



MICHAEL BARENBOIM AND THE WEST-EASTERN DIVAN ENSEMBLE

Tuesday, February 25, 2020, at 7:30pm
Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

MICHAEL BARENBOIM AND THE WEST-EASTERN DIVAN ENSEMBLE

Michael Barenboim, violin

Samir Naser Abdel Hamid Obaido, violin

Yamen Saadi, violin

David Strongin, violin

Miriam Manasherov, viola

Sindy Mohamed, viola

Assif Binness, cello

Astrig Spidak Siranossian, cello

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 18
Allegro ma non troppo
Andante, ma moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio
Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

Benjamin Attahir
(b. 1989)

Jawb for String Octet
new work commissioned by West-Eastern Divan Ensemble

20-minute intermission

Giuseppe Tartini
(1692-1770)

Violin Sonata in G Minor, B.g5, "Devil's Trill"
Larghetto affettuoso
Tempo giusto della Scuola Tartinista
Sogni dell'autore: Andante; Allegro assai

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20
Allegro moderato con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo
Presto

Michael Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble appear on tour with the support of CAMI Music (New York), the Daniel Barenboim Stiftung (Berlin), and the Barenboim-Said Foundation USA.

From soloists to quartets to chamber ensembles, the Classical Mix series creates a varied blend of outstanding musical experiences. The 2019-20 series includes Jupiter String Quartet with Jon Nakamatsu, piano (September 17), The King's Singers: Finding Harmony (November 5), Michael Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble (February 25), Fauré Quartett (March 31), and Takács Quartet with Erika Eckert, viola (April 21). For more information about these events, please visit KrannertCenter.com/calendar.

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

JAWB

J'ai traversé des paysages

comme on traverse une frontière

un océan fer et cendres

Embrasé

Jamais se retourner

je m'étais dit

jamais plus se retourner

sur ces paysages que mes yeux

Embrassaient

Liaient, reliaient,

reliaient

sans jamais leur donner sens

S'avancer

Simplement dans l'épaisseur du noir

Jamais le même noir

je me suis dit

je reconnais ce noir

et mes yeux me disaient le contraire

Oublie

Maintenant j'ai tout oublié

les attaches, le port, la barque

il ne reste plus que nous

nous que cette mer toujours

sépare.

JAWB

I have crossed lands

like one crosses a border

an ocean of iron and ashes

Burning

Never to go back

I had told myself

never again to go back

to these lands that my eyes

Beheld

Linked, connected

reread

without ever giving them meaning

Stepping forward

Simply in the thickness of dark

Never the same dark

I said to myself

I recognize this darkness

but my eyes told me the opposite

Forget it

Now I've forgotten everything

the ties, the port, the boat

there's nothing left but us

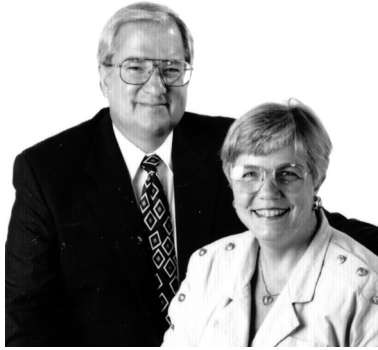
us whom this sea always

separates.

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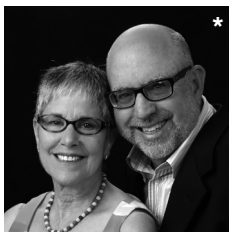
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PROGRAM NOTES

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 18

Walter Willson Cobbett, in his *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* first published by Oxford Press in 1929, speaks of Brahms' String Sextet No. 1 and its "pervading Olympian calm asserted in the opening and maintained throughout at a height which annihilates the distinction between 'Classical' and 'Romantic,' and which is as far above formality as it is above more tempting foolishness." A mouthful, indeed, yet the statement points directly to Brahms' genius in presenting the string sextet, not as a string quartet plus two or a doubling of a string trio but in a form all its own, reflecting, if anything, the serenades of Mozart and Beethoven but with an imprint singularly his own.

Form begets substance in both of Brahms' sextets, this one and the later Op. 36, as they reflect a certain leisureliness and luxury foreign to the stricter string quartet form Brahms wrestled with and did not bring to fruition until some 10 years after the sextets. The B-flat String Sextet was written between 1858 and 1860 during a particularly happy time in Brahms' life when he had accepted a brief position at the Court of Detmold deep in Germany's Teutoburg Forest. His despair over the death of Robert Schumann had abated and even his unrequited love for Clara Schumann had been abandoned. So it is that this first Sextet exudes a certain sunniness and ease we seldom associate with Brahms because of the profound self-criticism he attached to all his writing. He continued to work on the first Sextet after he left Detmold, and the work had its premiere in Hanover in 1860 by an ensemble that included Brahms' great friend and musical advisor, violinist Joseph Joachim. Many critics consider this his most beautiful work.

The first movement is almost Schubert-like in its Viennese waltz time, except it bears Brahms' affinity for the linking of melodic motifs. The second movement is in the form of a theme and, in this case, six variations. The third movement Scherzo, with its vigorous intervening Trio section is typical of Brahms' earlier period when he so honored Beethoven. Both respect for Classical style and a Romantic spirit are honored again in the carefree Rondo although the first cello's opening announcement is a new effect.

BENJAMIN ATTAHIR

Born February 25, 1989 in Toulouse, France

Jawb for String Octet

In this concert, the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble introduces us to its 2019 commission from composer Benjamin Attahir, who was born in Toulouse, France, only 30 years ago. Attahir studied with such notables as Édith Canat de Chizy, Marc-André Dalbavie, Gérard Pesson, and Pierre Boulez. He perfected his violin skills with Amy Flammer and performed in ensembles such as the Jersey Chamber Orchestra and L'Ensemble Intercontemporain. He has won numerous competitions in France, the United States and elsewhere.

Attahir's works have been performed in distinguished venues by l'Orchestre National de France, l'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, l'Orchestra de Capitoile de Toulouse, the Orchestra of Helsinki, l'Ensemble Intercontemporain, Les Éléments, the Trio Zadid, les Quatros Arod et Van Kuijk, and the Tokyo Sinfonietta.

In addition to Krannert Center, Attahir's *Jawb* is performed this season at Carnegie Hall.

GIUSEPPE TARTINI

Born April 8, 1692, in Piran, Slovenia

Died February 26, 1770, in Padua, Italy

Violin Sonata in G Minor, B.g5, "Devil's Trill"

The many aspects of Tartini's life are fascinating. After being charged by a famous cardinal with the abduction of his wife, he escaped to a monastery in Assisi, Italy, where he took up the violin and became the first known owner of a Stradivarius. He later was appointed Maestro di Cappella at the Basilica di Sant'Antonio in Padua. In 1726, he founded a violin school that attracted students from all over Europe. His home town of Piran still bears his statue, and an annual concert there in the Piazza Tartini celebrates his birthday.

While Tartini was a prolific composer, the so-called "Devil's Trill" Sonata is his most famous work. With its many double-stop trills, it is considered one of the most technically demanding in the violin repertoire. According to a story told by Tartini himself, he wrote the work after his dream in which the devil played the violin with such virtuosity that it inspired him to compose the "Devil's Trill." Tartini claimed to have written the Sonata in 1713, but scholars think it may have been composed as late as the 1740s because of its stylistic maturity. It was not published until 30 years after Tartini's death. Today it is perceived as the inspiration for Cesare Pugni's ballet *Le Violon du diable* and Chopin's Prelude No. 7. The emotional impact of the work might well cause one to associate it with the Romantic period rather than the Baroque in which it was written.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born February 3, 1809, in Hamburg, Germany

Died November 4, 1847, in Leipzig, Germany

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

There is nothing in Mendelssohn's famous Octet that suggests the work of a 16-year-old. Yet by that age, Mendelssohn had miraculously achieved the originality, freshness, Romanticism, and

compositional maturity that infuse the Octet. Mendelssohn considered it the favorite of all his works. "I had a most wonderful time in the writing of it," he commented. That genius should sit so easily on a 16-year old is a musical wonder surpassing even the early accomplishments of Mozart and Schubert.

The ease and joy with which the Octet was written, however, should not obscure its brilliant compositional technique or the virtuosic demands it makes on the performers. While Mendelssohn's chamber music outpouring—the wonderful string quartets and piano trios in particular—are some of his greatest achievements, this work is powerfully orchestral in its effect, evidenced most clearly by the concerto-like demands on the first violin.

The vigorous first movement is contrasted by the touching Andante before we are thrown into the famous Scherzo. It has been said that Mendelssohn wrote the Scherzo on one try without corrections, a plausible assumption indicated by its freshness, originality, and inventiveness. Inspired by the "Walpurgis-Nacht" of Goethe's *Faust* and played staccato and pianissimo from start to finish, the movement is the breathtaking jewel of the work. The unmitigated joyfulness of the Octet concludes with a fugue, which is yet another tribute to Mendelssohn's compositional genius. How ironic that Hitler suppressed Mendelssohn's music in the dark days of World War II and that musicologist Alfred Einstein chose to resurrect it in his important publication of 1941, *Greatness in Music*.

Written in 1825 for one of the weekly Sunday morning musicales in Mendelssohn's lavish home, the Octet remains today a consummate treasure of the chamber repertoire.

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PROFILES

The **WEST-EASTERN DIVAN ENSEMBLE**, led by the orchestra's concertmaster Michael Barenboim, draws upon players of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

Founded in 1999, the origins of the orchestra lie in the conversations between its founders, Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim. Over the course of their great friendship, the Palestinian author/scholar and Israeli conductor/pianist discussed ideas on music, culture, and humanity. In their exchanges, they realized the urgent need for an alternative way to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The opportunity to do this came when Barenboim and Said initiated the first workshop using their experience as a model. This evolved into the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra that global audiences know today. The group is comprised of Arab and Israeli musicians, defying fierce political divides in the Middle East and globally. Through its work and existence, they demonstrate that bridges can be built to encourage people to listen to the narrative of the other.

The West-Eastern Divan Ensemble is the most recent imprint of this project and brings the highly praised artistry of the large orchestra into an intimate chamber music format. As the orchestra celebrates its 20th anniversary, Michael Barenboim, who as a soloist has recently appeared with Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, and Chicago Symphony, amongst many others, founded this ensemble to spread the ideas behind the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra even further and to give the public an opportunity to experience the musicians' unique artistry and personality up close.

While committed to the core Classical and Romantic repertoire, **MICHAEL BARENBOIM** is deeply invested and especially recognized for his performances of 20th-century and contemporary music. He celebrates a long history of collaboration with the late Pierre Boulez, whose pieces he regularly performs. His second solo recording, with works by Sciarrino, Berio, and Paganini, was released in early 2018 and hailed by the critics as "visionary programming" (*BBC Music Magazine*) and "breathtakingly compelling, and one that's full of brilliant revelations" (*The Strad*).

Recent highlights include debuts with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with Robert Trevino and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and with San Diego Symphony and Dresden Philharmonic, performing Glazunov's *Violin Concerto*. Barenboim's debut with the Berlin Philharmonic performing Schönberg's *Violin Concerto* was critically acclaimed, and followed debuts with the Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic. He has also appeared with London's Philharmonia Orchestra, performing Prokofiev's *Violin Concerto No. 1*, and with the BBC Philharmonic performing Berg's *Violin Concerto*.

The 2019-2020 season brings debuts with the Orchestre National d'Île de France where he will perform in a regional tour of the Ligeti Concerto with Case Scaglione conducting, and with Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse where he will perform Dutilleux's *Concerto* with Fabien Gabel. He will also return to the Enescu Festival Orchestra to perform J. Widmann's *Violin Concerto No. 1* and will reprise the Schönberg

Concerto, this time at the Musikverein with the ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien under the baton of Pinchas Steinberg. Trio performances with Daniel Barenboim and Kian Soltani will be featured at the Boulez Saal in Berlin, and Barenboim will be soloist and leader of a new chamber ensemble of musicians from the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, known as Michael Barenboim & the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble, which will tour the United States extensively from coast to coast.

Barenboim is a founding member of the Erlenbusch Quartet and frequently invited at such festivals as the Lucerne Festival, Verbier, Aix en Provence, and Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival. He collaborates regularly with his mother, the pianist Elena Bashkirova, as well as with such artists as Franz Helmerson, Julian Steckel, Guy Braunstein, Andras Schiff, and Martha Argerich. He also serves as concertmaster of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and cultivates a continuous and strong involvement in educational activities. He is Head of Chamber Music at the Barenboim-Said Academy and gives master classes around the world.