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Jonathan Biss

Jonathan Biss PIANO
Brentano Quartet

MARK STEINBERG, Violin || **SERENA CANIN**, Violin
MISHA AMORY, Viola || **NINA LEE**, Cello

MONDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2016, 8PM
Lobero Theatre, Santa Barbara

COMMUNITY ARTS MUSIC ASSOCIATION

Jonathan Biss PIANO Brentano Quartet

MARK STEINBERG, Violin || SERENA CANIN, Violin
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MONDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2016, 8PM
Lobero Theatre, Santa Barbara

“THE LATE STYLE”

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata in G Major for Violin and Piano, Op.96

Allegro moderato

Adagio espressivo

Scherzo: Allegro—Trio

Poco Allegretto

Mark Steinberg, Violin

Jonathan Biss, Piano

INTERMISSION I: 10 minutes

Sonata in C minor for Piano, Op.111

Maestoso—Allegro con brio ed appassionato

Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

Jonathan Biss, Piano

INTERMISSION II: 15 minutes

String Quartet in F Major, Op.135

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

Grave, ma non troppo tratto—Allegro—Grave—Allegro

The Brentano Quartet

Programs and artists subject to change

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The Brentano Quartet

MARK STEINBERG, Violin || **SERENA CANIN**, Violin
MISHA AMORY, Viola || **NINA LEE**, Cello

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. “Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding,” raves the London Independent; the New York Times extols its “luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism.”

Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists in Residence at Yale University. The Quartet also currently serves as the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Formerly, they were Artists in Residence at Princeton University for many years.

The Quartet has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully

Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House. The Quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut.

The Brentano Quartet is known for especially imaginative projects combining old and new music. Among the Quartet's latest collaborations with contemporary composers is a new work by Steven Mackey, “One Red Rose,” commemorating the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Other recent commissions include a piano quintet by Vijay Iyer, a work

by Eric Moe (with Christine Brandes, soprano), and a new viola quintet by Felipe Lara (performed with violist Hsin-Yun Huang). In 2012, the Quartet provided the central music (Beethoven Opus 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

The quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The Quartet has also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida.

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. ■

Jonathan Biss

Pianist

Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned pianist who shares his deep musical curiosity with classical music lovers in the concert hall and beyond. Over nearly two decades on the concert stage, he has forged relationships with the New York Philharmonic; the Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Philharmonia orchestras; the Boston, Chicago, and Swedish Radio symphony orchestras; and the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Budapest Festival, and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras, among many others. In addition to performing a full schedule of concerts,

the 36-year-old American has spent ten summers at the Marlboro Music Festival and has written extensively about his relationships with the composers with whom he shares a stage. A member of the faculty of his alma mater the Curtis Institute of Music since 2010, Biss led the first massive open online course (MOOC) offered by a classical music conservatory, *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, which has reached more than 150,000 people in 185 countries.

This season Biss continues his latest Beethoven project, *Beethoven/5*, for which the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra is co-commissioning five composers to write new piano concertos, each inspired by one of Beethoven's. The five-year plan began last season, with Biss premiering Timo Andres's "The Blind Banister," which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music, and which Biss plays with the New York Philharmonic in the spring of 2017. This season he premieres Sally Beamish's concerto, paired with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.1, with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, before performing it with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra in Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. In the next three years Biss will premiere concertos by Salvatore Sciarrino, Caroline Shaw, and Brett Dean.

In addition to his involvement at Marlboro, Biss spends the summer of 2016 as the Artist-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center, where he performs chamber music, a solo recital, and the Andres and Beethoven concerto pair with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. He also gives recitals at the Aspen and Ravinia



summer music festivals as part of his ongoing concert cycles to perform all the Beethoven sonatas.

In 2016-2017 he begins examining, both in performance and academically, the concept of a composer's "late style," and has put together programs of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Britten, Elgar, Gesualdo, Kurtág, Mozart, Schubert, and Schumann's later works, both for solo piano and in collaboration with the Brentano Quartet and Mark Padmore, which he will play at Carnegie Hall, San Francisco Performances, the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, London's Barbican Centre, and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw. A previous Biss initiative, *Schumann: Under the Influence*, was a 30-concert exploration of the composer's role in musical history, for which he also recorded Schumann and Dvořák Piano Quintets with the Elias String Quartet and wrote an Amazon Kindle Single on Schumann, *A Pianist Under the Influence*. This season Biss also

gives masterclasses at Carnegie Hall in connection with the idea of late style and publishes a Kindle Single on the topic in January.

Biss has embarked on a nine-year, nine-disc recording cycle of Beethoven's complete piano sonatas, and in early 2017 he releases the sixth volume, which includes the monumental "Hammerklavier" sonata. Upon the release of the fourth volume, *BBC Music Magazine* said, "Jonathan Biss will surely take his place among the greats if he continues on this exalted plane." His bestselling eBook, *Beethoven's Shadow*, published by RosettaBooks in 2011, was the first Kindle Single written by a classical musician, and he will continue to add lectures to his extraordinarily popular online course, *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, until he covers all of them.

Throughout his career, Biss has been an advocate for new music. Prior to the *Beethoven/5* project, he commissioned are *Lunaire Variations* by David Ludwig,

Interlude II by Leon Kirchner, *Wonderer* by Lewis Spratlan, and *Three Pieces for Piano* and a concerto by Bernard Rands, which he premiered with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has also premiered a piano quintet by William Bolcom.

Biss represents the third generation in a family of professional musicians that includes his grandmother Raya Garbousova, one of the first well-known female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his Cello Concerto), and his parents, violinist Miriam Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Biss began his piano studies at age six, and his first musical collaborations were with his mother and father. He studied at Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Leon Fleisher. At age 20, Biss made his New York recital debut

at the 92nd Street Y's Tisch Center for the Arts and his New York Philharmonic debut under Kurt Masur.

Biss has been recognized with numerous honors, including the Leonard Bernstein Award presented at the 2005 Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Wolf Trap's Shouse Debut Artist Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award. His recent albums for EMI won Diapason d'Or de l'année and Edison awards. He was an artist-in-residence on American Public Media's *Performance Today* and was the first American chosen to participate in the BBC's New Generation Artist program.

For more information, please visit www.jonathanbiss.com

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

by Howard Posner

This concert comprises **Ludwig van Beethoven's** final violin sonata, final piano sonata and final string quartet. It is usually a mistake to find much significance in this kind of finality, which is usually entirely accidental. When Beethoven composed his last violin sonata fifteen years before his death, he was turning forty-two, and could scarcely have thought about whether he would write another one. But he did think his last string quartet would indeed be his last.

Eight of Beethoven's ten sonatas were written before he turned thirty-two, and the ninth, the titanic "Kreutzer" Sonata, followed within a year. It would be another nine years before he wrote another.

Like the "Kreutzer," the **Sonata in G Major, Op.96** was written for a visiting violinist. The Kreutzer sonata reflects George Augustus Pohlgreen Bridgetower's virtuosity, bravura, intensity, and rare ability to comprehend

Beethoven's vision. Pierre Rode (1774-1830) for whom Beethoven wrote his last sonata, was a different player who called forth different music. Rode is known today for etudes that violin students still practice, but his playing was more elegant than forceful, and by December 1812, when he came to Vienna, he may have been suffering from a medical condition that weakened his bowing arm.

Beethoven accommodated Rode's taste, or technical limitations, to a surprising degree. He wrote to the twenty-four-year-old Archduke Rudolph, his student, patron and friend (and the Austrian Emperor's baby brother), "I have not hurried unduly to compose the last movement merely for the sake of being punctual, the more so as in view of Rode's playing I have had to give more thought to the composition of this movement. In our Finales we like to have fairly noisy passages, but R does not like them—and this hampered me somewhat."

The sonata requires no fast bowing or (except for a few vigorous chords in the last movement) vigorous bowing. Where the Kreutzer Sonata was a volcanic eruption, the Sonata in G is more of walk in the park. For all intents and purposes it has two slow movements: in the theme-and-variation finale, the fifth variation is an extended adagio that lasts considerably longer than the entire scherzo third movement.

Beethoven's deteriorating hearing had ended his own career as a public performer, so on the December 29, 1812 premiere performance was played by Rode and Archduke Rudolph.

By the time Beethoven composed



his **last piano sonata** in 1821, he was completely deaf, and years removed from his career as a pianist. He would write a few more piano pieces after 1822, but this sonata marks the last time one of his piano works would be a landmark.

There is no mistaking its importance from the very first notes of its slow introduction, a loud, menacing drop of a seventh. In opera, such a gesture would portend a dramatic, and probably catastrophic, turn of the plot, and indeed it presages a titanic struggle of an allegro, propelled by a theme of powerful leaps and driving running figures. Beethoven originally conceived the movement as a fugue, and though he abandoned that form for a sonata structure, its origins show: it is essentially monothematic and full of dizzying counterpoint.

The Adagio is every bit as titanic as the first movement, but as serene and elysian as the first movement is furious. It is a simple song of a theme with variations that become increasingly syncopated and rhythmically complex — the third variation sounding like a

precursor of jazz — until the fourth variation turns into a free fantasy.

Though the sonata is not short by any measure, clocking in at about 25 minutes, its absence of a third movement worried Adolf Schlesinger, Beethoven's publisher in Berlin, who had not published Beethoven's first twenty-nine piano sonatas and may not have known that five of them had only two movements. He wrote to ask "most submissively" whether Beethoven intended to write only the two movements, "or if perhaps the Allegro were accidentally forgotten by the copyist," which was a diplomatic way of asking whether the notoriously absent-minded Beethoven might have mislaid a third movement somewhere. Anton Schindler, Beethoven's assistant at the time, later wrote in his legendarily inaccurate (but nonetheless influential) Beethoven biography that when he asked the same question, Beethoven answered that he hadn't had time to write a third movement, which was just the sort of answer Schindler deserved.

Modern listeners, knowing the Arietta is the last movement of Beethoven's last sonata, are inclined to hear a valedictory quality in the last movement that Beethoven could scarcely have intended. What struck 19th-century critics, whose constituency was the large pool of amateur players who made up the market for published music, was that Beethoven's notation was bizarre. He used small note values as the beat unit — for example, writing a variation in 12/32 time instead of 3/8. Since smaller notes have more flags and beams, the music takes on a fearsomely complex look and blackens

the page, as if Beethoven is trying his best to scare away those amateurs. In some variations, there are more beats in the measure than the time signature allows. In an 1855 book titled "Beethoven and his Three Styles," a French critic wrote, "When one is Beethoven it is possible to do anything, but still two and two must make four." In actually playing the music, the bad arithmetic is not a major problem, but when we read contemporary accounts that describe Beethoven as capricious or crazy, we should remember things like this.

Beethoven's **last quartet**, as forward-looking as it is, owes much to the past.

It begins, like his First Symphony, on a "wrong" chord, starting on what amounts to the dominant of the dominant before finally establishing the home key of F. The first movement blends Bachian complexity with Haydnesque congeniality and wit, betraying nothing of the difficult circumstances in which it was written. Beethoven composed it in October 1826 at his brother's country estate while he and his nephew Karl were taking refuge after Karl's attempted suicide, which was probably more an expression of frustration at life with his uncle (who had wrested custody of the youth from his mother years earlier) than a real attempt to end his own life. But suicide was still a crime, and it was necessary to get Karl out of sight while a fairly minor bullet wound to his head healed.

The scherzo shows Beethoven's pie-in-the-face sense of humor. It is written entirely in 3/4 time, but is rife with rhythmic jokes likely to convince players that they (or the composer) can't count. Beethoven

did not invent this sort of movement: Haydn's quartets are full of minuets that would break a dancer's ankles, but like everything he took from Haydn, he went much further with it. The four parts tug at each other in four different rhythms, or get together to run up and down and stop for no good reason. In mid-movement, the first violin gets lost in a series of syncopated leaps while the three lower parts repeat the same five-note sequence *forty-eight times*.

The ridiculous gives way to the sublime in a placid, seamless slow movement consisting of three variations on a softly rolling theme.

Before the finale — a brief slow introduction followed by an energetic allegro — Beethoven wrote „Der schwer gefasste Entschluss“ (which can be translated as, "the decision reached with difficulty" or "the difficult resolution"). Beneath it, he wrote the three-note motif of the slow introduction with the words „Muss es sein?“ ("Must it be?"), followed by the two three note-motifs that make up the allegro's principal theme, underlaid with the words „Es muss sein! Es muss sein!“ ("It must be! It must be!"). These inscriptions cry out for an explanation. There are two.

Ignaz Dembscher, a wealthy imperial court official and musical amateur, attended nearly every concert by the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which premiered Beethoven's later quartets, and also put on chamber music concerts in his own house. Beethoven usually let Dembscher use manuscripts of his new music for Dembscher's house concerts, but when Dembscher asked for the score

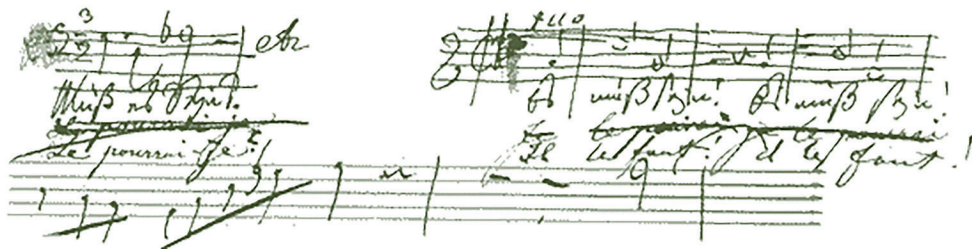
of the Op.130 quartet after having not subscribed to the concert in which it was first played, Beethoven said no. Karl Holz, Beethoven's secretary (and second violinist in Schuppanzigh's quartet), told Dembscher that if he wanted to use the manuscript he would have to pay the subscription price of the concert he had missed. Dembscher asked, probably with a smile, "Must it be?" As the story goes, when Holz told Beethoven about the conversation, Beethoven immediately wrote a canon for four male voices (WoO 196) to the words, "It must be! Yes, yes, yes, yes, take out your wallet!" using the „Es muss sein!“ theme of the Op.135 finale.

But why did Beethoven base the last movement of his last quartet on an inside joke? When Beethoven sent the manuscript of the quartet to his publisher, Moritz Schlesinger (son of Adolf) in Paris, he said in an accompanying letter:

Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto *'The decision taken with difficulty—Must it be? —It must be, it must be! —'*

For Beethoven, composition was a series of agonizing decisions about which version of a theme to use or which direction to take it, and it must sometimes have been an act of extreme will to make his choices and finish a movement. „Es muss sein!“ may mean, "At last, I know how it must sound."

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Muss es sein - Motto at the beginning of the Finale of Beethoven's last string quartet, Op.135

A note on Beethoven's String Quartet in F Major, Op.135

By Misha Amory, violist of the Brentano Quartet

The String Quartet in F, opus 135, was the last complete work Beethoven composed, only a few months before his death in March 1827. It is traditionally grouped together with his other late quartets, opp.127, 130, 131, 132 and the ; but it's hard not to wonder what Beethoven would have thought of that grouping. Certainly opus 135 is the black sheep of this bunch. Where the other quartets are monumental in scale, sprawling in their expressive reach and scope, and often searching for a new formal basis for the quartet genre altogether, opus 135 stands apart: tightly reasoned, having an airy and transparent texture, playful and teasing in so many places, it is the work of a composer who seems to have suddenly attained some new, simple truth after miles of struggle. It is more similar in length and structure to his early opus 18 quartets than to the later ones, and yet it could not be mistaken for an opus 18 quartet: it is a greater and deeper achievement than those quartets, yet somehow less ambitious, less reaching, at the same time.

The first movement is as spare in texture as any quartet movement Beethoven ever wrote. It begins with a four-note question in the viola, colored with a mock-serious minor note in the

cello; the first violin answers with a giggling echo. Right away the composer is signaling that here he will have nothing to do with the old, earnest questions of existence or fate; this is to be put aside, at least for the time being. What ensues is a genial, often Haydn-esque Allegretto in 2/4 time, which ambles along, four friends sharing a melody or two between them, breaking it into fragments so that everybody gets a piece. The movement is a typical sonata form, with all the responsible sections of exposition, development and recapitulation; but it feels more like an airy distillation of that form, with its sparseness, its fragmentation, and its economy of means. It is music that speaks to us about the process of creating, a blueprint where we see all the parts laid out before our eyes, and are given a glimpse inside Beethoven's mind as he fits them together.

The second movement is a quicksilver scherzo. The parts at the beginning stage a rhythmic comic act, ill-fitting and awkward, everyone sitting on the wrong beat, then suddenly falling heavily onto a unison E-flat that is also off the beat, stuck in the wrong meter for a while before righting itself (sort of). This section is abruptly succeeded by a more brilliant one featuring a set of rapid upward scales

in the first violin, playful and yet tense and expectant. Then an extraordinary eruption occurs, a fortissimo section where the lower instruments are stuck in an infinite whirling loop while the first violin, berserk, goes off on an impossible tangent. This eventually spirals down to a quiet unison, where, for a brief instant one hears the four simple pitches that the movement is based on. Finally the opening section returns in all its bumptiousness.

The third movement: a dark hymn, a whispered prayer. In early sketches, Beethoven designated it „Süsser Ruhegesang oder Friedengesang“, a sweet song of calm or peace. It is one of the half-dozen slow movements that stand at the pinnacle of his late-period achievement, and it serves as the expressive center of gravity for this quartet. In fact it is a theme with four variations, but they unfold in such a continuous fashion that this is not immediately obvious. Set in D-flat Major, it feels a universe away from the sunny F Major key of the rest of the quartet; we have been pulled out of the public eye and find ourselves hearing an intimate confession. The theme is in the lowest register for all four instruments, husky and sorrowing. The first variation lifts us higher up, visiting some painful harmonic moments, but maintaining much of the tone of the original. In the second variation, we are taken to the minor key; the flowing rhythms of the earlier music are lost, and replaced with stony, halting steps. This is one possible answer to the prayer, an unthinkable rejection, a bereft state. Some measure of relief comes in the final two variations, as we return to the Major, and the cello reassuringly takes the melody. The last variation is the most extraordinary part of the movement: the first violin, winged, hints at the theme in gentle, gasping rhythms, while the other instruments describe simple upward arpeggios.

It is a movement that overflows with forgiveness and love, but is also full of great sadness.

The final movement bears a strange inscription: „Der schwer gefasste Entschluss“, or “The Difficult Resolution.” The slow introduction, which features a rising minor-key question in the lower instruments, is marked „Muss es sein?“ — “must it be?” Here we have the Beethoven who poses difficult questions, literally. This brief introduction reaches an anguished climax before subsiding. Then follows the main Allegro section, joyful and affirmative, marked „Es muss sein!“ — “it must be!” Two-thirds of this movement then unroll with barely a cloud on the horizon. All is happiness, hijinks, carefree melody, playfulness. It is all the more shocking when the minor-key introductory question — „muss es sein?“ — returns gigantically, terrifyingly, and almost without warning. It is one final struggle; and this time, it appears, the beast is tamed, the doubts laid to rest. The music dances away through the coda, teasing, pianissimo, and is crowned by one final boisterous affirmation.

There has been endless debate about just what this “difficult resolution” was, and many theories have been advanced. Is it about facing and accepting death? Is it another weighty philosophical question? Is it the laundry bill that has to be paid? Beethoven's note to his publisher hints that it might simply be the necessity of finishing the composition, and bidding farewell to a favorite genre: “Here, my dear friend, is my last quartet. It will be the last; and indeed it has given me much trouble. For I could not bring myself to compose the last movement. But as your letters were reminding me of it, in the end I decided to compose it. And that is the reason why I have written the motto: “The difficult resolution—Must it be?—It must be, it must be!”

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