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Brentano String Quartet
with *Mihae Lee, piano*
January 26, 2025 • Valley Regional High School

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Mark Steinberg, *violin*
Serena Canin, *violin*
Misha Amory, *viola*
Nina Lee, *cello*
with
Mihae Lee, *piano*

PROGRAM

String Quartet in D major, Op. 33, No. 6, Hob.III: 42 Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

I. Vivace assai
II. Andante
III. Scherzo: Allegretto
IV. Finale: Allegretto

String Quartet No. 2 in C major, Op. 36 Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

I. Allegro calmo senza rigore
II. Vivace
III. Chacony: Sostenuto

~ INTERMISSION ~

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 81 Antonín Dvorák (1841-1904)

I. Allegro, ma non tanto
II. Dumka: Andante con moto
III. Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace
IV. Finale: Allegro

Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists.
www.davidroweartists.com brentanoquartet.com

Program Notes

Franz Joseph Haydn: String Quartet in D major, Op. 33, No. 6, Hob.III: 42 (1781)

by Misha Amory

In 1781, Haydn published his opus 33 string quartets, which he advertised as “written in a new and special style.” There has been plenty of debate about what he meant by this: do these quartets really present a departure from his earlier work, and how? Or was it just a sales pitch for this new work, coming after his quite successful and widely circulated opus 20 quartets? Certainly one can perceive new trends in the opus 33: a lightening of tone, an abandoning of the learned fugues that ended several of the opus 20, a replacing of minuet movements with fleeter, cleverer “scherzos.” Witty and innovative as he always was, in the opus 33 he sharpened his attention in this department, finding new comedic timings, sudden stops, reversals of the expected order of events, funny ways of chopping up and jumbling his melodies.

The final quartet in the opus, number 6, announces its “chopped-up” nature right from the opening: its main idea consists of a series of little gestures, courtly bows where nobody can decide who will walk into the room first. The first minute or so of the movement has a surprising number of “ending” moments: apparent attempts to come to a conclusion, when the music has only just begun. This is a favorite trick of the composer, imposing roadblocks and spinning his musical carriage down the road in spite of them. Often the snippet of music that attempts to conclude will become the germ of the new idea, to its own surprise. In the second, developmental section of the movement, Haydn does just that, launching the section with a reversal of the gestures from the beginning, so that the final gesture is now answered by the opening one – a reimagining of that conversation. A few bars later, the entire playbook of sonata form is thrown out of the window, as the moment of return happens in the wrong key, with an appearance of enormous confidence. Hurriedly, the correct key turns up in the second phrase and dismisses the impostor, trying to assure all onlookers that things are under control. But clearly the disturbance has created waves, as the music enters into an extended doubtful passages, modulating and exploring various other keys, working out its issues till it finally re-emerges in the home key – almost stumbling across it! – able to confirm matters with authentic conviction this time.

The slow movement follows, a dark and sorrowful aria in d minor redolent perhaps of Gluck, and strikingly like the slow movement of Mozart’s Oboe Quartet, composed in the same year. The movement showcases Haydn’s love of melodic ambiguity: at the opening, and several more times, the first violin holds a long sustained note while the other voices play figures that might be murmuring accompanimental patterns or might

be melody. Always this relationship is on a knife-edge – does the first-violin note evolve into the “true” melody of the passage, does it continue to stand by, does it get subsumed into the accompanimental rhythms? All of these things happen at one point or another, the melodic role sliding between voices as the music works its way through a richly chromatic landscape. This protean sliding-around – the refusal to assign fixed roles, melodic or accompanimental, to the four parts – is central to the movement’s beauty, a shared grieving whose source of eloquence remains shifting, unclear.

The third movement, the Scherzo for this quartet, begins elegantly enough, with an idea that leans gracefully on downbeats, and is imitated by all the voices as they enter. However, almost right away everybody gets a case of the hiccups, and the wrong notes start poking out. (Or is Haydn laughing at all of us string players who struggle to control our bowstrokes?) By contrast, the middle Trio section, introduced by the cello, doesn’t wait to become wrongfooted: right from the start the melody places its highest, most dissonant note on the upbeat, which makes it hang in a pleasingly awkward, unbalanced way. Once more, lemmings as ever, the other voices jump in and hop around in this unbalanced dance.

In some ways, the Finale is a departure for Haydn. Normally the master of the fake-out – irregular phrase lengths, sudden pauses, elisions, and order-reversals – here he serves up a movement that is utterly regular, almost to the very end. It is a kind of round dance in a comfortable, even jolly Allegretto tempo, alternating major-key and minor-key sections. In the opening section, the melody features a bouncing downward leap, a kid jumping off a slightly too high ledge for fun. The spiky good cheer of the major sections alternate with a smooth, mournful cast in the minor ones. As the movement progresses, the composer weaves embellishments into each section as it returns, triplets and hocket-like offbeats. We are disarmed by the simplicity of this succession, unceasing until three bars before the end, when – Haydn being Haydn – he drops in just one unexpected silence when the players seem to forget their lines; and then he finishes off the piece in one glad swoop.



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Benjamin Britten: String Quartet No. 2 on C Major (1945)

by Barbara Leish

Benjamin Britten was one of the 20th century's most prolific and admired composers, writing hugely popular works like *A Ceremony of Carols* (a Christmas favorite), *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (a children's favorite), and opera favorites such as *Peter Grimes* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Britten always followed his own road. At a time when serialism and other *avant garde* techniques were considered benchmarks of a composer's worth, he rooted his works in tonality, drawing on centuries of musical tradition. The list of 20th-century modernists whom he did admire was short but select: Frank Bridge (his teacher and mentor), Berg, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Shostakovich. In addition, Britten had a strong affection and admiration for the 17th century English Baroque composer Henry Purcell, whom he called "the last important international figure of English music."

Britten first achieved international celebrity with his 1945 opera *Peter Grimes*. That same year, England commemorated the 250th anniversary of Purcell's death. For a celebratory Purcell concert in November, 1945, held in London's Wigmore Hall, Britten composed a stunning contribution: his String Quartet No. 2 in C Major. It is in three movements, with a majestic third movement that is longer than the other two movements combined and that pays direct homage to Purcell.

From beginning to end, the Quartet is an engaging example of Britten's melodic and harmonic adeptness. The first movement opens serenely with a few atmospheric measures based on the interval of a tenth – a striking interval out of which the entire rest of the movement is constructed. What follows is a study of contrasts, with the intimacy of the opening alternating with robust sections of bursting energy, all built from that opening interval. Within a relatively short space, dynamics and sonorities shift from tranquil to agitated to caressing. After many dramatic shifts, the end of the movement returns to the opening serenity, with the cello instructed to play like a harp while the music dies away. But Britten dispels this mood with a driving second movement bursting with agitation and punctuated by piercing chords.

Then Britten turns to the heart of his homage: a final movement that has been called the crown jewel of the Quartet. Using Purcell's terminology, Britten calls the movement "Chacony," the early English term for the style known elsewhere as the chaconne. Britain's Chacony consists of a nine-bar theme, followed by twenty-one variations divided into three groups of six and a group of three. Each group is followed by a cadenza played by, in turn, cello, viola, and violin. In a program note for the premiere, Britten wrote, "The sections may be said to review the theme from (a) harmonic, {b} rhythmic, (c) melodic, and (d) formal aspects." Epic in concept and execution, from the movement's stately opening to the twenty-one massive C Major chords that end the work, the Chacony is a celebration that befits the composer Britten is honoring.

Antonín Dvorák: Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 81 (1887)

by Barbara Leish

"Magnificent" may be an overused word, but it fits Dvorák's Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major. Dvorák was at the peak of his career when he wrote it. He was acknowledged at home and abroad as one of the great composers of his day – a master at evoking his Slavonic musical heritage within the classical traditions of Beethoven, Schubert, and especially his friend Brahms. He was happy in his personal life too. He was contentedly married, his children were flourishing, and after years of financial struggle he could afford to live comfortably. Dvorák had visited his sister-in law and her husband at their chateau in the small village of Vyoská, near Prague, and had fallen in love with the area. Eager for a place that could be a peaceful retreat from his increasingly busy travels abroad, he bought an old farm building that he turned into a summer home for his family. For years he spent long, idyllic summers there. Dvorák wrote many of his famous compositions at Vyoská, including his Symphonies No. 7 and No. 8, some Slavonic Dances, the opera *Rusalka*, and this epic Piano Quintet.

Fifteen years earlier, Dvorák had written an unmemorable Piano Quintet in A Major, which he published as Op. 5. Years later he thought of rewriting it, but then decided to start a new one from scratch, in the same key. What he composed in its place is one of the great piano quintets of the Romantic era – a melodically sumptuous, flawlessly structured, sonically grand work that joyfully blends Europe and Bohemia. Dvorák's brilliant handling of his material begins with the first measures of the opening Allegro, as the cello plays one of Dvorák's meltingly beautiful melodies over the piano's gentle arpeggios. Almost immediately, the mood changes with a rousing series of elaborate transformations of this theme. Not until many measures later does the viola introduce a second, minor-key theme. These contrasts – between gentle and vigorous, major and minor, lyrical and muscular – drive the rest of the movement, through its elaborate development and to its jubilant coda.

The Dumka, with its alternating lament and rhythmic folk dance, was a Dvorák specialty, and this one is superb. The opening melancholy melody alternates with two dances, the first a cheerful melody in D Major, the second a lively, rhythmic Vivace. Each time the lament returns it is treated more elaborately, with increasingly rich textures. Melodic invention and rhythmic verve drive the last two movements. The briskness of the effervescent Scherzo is interrupted by a tranquil trio. There's barely an interruption in the merry Finale, a rhythmic adventure with a fugato in the development, a chorale near the end, and a dazzling, headlong coda.

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CREDIT : EDUARDUS LEE

Brentano String Quartet

Mark Steinberg, *violin*
 Serena Canin, *violin*
 Misha Amory, *viola*
 Nina Lee, *cello*

With a career spanning over three decades, the Brentano Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. *The New York Times* extols its “luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism; and the *Times* (London) hails their “wonderful, selfless music-making.” Known for its unique sensibility, probing interpretive style, and original programming, the Quartet has performed across five continents in the world’s most prestigious venues and festivals, thus establishing itself as one of the world’s preeminent ensembles.

Dedicated and highly sought after as educators, the Quartet has served as Artists-in-Residence at the Yale School of Music for the past decade. They also lead the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and appear regularly at the Taos School of Music. Previously, the Quartet served for fifteen years as Ensemble-in-Residence at Princeton University.

In the 2024-25 concert season, the Quartet will premiere a program called *Evocations of Home*, featuring a new work by Lei Liang in honor of the late composer Chou Wen-chung. In spring 2025, they will perform Haydn’s complete Op. 33 quartets at New York’s Carnegie Hall and in several other U.S. cities. Other recent projects include *Dido Reimagined*, a monodrama for quartet and voice with soprano Dawn Upshaw, composed by Pulitzer-winning composer Melinda Wagner and librettist Stephanie Fleischmann, as well as a viola quintet, *Heart Speaks to Heart*, by composer James MacMillan.

Formed in 1992, The Brentano Quartet has received numerous accolades, including, in 1995, the prestigious Naumburg and Cleveland Quartet Awards. They have been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman and mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, as well as pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Jonathan Biss. The Quartet has commissioned works from some of the most important composers of our time, including Bruce Adolphe, Matthew Aucoin, Gabriela Frank, Stephen Hartke, Vijay Iyer, Steven Mackey, and Charles Wuorinen.

The Quartet’s notable recordings include Beethoven’s Quartet, Op. 131 (Aeon) which was featured in the 2012 film *A Late Quartet*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Christopher Walken, and a 2017 live album with Joyce DiDonato, *Into the Fire – Live from Wigmore Hall* (Warner.) Their most recent release features the K. 428 and K. 465 (*Dissonance*) Quartets of Mozart for the Azica label.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved,” the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

CREDIT : JUERGEN FRANK



Mark Steinberg (*violin*)

Mark Steinberg is an active chamber musician and recitalist. He has been heard in chamber music festivals in Holland, Germany, Austria, and France and participated for four summers in the Marlboro Music Festival, with which he has toured extensively. He has also appeared in the El Paso Festival, on the Bargemusic series in New York, at Chamber Music Northwest, with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and in trio and duo concerts with pianist Mitsuko Uchida, with whom he presented the complete Mozart sonata cycle in London’s Wigmore Hall in 2001, with additional recitals in other cities, a project that continues for the next few years. Mr. Steinberg has been soloist with the London Philharmonia, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Kansas City Camerata, the Auckland Philharmonia, and the Philadelphia Concerto Soloists, with conductors such as Kurt Sanderling, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Miguel Harth-Bedoya. Mark Steinberg holds degrees from Indiana University and The Juilliard School and has studied with Louise Behrend, Josef Gingold, and Robert Mann. An advocate of contemporary music, Mr. Steinberg has worked closely with many composers and has performed with 20th century music ensembles including the Guild of Composers, the Da Capo Chamber Players, Speculum Musicae, and Continuum, with which he has recorded and toured extensively in the U.S. and Europe. He has also performed and recorded chamber music on period instruments with the Helicon Ensemble, the Four Nations Ensemble, and the Smithsonian Institute. He has taught at Juilliard’s Pre-College division, at Princeton University, and New York University, and is currently on the violin faculty of the Mannes College of Music.



Serena Canin (violin)

A native of New York City, violinist Serena Canin is an active chamber musician, teacher and presenter. As a founding member of the Brentano Quartet, she has performed to critical acclaim around the world; she has also been heard at the Marlboro Festival, Chamber Music Quad Cities, Salt Bay Chamberfest, the Festival Internacional de Cartagena, the Continuum Series at Alice Tully Hall, and on tour with Music from Marlboro and the Brandenburg Ensemble. She has

worked with young musicians at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Mannes Beethoven Institute, and the Chamber Music Center of New York. Serena is the director of Music Middays, a noontime series promoting young musicians in New York, where she lives with her husband, pianist Thomas Sauer, and their two sons. She holds degrees from Swarthmore College and The Juilliard School, where she studied with Robert Mann.



Misha Amory (viola)

Since winning the 1991 Naumburg Viola Award, Misha Amory has been active as a soloist and chamber musician. He has performed with orchestras in the United States and Europe, and has been presented in recital at New York's Tully Hall, Los Angeles' Ambassador series, Philadelphia's Mozart on the Square festival, Boston's Gardner Museum, Houston's Da Camera series and Washington's Phillips Collection. He has been invited to perform at the

Marlboro Festival, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, the Vancouver Festival, the Chamber Music Society at Lincoln Center and the Boston Chamber Music Society, and he has released a recording of Hindemith sonatas on the Musical Heritage Society label. Mr. Amory holds degrees from Yale University and The Juilliard School; his principal teachers were Heidi Castleman, Caroline Levine and Samuel Rhodes. Himself a dedicated teacher, Mr. Amory serves on the faculties of the Juilliard School in New York City and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

Nina Lee (cello)

Through a public school program, Nina Lee began learning cello in Chesterfield, MO at the age of ten. Six years later, she left home to study with David Soyer at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, PA. She went on to complete her Bachelors and Masters of Music at The Juilliard School in New York City with Joel Krosnick, attended



the Tanglewood Music Festival, and toured with the Marlboro Music Festival where she collaborated with Mitsuko Uchida, Andras Schiff, Felix Galimir and Samuel Rhodes.

In 1999, Ms. Lee joined the Brentano Quartet with whom she has been privileged to perform throughout North America, Australia, New Zealand, England, France, Germany, Spain, Japan, the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy. In addition, she has not only recorded the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven

but has also championed new music represented in her quartet's commissioned works of Stephen Hartke, Steve Mackey, Vijay Iyer, James MacMillan, Bruce Adolphe, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Shulamit Ran (to name a few).

Among the various projects the Brentano Quartet has undertaken, it was asked to record the soundtrack to the 2012 film, *A Late Quartet* which centered around Beethoven's Op. 131. The film, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman, Christopher Walken and Catherine Keener also featured Ms. Lee playing herself in a cameo.

As important to her life as a musician, Ms. Lee has made a commitment to teaching chamber music. She has been on the faculty at Princeton and Columbia Universities and is currently coaching chamber music at the Yale School of Music where the Brentano Quartet is in residence. She has also participated as a guest faculty member at the St. Lawrence String Quartet Chamber Music Seminar and the Apple Hill Center for Chamber Music. She also has made appearances at the Spoleto Festival USA and La Jolla SummerFest.

Ms. Lee makes her home in Brooklyn, New York where she lives with her husband and two children. When she isn't playing the cello or teaching, she loves spending time with her family, cooking, entertaining, organizing chamber music salons and finding new ways to be creative!



Mihae Lee (piano)


Praised by *Boston Globe* as "simply dazzling," Essex Winter Series Artistic Director and pianist Mihae Lee has captivated audiences throughout North America, Europe, and Asia in solo recitals and chamber music concerts, in such venues as Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Jordan Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Academia Nazionale de Santa Cecilia in Rome, Warsaw National Philharmonic Hall, and Taipei National Hall. An active chamber musician, Mihae is a founding member

of the Triton Horn Trio and was an artist member of the Boston Chamber Music Society for three decades. Her recordings of Brahms, Shostakovich, Bartok, and Stravinsky with


the members of BCMS were critically acclaimed by *High Fidelity*, *CD Review*, and *Fanfare* magazines, the reviews calling her sound “as warm as Rubinstein, yet virile as Toscanini.”

Mihae has appeared frequently at numerous international chamber music festivals including Dubrovnik, Amsterdam, Groningen, Medellin Festicamara, Great Woods, Seattle, OK Mozart, Mainly Mozart, Music from Angel Fire, El Paso, Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Northwest, Rockport, Sebago-Long Lake, Bard, Norfolk, Mostly Music, Music Mountain, and Chestnut Hill Concerts. Mihae has been a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Bargemusic in New York and Speculum Musicae; has collaborated with the Juilliard, Tokyo, Muir, Cassatt, and Manhattan string quartets; and has premiered and recorded works by such composers as Gunther Schuller, Ned Rorem, Paul Lansky, Henri Lazarof, Michael Daugherty, and Ezra Laderman. Mihae is often heard over the airwaves on National Public Radio’s “Performance Today,” and on WNYC and WQXR in New York City, WGBH in Boston, and other stations around the country.

A native of Korea, Mihae is a graduate of The Juilliard School and the New England Conservatory studying with Martin Canin and Russell Sherman. She has released recordings on the Bridge, Etcetera, EDI, Northeastern, and BCMS labels. Since 2016 she serves as Music Director of the Sebago-Long Lake Music Festival in Maine and as of 2024, she serves as the Artistic Director of Chestnut Hill Concerts, which offers a series of August performances locally at The Kate in Old Saybrook, CT. In this 2025 season, Mihae will retire as Artistic Director of Essex Winter Series.



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