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# Avila Chamber Music Celebration

*Inaugural Season*



Thursday, January 10 *Central Bank*



Saturday, January 12 *Governor's Palace*



Sunday, January 13 *La Belle Alliance*

## About the Artists

### Anne-Marie McDermott *Artistic Director / piano*



Photo: Steve J. Sherman

A luminous, boldly emotive pianist who conveys great sensitivity and spirituality through her playing, **Anne-Marie McDermott** is widely celebrated for her performances on the world's illustrious stages—in recital, as a soloist with orchestra or as part of a chamber music ensemble. Highlights of recent seasons include performances with the Minnesota Orchestra, New Jersey Symphony, Houston Symphony, Alabama Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Charlotte Symphony and Dallas Symphony, among others. Ms. McDermott continues her highly acclaimed collaboration with violinist Nadja Salerno Sonnenberg, in both recital and on recordings. As an artist member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Ms. McDermott was the curator and featured performer of a three-concert Centennial Shostakovich Celebration. In recital, Ms. McDermott has been presenting Bach's Goldberg Variations, in conjunction with a planned recording of the work later in the season.

She has premiered numerous new American works and will be presenting the world premiere of Charles

Wourinen's Fourth Piano Sonata. A passionate champion of the music of Prokofiev, Anne-Marie McDermott performed the complete cycle of sonatas to great acclaim at the Lincoln Center Festival, the University of Arizona, Chamber Music Northwest and at UCLA. She has recordings on Arabesque Records, NSS and GMN labels, and Bridge Records will release Ms. McDermott's latest CD of the complete works of George Gershwin for Piano and Orchestra, with the Dallas Symphony. Recital engagements have included New York's 92nd Street "Y", Town Hall and Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center, San Francisco's Herbst Theatre and she regularly performs at the leading summer festivals. Ms. McDermott is the recipient of numerous awards. Anne-Marie began playing the piano at age 5 and by 12 she had performed the Mendelssohn Concerto in G minor at Carnegie Hall. She studied at the Manhattan School of Music as a scholarship student with Dalmo Carra, Constance Keene and John Browning. Ms. McDermott was recently appointed as a Piano Professor at New York University's Piano Studies department.

### Ida Kavafian *violin*



Photo: Christian Steiner

Violinist/Violist **Ida Kavafian** enjoys an international reputation as one of the most active and versatile musicians performing today. Artist-Member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and former Violinist of the renowned Beaux Arts Trio, some of her many activities presently include performing as a soloist, in recital, with her sister Ani, as guest violist with ensembles such as the Guarneri, Orion and American String Quartets, as Artistic Director of the highly successful festival, Music from Angel Fire in New Mexico, and as a faculty member at The Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and the Conservatory of Music at Bard College. With a repertoire as diverse as her career, she has premiered many new works, including concerti by Toru Takemitsu and Michael Daugherty, has toured and recorded with jazz greats Chick Corea and Wynton Marsalis, and has had a solo feature on

CBS Sunday Morning. Co-founder of the innovative group TASHI more than thirty years ago, Ms. Kavafian more recently co-founded a piano quartet called OPUS ONE. Born in Istanbul, Turkey of Armenian parentage, she is a graduate of the Juilliard School, where she was a student of Oscar Shumsky. She was presented in her debut by Young Concert Artists with pianist Peter Serkin and was a winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. When at home either in Connecticut or Philadelphia with her husband, Violist Steven Tenenbom, Ms. Kavafian can be found pursuing one of the most important activities in her life, breeding and training prize-winning Hungarian Vizsla show dogs under the kennel name Opus One Vizslas. Even in this field, Ms. Kavafian has enjoyed great success, having bred, trained and owned the Number One Vizsla All Systems in the US for the year 2003 and the National Champion of 2007.

### Cathy Meng Robinson *violin*



Photo: Lynne Mazza

Violinist **Cathy Meng Robinson** is a founding member of the Miami String Quartet which will be celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. As a member of the quartet she has performed extensively throughout the United States and Europe. In addition to their touring schedule the quartet serves as Quartet in Residence at Kent State University and as visiting Quartet in Residence

at the Hart School of Music. Awards with the quartet include the Cleveland Quartet Award, 1st prize in the Concert Artist Guild competition, as well as prizes in the Evian and London quartet competitions. The quartet has performed at many of the country's top summer music festivals, including Angelfire, Santa Fe, Blossom, La Jolla, Bravo/Vail, Music from Menlo, Virginia Arts

## About the Artists

Cathy Meng Robinson - *Cont.*

Festival, and Chamber Music Northwest. She has recorded with the quartet for BMG Conifer, Pyramid, and Musical Heritage Society labels. Cathy is a native of Greenville, SC where she began violin at the age of six. She received her Bachelor of Music Degree from

the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Ivan Galamian and David Cerone. She then received her Master's Degree from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Isadore Tinkleman. Her violin is a Nicholas Gagliano, made in 1732.

### Paul Neubauer *viola*



Photo: Richard Termine

Violist Paul Neubauer's musical endeavors are consistently creative in his roles as soloist, chamber musician, and music director.

This season starts and ends with works that he premiered - he performs the revised Bartók Viola Concerto with the New Mexico Symphony at the opening of their season and ends with a performance of Joan Tower's "Purple Rhapsody" for viola and orchestra at the 2008 International Viola Congress in June. He collaborates with the Emerson Quartet in the United States and Europe and performs in recital with pianist Vladimir Feltsman. In New York he appears with the Sejong Soloists at Zankel Hall and premieres Joan Tower's "Simply Purple" for solo viola at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Neubauer is the orchestra and chamber music director of the OK MOZART Festival in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. Strings Magazine recently wrote of his "Schumann-Romance" CD with pianist Anne-Marie McDermott: "From Neubauer's almost painfully beautiful entrance in the first of the Op.

94 Romances to the quiet sighs of the last of the four charming Fairy Tale Pieces, Op. 113, this is an exceptional release in every way." Other recent recordings include the following works written for him: Wild Purple for solo viola by Joan Tower; Viola Rhapsody, a concerto by Henri Lazarof; and Soul Garden for viola and chamber ensemble by Derek Bermel. At age 21 he became the youngest principal string player in the history of the New York Philharmonic. Mr. Neubauer has appeared with the New York, Los Angeles, Helsinki, and Royal Liverpool philharmonics; the National, St. Louis, Detroit, Dallas, San Francisco, and Bournemouth symphonies; and the Santa Cecilia, English Chamber, and Beethovenhalle orchestras. He gave the world premiere of the revised Bartók Viola Concerto as well as concertos by Tower, Picker, Jacob, Lazarof, Suter, Müller-Siemens, Ott, and Friedman. Mr. Neubauer is on the faculty of The Juilliard School and Mannes College.

### Steven Tenenbom *viola*



Photo: Lois Greenfield

Violist **Steven Tenenbom** has established a distinguished career as a chamber musician, soloist, recitalist and teacher. His impeccable style and sumptuous tone have combined to make him one of the most respected violists performing today. In great demand as a chamber musician, Mr. Tenenbom has appeared as guest artist with such eminent ensembles as the Guarneri and Emerson String Quartets, the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson and Beaux Arts Trios, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Chamber Music at the "Y." He has appeared as soloist with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Brandenburg Ensemble in performances at Boston's Symphony Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, Avery Fisher Hall in New York City, and on tour in Japan. Recent seasons have included recital performances in New York and California, and concerto performances in Washington State, Michigan, Arizona and Ohio. Mr. Tenenbom is the violist of the Orion String Quartet, one of the most outstanding and eloquent ensembles performing today. In addition to their many performances both nationally and internationally, they are the Quartet-in-Residence of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Mannes College of Music and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival; and have toured widely with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, premiering this unique collaboration at Hancher Auditorium, Iowa City.

As a member of the prestigious group TASHI, Mr. Tenenbom has also had a long association with the Marlboro Music Festival, including many tours across the United States, Japan and France. Other festival credits include the June Music, La Jolla, Mostly Mozart, Chamber Music Northwest, Music from Angel Fire, and Bravo! Colorado. Devoted to the music of our time, he has worked closely with such diverse composers as Lukas Foss, John Corigliano and jazz greats Chick Corea and Wynton Marsalis. Mr. Tenenbom is on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he is the Coordinator of String and Piano Chamber Music. He also serves on the faculties of the Juilliard School and the Bard College Conservatory of Music. He has recorded on RCA Records with TASHI and the Guarneri String Quartet, and can also be heard on the Sony Classical, Marlboro Recording Society, Delos, ECM and Arabesque labels. Born in Phoenix, Arizona, Mr. Tenenbom began his early studies with Max Mandel. He then attended the University of Southern California as a pupil of Milton Thomas. Further studies carried him to the Curtis Institute of Music, where he worked with Michael Tree and Karen Tuttle. Married to violinist Ida Kavafian, the Tenenboms live in Connecticut, where they breed, raise and show champion Vizsla purebred dogs.

## About the Artists

### Keith Robinson *cello*



Photo: Lynne Mazza

**Keith Robinson**, a founding member of the Miami String Quartet, has been active as a chamber musician, recitalist, and soloist since his graduation from the Curtis Institute of Music. A member of the Thouvenel and Montani Quartets, he subsequently helped found the Miami Quartet in 1988, the same year they won the grand prize at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet went on to garner prizes at the Evian, London, and, most recently, the Concert Artists Guild competition in New York, where they were the first quartet in ten years to win the first prize in that competition. Solo appearances with orchestra include the Palm Beach Symphony, The Midland-Odesa Symphony, The Miami Chamber Symphony, and the Curtis Symphony Orchestra. In 1989, Keith won the P.A.C.E. "Classical Artist of the Year" award, which promoted him throughout South Florida as a recitalist. As a member of the Miami Quartet, he has appeared as a soloist with the American Sinfonietta, the New World Symphony and the Miami Chamber Symphony. He has recordings on the BMG, Pyramid, CRI, Klavier, Albany, Koch, Musical Heritage Society and Audiophon

labels. Along with the other members of the Miami Quartet, he serves as an Artist-in-Residence at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. They are also Quartet-in-Residence at the Kent / Blossom Music Festival at Kent State University, as well as visiting guest artists at the Hartt School of Music in Hartford, Connecticut. Recent Festivals include Music@Menlo, Bravo! Vail Valley, Ravinia, Mostly Mozart, Music from Angel Fire, The Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, La Jolla Summerfest in San Diego, Taos School of Music, Eastern Music Festival, Chamber Music Northwest, Strings in the Mountains, The Maui Chamber Music Festival, Brevard Music Festival, and the Pensacola Chamber Music Festival. The Miami Quartet was recently appointed to the Chamber Music Two Program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York City. Hailing from a musical family, his siblings include Sharon Robinson of the Kalichstien-Laredo-Robinson Trio, and Hal Robinson, principal bass of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Both of his parents were members of the Houston Symphony. Mr. Robinson plays a Giovanni Grancino cello dated 1690 made in Milan, Italy.

### Sophie Shao *cello*



Photo: Christian Steiner

Cellist **Sophie Shao** is rapidly gaining international acclaim for her brilliant, mature interpretations of repertoire ranging from Bach and Beethoven to Crumb and Wilson. Winner of top prizes at the 2001 Rostropovich International Violoncello Competition, the XII International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2002, and a 1996 Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient, she has performed as a soloist with L'Orchestre de Paris with Christoph Eschenbach, American Symphony Orchestra with Leon Botstein, Russian State Academic Symphony, Houston Symphony, among many others, and has appeared in performances throughout North America, Canada, Europe, Japan and Taiwan.

In great demand as a chamber musician, she has collaborated with such distinguished artists as Gary Graffman, David Shifrin, Jaime Laredo, Andre Previn, Eugene Istomin, Cho-Liang Lin, Paquito D'Rivera, Fred Sherry, Ani Kavafian, Claude Frank, Andre Watts, Martha Argerich, and Christoph Eschenbach. Ms. Shao's many festival appearances include Marlboro, Chamber Music Northwest, Bard, Caramoor, Bridgehampton, Sarasota, Music from Angel Fire, Vail, Saratoga, and Ravinia.

Ms. Shao can be heard on EMI Classics, playing Andre Previn's *Reflections* with the Curtis Orchestra under the direction of the composer. Her 1995 performance of Mendelssohn's *Quartet in A minor* appears on Marlboro Music Festival's 50th Anniversary Album on Bridge Records. Released by Albany Records in 2005, "Diablerie" features the music of composer Richard Wilson, performed by Rolfe Schulte, violin, Sophie Shao, cello, Allen Blustine, clarinet, and Richard Wilson, piano.

A native of Houston, Texas, Ms. Shao began playing the cello at age six, and was a student of Shirley Trepel, former principal cellist of the Houston Symphony. At age thirteen she enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, studying cello with David Soyer and chamber music with Felix Galimir. After graduating from the Curtis Institute, she continued her cello studies with Aldo Parisot at Yale University, receiving a B.A. in Religious Studies from Yale College and an M.M. from the Yale School of Music, where she was enrolled as a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellow. She is currently on the faculty of Vassar College and the Bard Conservatory of Music.

## Program

### Thursday Evening, January 10, 8:00 p.m. Central Bank

Johann Sebastian Bach  
1685-1750

English Suite No. 2 in A Minor, BWV 807  
*Prelude*  
*Allemande*  
*Courante*  
*Sarabande*  
*Bourrée I / Bourrée II*  
*Gigue*

*Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

Robert Schumann  
1810-1856

Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor, Opus 63  
*Mit Energie und Leidenschaft*  
*Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch*  
*Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung*  
*Mit Feuer*

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Sophie Shao, cello • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

### Intermission

Johannes Brahms  
1833-1897

String Sextet in B Flat Major, Opus 18  
*Allegro, ma non troppo*  
*Andante, ma moderato*  
*Scherzo: Allegro molto*  
*Rondo: Poco Allegretto e grazioso*

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Cathy Meng Robinson, violin • Steven Tenenbom, viola*  
*Paul Neubauer, viola • Keith Robinson, cello • Sophie Shao, cello*

### Saturday Afternoon, January 12, 5:00 p.m. Governor's Palace

#### "Dynamic Duos"

**Bach: Violin Sonata, BWV 1016**

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

**Boccherini: Cello Duo in C Major**

*Keith Robinson, cello • Sophie Shao, cello*

**Schubert-Tertis: Allegretto for Two Violas and Piano**  
(from the Quartet in G Major, D.887)

*Paul Neubauer, viola • Steven Tenenbom, viola • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

**Shostakovich: 3 Violin Duos**

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Cathy Meng Robinson, violin • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

**Kreisler/Tartini/Tertis: Fugue in D Major for Viola and Cello**

*Paul Neubauer, viola • Sophie Shao, cello*

**Victor Herbert: "Kiss Me Again"**

*Paul Neubauer, viola • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

**Ransom Wilson: "Chant d'Automne"**

*Paul Neubauer, viola • Ida Kavafian, violin • Keith Robinson, cello • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

**Albert Joost: "Lunatic Polka"**

*Paul Neubauer, viola • Ida Kavafian, violin • Keith Robinson, cello • Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

## Program

Sunday Morning, January 13, 11:00 a.m.  
*La Belle Alliance*

Franz Joseph Haydn  
1732-1809

Piano Sonata in G Major Hob.XVI:40  
*Allegretto e innocente*  
*Presto*

*Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

Anton Stepanovich Arensky  
1861-1906

Quartet in A Minor for Violin, Viola  
and Two Cellos, Opus 35  
*Moderato*  
*Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky*  
*Finale*

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Paul Neubauer, viola*  
*Sophie Shao, cello • Keith Robinson, cello*

Ernst von Dohnányi  
1877-1960

Piano Quintet No. 1 in C Minor, Opus 1  
*Allegro*  
*Scherzo: Allegro vivace*  
*Adagio, quasi Andante*  
*Finale: Allegro animato*

*Ida Kavafian, violin • Cathy Meng Robinson, violin*  
*Steven Tenenbom, viola • Keith Robinson, cello*  
*Anne-Marie McDermott, piano*

Our special thanks to  
the Central Bank for  
making available the  
beautiful Atrium for  
the opening night  
concert January 12

AVILA CHAMBER MUSIC  
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**Avila Chamber Music Celebration**  
*Inaugural Season – January 10-13, 2008*



**Program Notes**  
**Thursday, January 10, 8:00 p.m.**

**JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH [1685-1750]**  
**English Suite No. 2 in A Minor for Solo Piano, BWV 807 (ca. 1720)**

Aaron Copland on J.S. Bach: *"What strikes me most markedly about Bach's work is the marvelous rightness of it. It is the rightness not merely of a single individual, but of a whole musical epoch. Never since that time has music so successfully fused contrapuntal skill with harmonic logic. This amalgam of melodies and chords provided Bach with the necessary framework for his massive edifice. Within that edifice is the summation of an entire period, with all the grandeur, nobility, and inner depth that one creative soul could bring to it. It is hopeless, I fear, to attempt to probe further into why his music creates the impression of spiritual wholeness, the sense of his communing with the deepest vision."*

During Bach's time, the suite was one of the most popular forms of extended instrumental compositions. It was generally a set of stylized adaptations of dances that had migrated from the ballroom to the concert room during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The movements are contrasted in mood and character, but usually share the same tonality. Most of the dances are in two sections, each repeated, sometimes with improvised ornamentation or variation when played the second time. When there are pairs of dances of the same type, the first is played again after the second one.

J.S. Bach wrote over two dozen suites, for violin, cello, lute, keyboard and orchestra. Some of them are called "partitas" for no particular reason except perhaps that terminology during this time was often indiscriminate. Also, to add to the confusion, Bach headed the manuscripts of his orchestral suites with the term "overture" and as a result, they are often referred to as his Overtures.

Bach's three sets of keyboard suites — 6 English Suites (BWV 806-811), 6 French Suites (BWV 812-817) and the 6 Partitas (BWV 825-830) — share a consistency in style and design, but there is nothing particularly English or French about them. How they acquired these classifications remains a mystery, though certain theories have been suggested. One proposes that the English and French Suites were written to honor a visit of an important delegation from Great Britain, another notes the resemblance to the popular suites in England by Handel (1685-1759) and by the French composer Charles Dieupart (ca.1667- ca.1740).

The term "suite" as we use it today carries several meanings — a unit of connected rooms, a matching set of furniture, or even a collection of computer software. Musically it refers to a type of composition comprising a series of movements in identical or related keys with common musical ideas. The earliest use of this word in this context was related to the European dances. The slow and stately *pavane* and fast triple *galliard* date as far back as the 1400s. The *sarabande* (slow triple time) came later, sometimes as a prelude and not a dance in itself. The *pavane* and *galliard* later evolved in the French courts into the *allemande* and *courante*. The English *gigue* (or jig) joined the *sarabande* as it also gained popularity. Nonetheless, it took a German composer, J.J. Froberger, to combine these dances into a regular cosmopolitan pattern which, with various options, formed the basis for the instrumental suites of Handel and Bach. The suite would become the mainstay of the Baroque period until it was overtaken by the sonata form in the Classical era (ca.1800s).

Bach was able to combine the grace and refinement of French dance music with concerto elements borrowed from the Italians, yet subjecting it all to the German polyphonic writing at which he was the supreme master. Nowhere is all this more beautifully demonstrated than in his six English Suites, written, it is thought, during his tenure at Weimar.

The title is totally misleading. There is nothing at all "English" in what Bach wrote. Although the autograph manuscript is lost, there are several copies in various hands which give the title simply as "Suites avec préludes". In one copy known to have been in the possession of Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian, the remark "fait pour les Anglais" (made for the English) is added to the title page of the first suite. Forkel describes them in his biography as: "Six great Suites, consisting of preludes, allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, jigs, etc." They are known by the name English Suites because they were composed for an "Englishman of rank". The exact identity of the Englishman we shall probably never know, but the title has endured. Bach follows his usual practice of grouping six pieces together in a collection. They demand the virtuosity that made Bach famous. Bach's compositions in this field are regarded as the pinnacle of the form.

#### **ROBERT SCHUMANN [1810-1856]**

##### **Trio in D Minor for Piano, Violin and Cello, Op. 63 (1847)**

Schumann personifies the artist of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. His turbulent and passionate love affair and ultimate marriage with pianist Clara Wieck, his progressive illness and final breakdown, and his valuable contributions as a music journalist have been given more than enough attention, though this information is important in order to understand Schumann's creative personality and the emotional and intellectual climate of musical Germany at the time. Notable music historian, pianist and harpsichordist John Gillespie aptly describes Robert Schumann's contribution to music history: "Schumann's successful transfer of pure emotion into pure sound was unique in his time and remains so today."

This Piano Trio is a personal work, and in many ways autobiographical. For much of his life Schumann suffered from severe depression. It led to three nervous breakdowns: in 1833, 1844, and 1854. The one in 1844 was catastrophic, and lasted for months. Schumann was unable to sleep, and felt drained of all energy. At first he attributed his collapse to overwork: "I lost every melody just as I thought of it. My inner ear was exhausted." But as his condition persisted, its severity could not be overlooked. "I was often very ill," he confided to a friend. "Dark demons took control of me." Medical practice at the time was of little help, and Schumann discovered that for his recovery he was basically on his own. It was a slow and painstaking process for him. He slowed the pace of his life, and took long walks in the countryside. Composition was put on hold. And vital in his return to health was the role of his wife, renowned pianist Clara Wieck. She supplied constant support and encouragement.

It was characteristic of Schumann to pay tribute to her in two compositions composed not long after his recovery: the Second Symphony, Op. 61 and the Piano Trio, Op. 63. In the Symphony, Schumann secretly embedded melodies associated with Clara, his way of binding the work with her. In many ways the Piano Trio was modeled on the Symphony. The first movement is passionate and filled with sadness. The second movement is not, as would be expected, a slow movement, but a *Scherzo* — as is the case with the Symphony. Again like the Symphony, the slow movement follows, and it contains a poignant duet between violin and cello that is a counterpart to a duet between oboe and bassoon in the Symphony. The fourth movement flows, undeniably triumphant and heroic.



**JOHANNES BRAHMS [1833-1897]**  
**Sextet for Strings in B-flat Major, Op. 18 (1859-1860)**

*"Brahms was a romantic who felt at ease with the mold of classicism."*  
[Renowned cellist Pablo Casals (1876-1973)]

Johannes Brahms gave piano lessons and played in brothels and taverns around Hamburg while pursuing his musical studies. This somewhat unfavorable period ended in 1853, just before his twentieth birthday, with the invitation for a concert tour. Although the tour was undistinguished, Brahms had the good fortune to meet the celebrated Hungarian violinist and conductor Joseph Joachim, with whom an intimate friendship developed. Joachim was responsible for introducing Brahms to Robert Schumann (1810-1856) and his wife, renowned 19th-century pianist Clara Wieck (1819-1896), which proved most beneficial for his career as a composer. Though Brahms' association with Robert was brief, 1853 to Schumann's death in 1856 (also, for the last two years of his life, Schumann was hopelessly ill in a sanatorium), his influence was immeasurable. His friendship with Clara was an extraordinary emotional association that lasted a lifetime. The correspondence between Clara, fourteen years his senior, and Johannes is extensive and their intimacy has always been surrounded with speculation, but remains clouded in mystery. Brahms had a penchant for sarcasm, but behind his intermittent rough exterior lurked an equally strong bent for kindness and good deeds. Brahms was largely self-taught, although he did have contact with the leading music scholars of his day, exchanging views verbally and in writing. In addition to composing, he enjoyed a career as a pianist and conductor.

Brahms had been involved with chamber music from the earliest stages of his commitment to composition. Robert Schumann hailed him as a genius and wrote the press article 'Neue Bahnen' ('New Paths') extolling his achievement and promise. Brahms came to know music from a broader historical range than any composer before; among his special and lasting enthusiasms were Palestrina, Couperin, J.S. Bach, Handel, C.P.E. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and Chopin. More important than knowing and understanding it, he let it influence the development of his own distinctive creative voice.

Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn provided models of quartet- and quintet-writing and although the string quartet was the principal chamber music medium at this time, Brahms seemed to have trouble making the four instruments reflect his musical thoughts. He was also dissatisfied with a later string quintet, which was eventually converted to his quintet for piano and strings. These difficulties paved the way for his two sextets, number one in B-flat major on this evening's program and number 2 in G major, Op. 36 (1864-65), both scored for two violins, two violas and two cellos. The availability of six performers greatly increases the number of different combinations of instruments, affording the composer more textural freedom and expressive capabilities.

This Sextet No. 1 resembles Schumann with its never-ending seem of pleasing musical thoughts and its melodic wealth. The opening movement, *Allegro, ma non troppo*, is set in sonata form and basically follows the expected pattern. The three distinct melodic ideas are convincingly presented, developed and followed by a recapitulation and brief coda. This is a good example of Brahms's use of traditional form, but his sweeping melodies, rhythms, and rich harmonies musically reflect his own era. The *Andante, ma moderato* is a slow theme and

variations; it begins with a simple Hungarian folk melody, beautifully set for a dark quartet of violas and cellos. A series of six variations develops in tension and drama. The first cello's soulful recollection of the original theme, echoed by the violin in pizzicato in Variation VI, gently concludes the movement.

Brahms was fond of this form because it permitted him freedom to combine discipline with imagination. The third movement is a short, bright and bouncy *Scherzo* with an accompanying rustic *Trio*. The final *Rondo* is elaborately developed. A movement of huge proportions, Brahms exploits the thematic elements with great imagination and skill. Brahms succeeded in reconciling Classic and Romantic styles.

The repertoire of important String Sextets consists of a handful of works: the two by Brahms, one by Dvořák (1878), Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* (1887-92), Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (1899), one by Martinu (1932) and the Sextet from Richard Strauss's opera *Capriccio* (1942).

The first public performance of this Sextet took place on October 20, 1860, in Hanover (Germany) with the Joachim Quartet and assisting artists.

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