an instrument I cannot bear!

A lot is made of this comment about “an instrument I cannot bear,” but Mozart was famously impulsive, and his communications with his family and friends were extremely casual and often humorous; there is really no reason to believe that he sincerely hated the flute as is often remarked. In any event, he did find himself in a dispute with Dejong over the fee and ended up settling for 96 gulden in exchange for two concertos – one being a transcription of an earlier oboe concerto – and three quartets for flute and strings. The D Major quartet on today’s program is the most substantial, with a tuneful, memorable Allegro in standard sonata form, a beautiful slow melody over pizzicato strings in the Adagio, and a lively Rondo finale with the flute and violin in playful dialogue.

Elliott Schwartz (1936-2016) was born in New York to a family of physicians. He initially seemed headed to medical school as well, but instead returned to music – he was an accomplished concert pianist by the age of fifteen – for a graduate degree at Columbia University. He soon joined the music faculty at Bowdoin College and served there for 43 years, becoming the most influential teacher and mentor for generations of composers in Maine.

His own music is remarkably wide-ranging in conception and techniques, ranging from through-composed works in a primarily 12-tone language, to pieces with aleatoric, improvised, and theatrical elements, to electronic music created with tape and synthesizers. “My teaching was very influential upon my composing,” he said. “Various sorts of experimental ideas, techniques which I had read about and had been exposed to by going to other concerts, which of course I taught my students about, they seemed so tempting that I was obviously led into trying them myself.”

Schwartz’s music has been performed by ensembles all over the United States and beyond, including the Minnesota Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Milwaukee

Symphony, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Contemporary Chamber Ensemble, ALEA III, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, New York Chamber Soloists, Atlanta Virtuosi, Tremont Quartet, Esbjerg Ensemble (Denmark), Lontano (UK), and Spectrum (UK). He received a Dutch Gaudeamus Prize, two Rockefeller Foundation residencies at Bellagio, Italy, three grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, an NEA Consortium commission, and a McKim Fund commission from the Library of Congress. Schwartz also wrote extensively about music, publishing *Music: Ways of Listening*, *Electronic Music: A Listener's Guide*, *Music since 1945* (co-author with Daniel Godfrey) and the anthology *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music* (co-editor with Barney Childs).

Composer's Program Note:

In my 1998 composition *Vienna Dreams* for viola, clarinet and piano, fragments of three Viennese chamber works – the Mozart trio for these same instruments, the Schubert “Arpeggione” sonata, and the Brahms clarinet-cello-piano trio – intersect and interact with each other in a state of free association. While a number of quotes are fairly literal, and may be recognizable, quite a few have been distorted, pulverized, and grafted onto other Viennese neighbor-fragments.

Moreover, there is another prominent level of quotation, suggesting that the three main sources (Mozart, Schubert, Brahms) are being filtered through the sensibility – perhaps the “memory” – of a fourth Viennese composer, Gustav Mahler.

Finally, a colleague has pointed out to me that the overall harmonic language of *Vienna Dreams* may reveal the presence (or ghost) of a fifth Viennese figure – Arnold Schoenberg – hovering over the entire fabric.

From the perspective of his impact on the composers who followed him, **Arnold Schoenberg** (1874-1951) can credibly be called the most influential composer of the 20th century, despite the fact that his music is still controversial enough to be polarizing for many mainstream audiences. His personality and his compositional career were marked by a painfully honest, uncompromisingly sincere quest for truth and innovation. Despite his late start and nearly complete lack of formal musical training, Schoenberg became one of the greatest composition teachers of all time. The foreword to his *Harmonielehre*, a textbook he wrote for the study of harmony, contains the following passage: “I hope my students will search! Because they will know that one searches only for its own sake, that finding is indeed the goal, but can easily mean the end of striving.”

Schoenberg was born to a Jewish family in Prague and lived most of his life in Austria and Germany, immigrating to the United States in 1933 and settling in Los Angeles to teach at UCLA. His family was somewhat poor, and most of his early musical studies were on his own. His first composition teacher was Alexander von Zemlinsky, who, only three years older, had had the benefit of studies at the Vienna Conservatory. Always independently minded, Schoenberg was his own best teacher, however, and studied the great composers of earlier times with tremendous depth and insight. Even after the development of the twelve-tone method in the early

1920s, his composition pupils were required to develop an exhaustive understanding of traditional form, harmony and counterpoint. His method of serial, or twelve-tone, composition has had a profound impact on every serious composer in the tradition of Western art music since, whether or not they choose to utilize its methods in their own work. Prominent contemporaries such as Stravinsky and Hindemith, who at first ignored or even opposed the twelve-tone method, eventually experimented with serial composition techniques. Often decried for destroying the language of tonality, Schoenberg in fact considered himself to be furthering the traditions in which he was raised; he considered his compositional methods to be the necessary extension of chromatic tonality as practiced by Gustav Mahler, and his guiding principle of “developing variation” was inspired most directly by the work of Johannes Brahms.

Das Buch der hängenden Gärten (The Book of Hanging Gardens), a song cycle for soprano and piano, was composed in 1908 and 1909 and premiered in January 1910 by Austrian singer Martha Winternitz-Dorda and pianist Etta Werndorff. The fifteen songs of Schoenberg’s full cycle are settings of a longer cycle of poems of the same title published in 1895 by the German symbolist poet Stefan George (1868-1933), and are also commonly known as the George Lieder. On today’s concert we will hear eight of the songs.

George’s story recounts the sexual awakening of a young prince in a utopian garden. After he consummates his desire with his lover, they part ways and then the garden itself dies. By choosing to set just fifteen of the thirty-one poems, Schoenberg resisted the overarching narrative in favor of aphoristic portraits of moods and fleeting thoughts – a central aspect of the aesthetic he was establishing as he was developing his musical language of free atonality, or “the emancipation of dissonance.” In fact, *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* is a hallmark work in Schoenberg’s development, and song number 14, “Sprich nicht immer,” is the most groundbreaking of all. George’s poem contains fourteen lines of just two or three words each, and Schoenberg’s setting is only eleven measures of music – foreshadowing the extreme brevity that would later become the most radical characteristic of the work of his pupil Anton von Webern.

In his own notes for the piece Schoenberg wrote:

With the George Lieder I have for the first time succeeded in approaching an ideal of expression and form which has been in my mind for years. Until now, I lacked the strength and confidence to make it a reality. But now that I have set out along this path once and for all, I am conscious of having broken through every restriction of a bygone aesthetic. [...] I am being forced in this direction not because my invention or technique is inadequate, nor because I am uninformed about all the other things the prevailing aesthetics demand, but that I am obeying an inner compulsion, which is stronger than any upbringing: that I am obeying the formative process which, being the one natural to me, is stronger than my artistic education.

Rather than relying on the familiar developmental tools of tonal harmony, Schoenberg instead manipulates and develops small motivic elements – in this case mostly a three-note combination of G-sharp, A, and D – to give each work a sense of unity and structure. As he would so often point out to his students, this was not fundamentally different from the compositional techniques

of Beethoven and Brahms, but of course the absence of familiar tonal structures made Schoenberg's works sound very different.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a native of Hamburg, Germany. His father, a double bass player, was the first member of his family to be a professional musician, and had to make a living without much support. Much of the younger Brahms' early musical training was put to use arranging and composing for dance orchestras and other small ensembles performing for public and private functions. He showed early promise as a pianist, nearly embarking on a career as a child prodigy showcase performer. Instead, he directed his energies toward more extensive composition study. In 1848, a flood of Hungarian refugees came through Hamburg, and Brahms met the violinist Eduard Reményi, who later engaged him as accompanist for a concert tour. Reményi taught Brahms the authentic *alla zingarese* style that became an important part of his musical vocabulary. While on tour he met the violinist Joseph Joachim, who, although only in his early twenties himself, was already one of Germany's most prominent musicians. They quickly formed a bond that would last their lifetimes, despite the inevitable periods of estrangement that would spring up between two such strong personalities. Joachim convinced Brahms to travel to Düsseldorf to introduce himself to Robert and Clara Schumann, and musical history was set in motion.

Robert Schumann wasted no time in proclaiming the young Brahms the savior of Germanic music – the implication being that he would save it from the likes of Wagner and Liszt. Within a month of their first meeting, he published an article in the *Neue Zeitschrift* under the title “Neue Bahnen” (“New Paths”) describing the 20-year-old Brahms as “someone [who] must and would suddenly appear, destined to give ideal presentation to the highest expression of the time, who would bring us his mastership not in the process of development, but springing forth like Minerva fully armed from the head of Jove. And he is come, a young blood by whose cradle graces and heroes kept watch... ‘This is one of the elect’...” The purple language continues, revealing at least as much about the manic side of Schumann's mental illness as it does about his assessment of Brahms' talent. Following Robert's nervous breakdown less than a year later, Brahms spent a great deal of time with Clara and, although he was fourteen years younger, fell in love with her. He remained devoted to her throughout his life, although the initial passion faded to a more appropriate and realistic affection between confidantes.

By the end of his life, Brahms had fulfilled the spirit of Robert Schumann's predictions, serving as the foil to Wagner in the minds of those who placed supreme value on upholding and furthering tradition. In truth, the two men shared a real, if grudging, mutual admiration. For those of us who care more about the music itself than the politics of the 19th century musical world, the significance of Brahms' work lies in his synthesis of Classical balance with Romantic humanity and emotion, and his ability to honor tradition while creating an instantly recognizable personal voice.

Brahms wrote the A Major Piano Quartet in 1861. He had recently moved out of his family home, and the piece is dedicated to Elisabeth Rösing, his landlady in a suburb of Hamburg and one of the hosts of the regular musical gatherings he attended. Still a young man, Brahms was intensely engaged in the study of music of the past, and Schubert's chamber music had been a

particular fascination. Like the best of Schubert's music, the A Major quartet is both expansive in scale and intimate in feeling, but it is also an early example of many of the innovations that would characterize Brahms' output. The alternating eighth notes and triplets in the opening melody reappear throughout, often expressed as two-against-three, and he generates rhythmic activity and dramatic tension by obscuring the meter in ways that are utterly unlike his models from the 18th and early 19th century. Some commentators speculate that Brahms' rhythmic playfulness was inspired by polyphonic music of the Renaissance, when regular metric emphasis was much less prominent.

The second movement contains a striking homage to Schubert; the basic key of E Major is interrupted by an outburst in f minor, reminiscent of a harmonic event in the same keys in the second movement of Schubert's C Major String Quintet (which you may remember from Chameleon's April 2019 program). The trio of the scherzo movement is largely constructed as a canon, a contrapuntal device used often by Haydn in similar movements. The G minor Piano Quartet, composed earlier in the same year, is generally played more often, in large part because of its wonderful finale movement in the Hungarian *alla zingarese* style. The finale of the A Major, no less exhilarating, also owes quite a bit to Hungarian dance styles, but it is much more abstract, taking a step toward the grand finales that would be more suitable for most of his later symphonic works.

- *Gabriel Rice*

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