

# Colburn Chamber Music Society

The Calidore String Quartet  
October 1, 2017  
Zipper Hall, 3 pm

## **Two Pieces for Four Violins, Two Violas, and Two Cellos, Op. 11 (1924–25)**

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH  
(1906–1975)

Prelude. Adagio	Jeffrey Myers, Violin	Ryan Davis, Viola
Scherzo. Allegro molto–Moderato–Allegro	Ryan Meehan, Violin	Benjamin Chilton, Viola
	Felicity James, Violin	Minji Kim, Cello
	Misha Vayman, Violin	Yun Han, Cello

## **Quintet for Two Violins, Two Violas, and Cello in F Major (1878–79)**

ANTON BRUCKNER  
(1824–1896)

III. Adagio	Lucy Wang, Violin	Jeremy Berry, Viola
	Hao Zhou, Violin	Tate Zawadiuk, Cello
	Aiden Kane, Viola	

## **Quartet No. 1 for Two Violins, Viola, and Cello, “Kreutzer Sonata” (1923)**

LEOŠ JANAČEK  
(1854–1928)

Adagio	Jeffrey Myers, Violin
Con moto	Ryan Meehan, Violin
Con moto	Jeremy Berry, Viola
Con moto	Estelle Choi, Cello

Intermission

## **Sextet No. 2 for Two Violins, Two Violas, and Two Cellos in G Major, Op. 36 (1864–65)**

JOHANNES BRAHMS  
(1833–1897)

Allegro non troppo	Hannah Ji, Violin	Estelle Choi, Cello
Scherzo. Allegro non troppo	Ryan Meehan, Violin	Ben Solomonow, Cello
Adagio	Jeremy Berry, Viola	
Poco allegro	Johanna Nowik, Viola	

## Thank You

The Colburn Chamber Music Society Series is generously supported by Carol and Warner Henry.

# About the Music

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

## **Two Pieces for Four Violins, Two Violas, and Two Cellos, Op. 11 (1924–25)**

*by Felicity James, violinist in the Bachelor of Music program of  
the Colburn Conservatory of Music*

Dmitri Shostakovich wrote his Two Pieces for Four Violins, Two Violas, and Two Cellos when he was only 18 years old, studying piano and composition at the Leningrad Conservatory. Though Shostakovich is most well-known today for his monumental symphonic output, his musical personality is clearly manifest in this early work. The lyrical, rhythmic, and energetic Octet clearly leads to the unique mature style of this most important twentieth-century composer.



The Octet was written at the same time Shostakovich was composing his First Symphony and though it was originally planned to be five movements, only two were completed; the resulting work consists of a slow Prelude and lively Scherzo which together last about ten minutes. The young composer recalled that after looking over the work for the first time, his professor Maximilian Steinberg “made a sour face and expressed the hope that, when I turn thirty, I will no longer write such wild music.”

Shostakovich’s Prelude and Scherzo are arranged in a similar fashion to a Prelude and Fugue of J. S. Bach, consisting of a slow first movement and an energetic finale. The Prelude opens in a solemn D Minor, stated in rhythmic unison by the upper six voices and echoed by the cellos. The first violin takes over with a small cadenza leading into a short-lived cadence in D Major, soon replaced by a dark B-flat minor mood. As the two violas and first cello pulse this harmony, the fourth violin enters and begins a slow fugal figure which is passed upwards until it reaches the first violin, eventually giving way to a second statement of the opening. This time, the first viola is showcased in a short cadenza and additional slow, fugal entries are passed around; the first three violins then enter in a high and eerie register with unison triplets while the viola continues into a melancholy and lyrical solo. A few measures of halting

pizzicato lead into a più mosso section, in which all eight voices trade passages of quick spiccato eighth notes until they coalesce with a return to the opening bars of the Prelude. The movement features incredibly virtuosic writing for the first violin, which Shostakovich consistently showcases with piercing melodies, flashy runs of sixteenth notes, and multiple cadenzas. At the penultimate moment, this virtuosity is ultimately overtaken by a forlorn duet between the fourth violin and first viola as the other six instruments, in rhythmic unison, return to the eerie triplet figures to close out the movement in a ghostly pianississimo.

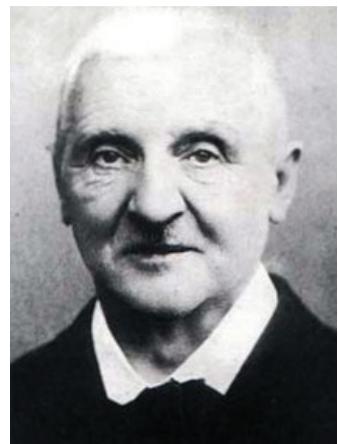
The Scherzo bursts to life with an energetic rhythmic motive in the first two violins, which is passed down throughout the rest of the ensemble until all eight players come to an abrupt stop. The silence is broken by a yearning, unstable melody in the first cello, accompanied in short, pointillistic spurts of pizzicato from the accompanying instruments. An ominous cello glissando leads into the allegro section, which leaps into a frenzied fury that charges forward at breakneck speed to the end of the movement. All eight players engage in a thrilling fugal dance, as each voice enters a split second after another, creating a contrapuntal maze which highlights each instrument, if only for a few notes. Shostakovich employs a variety of techniques in this mad dash to the end including tremolo, ricochet, glissandi, and harmonics, which culminate in a stark unison G to bring the Octet to a forceful close.

**ANTON BRUCKNER (1824–1896)**

**Quintet for Two Violins, Two Violas, and Cello  
in F Major (1878–79)**

*by Madeleine Vaillancourt, violinist in the Artist Diploma  
program of the Colburn Conservatory of Music*

Anton Bruckner, a somewhat peculiar and obsessive man, was truly one-of-a-kind among his Romantic contemporaries in late-nineteenth-century Vienna. Unlike the rule-breaking, experimental tendencies of Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss, Bruckner venerated musical conservatism and spent much of his life studying principles that had been laid out centuries earlier. While his fascination with the laws of counterpoint alienated him in the highly progressive and intellectual Viennese music scene,



his fascination with earlier forms resulted in astonishing works that pay homage to both the past and modernity. His musical endeavors were ambitious and his exhaustingly lengthy symphonies contained some of the most complex harmonies of the time. In contrast to his massive symphonic works, Bruckner also composed works of exquisite intimacy, as seen in his String Quintet in F Major. Through this lesser-known yet important work, he showed the world the enormous scope of his compositional capabilities.

After moving from the countryside to Vienna in his mid-forties, Bruckner was recognized as a talented composer but did not maintain the cleanest reputation. Anecdotes included pursuing girls half his age, and one time he tipped a conductor with cash for getting through a rehearsal of one of his symphonies. Despite being a misunderstood oddball during his lifetime, Bruckner's music has only become more adored and appreciated over the years. His symphonies are beloved and remain in the standard repertoire, while the depth and profundity of the Adagio from his String Quintet in F Major clearly demonstrates his mastery of more intimate forms as well. Before writing the Quintet, Bruckner had only written one string quartet, which, in fact, was merely a compositional exercise for his teacher in 1862. Sixteen years later he was commissioned by the Vienna Philharmonic's concertmaster, Joseph Hellmesberger, to compose another string quartet. Instead of a quartet, Bruckner decided to write a viola quintet, which he began in December of 1878 and completed in July 1879.

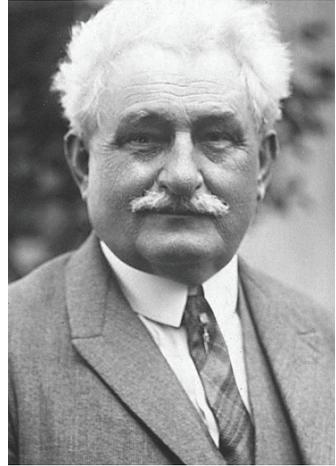
Much like his symphonies, the String Quintet in its entirety is a long and harmonically rich work; it is, however, most loved for the third movement, the poignantly beautiful Adagio performed today. This expansive movement begins with a theme of ineffable beauty, presented by the first violinist, accompanied by hymn-like chords underneath. Beginning in the rare key of G-flat Major, the first theme effortlessly unfolds in waves of resplendent, closely-related subsidiary themes in which Bruckner showcases his unique love of harmonic seconds and half-tones. Following the full presentation of the theme, an austere transitional section stealthily enters, marked by dotted rhythms. The harmonies trudge through murky territory until reaching the second theme, which is a clever inversion of the first theme. By doing this, Bruckner turns the initial downward melody into one that rises up and is suspended by pulsing eighth notes in the accompanying voices. An intricate and heavy development section dominates most of the Adagio, building up to a substantial climax which gradually dissipates and leads back to the statement of the two themes, this time in reverse order. Transitional material returns, gradually leading to G-flat Major for the serene and nostalgic coda, bringing this monumental movement to a close.

LEOŠ JANAČEK (1854–1928)

**Quartet No. 1 for Two Violins, Viola, and Cello,  
“Kreutzer Sonata” (1923)**

*by Emma Wernig, violist in the Bachelor of Music program of  
the Colburn Conservatory of Music*

Leoš Janáček's First String Quartet is arguably one of the most underrated masterpieces in the chamber repertoire. Nicknamed “Kreutzer Sonata,” Janáček's inspiration came from Tolstoy's novella of the same name, the title of which is taken from Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata Op. 47, for violin and piano. Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata chronicles a man who murders his wife, whom he wrongfully suspects of infidelity. His wife (a pianist) and the suspected lover (a violinist) perform the Beethoven sonata at a crucial moment in the novella. Janáček's quartet is said to capture this tumultuous journey of emotion and tragedy through music; the composer was a passionate advocate for women's rights, making this story about an ill-treated woman of personal importance. He includes references to and direct quotes from Beethoven's sonata throughout the quartet to explicitly weave together his two inspirations. Janáček did not reach his most successful and productive period until he was in his late sixties, when he wrote two of his most famous operas, *Kát'a Kabanová*, and *The Cunning Little Vixen*, along with his First String Quartet. Like many of Janáček's works, this quartet is almost operatic in nature, containing leitmotifs and singing melodies throughout. He spent a great deal of his life in what was Czechoslovakia, and the eastern European influence of his surroundings can be heard throughout his works and in this quartet in particular. Irregular rhythms, folk tunes, and uniquely rustic energies are prevalent throughout all four movements.



The first movement, marked *Adagio con moto*, opens with a tragic theme—"I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one the Russian writer Tolstoy describes in his Kreutzer Sonata," Janáček wrote in a letter to a friend. This heart-wrenching theme is repeatedly interrupted by an agitated, rapid eighth-note figure which conveys her

desperation. A lighter, more playful pastoral second theme shifts the mood and Janáček then alternates the two to create a sense of emotional instability throughout the movement. The tumultuous nature of the protagonist's emotional state is portrayed in the fifteen marked tempo changes in the first movement alone.

The dance-like second movement, marked simply *Con moto*, draws clear influence from his Czech roots. A seductive theme that reappears throughout the movement represents the alleged lover in the story. Like the first movement, there are frequent changes in tempo and character, as melodic and agitated ponticello sections alternate, representing the duality of the seductive lover and the suspicious, agitated husband.

The third movement, also *Con moto*, opens with a quote from Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* in the cello and the first violin; the second violin and viola interject dissonant passages perhaps signifying the husband's suspicion and despair surrounding the performance of the piece in the novella. The first violin and cello lines escalate into a wild, dissonant frenzy before easing back into the romantic original theme, but as before, interrupted by the other two instruments.

The fourth movement, again *Con moto*, begins with a restatement of the original theme from the first movement, this time in A-flat, the falling violin solo line appropriately marked *teskně* (like in tears). Fragments of the original theme can be heard throughout the movement, transposed, played in tremolo, and overlapped with other themes from the quartet. The movement begins to pick up in tempo, drama, and tension, summarizing an emotional journey undertaken. Despite ending on the tonic, the quartet finishes in an open-ended way, as if mid-sentence.

Janáček's work is truly a study in human emotion and is a revolutionary piece both musically and politically, shedding light on women's struggles of the 1920s. The protagonist, the wrongfully accused woman, is also the story's hero, whose predestined fate makes for an overarching theme of undeserved tragedy. This profound example of extra-musical expression and narrative told through music is what makes it one of the truly great quartets of our time.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

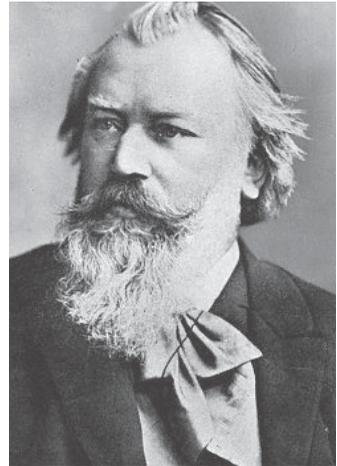
**Sextet No. 2 for Two Violins, Two Violas, and Two Cellos  
in G Major, Op. 36 (1864–65)**

*by Madison Vest, violinist in the Bachelor of Music program of  
the Colburn Conservatory of Music*

Brahms's Opus 36 holds a great deal of significance in both the composer's musical and personal life. Up until this point, Brahms had captured audiences with his grandiose First Piano Concerto that showcased his passionate temperament, the charming Serenades for orchestra, and various chamber works including his First String Sextet, Opus 18, written in 1860.

Brahms's artistry and romantic temperament were clear in his early works, but with the second string sextet he exhibits a special flavor of Brahmsian angst and depth heretofore unexplored. His skill and artistry as a contrapuntalist is clearly manifest in this sextet, inviting us in with his masterful harmonies and keeping us entranced with his carefully crafted yet poignant melodies. Although somewhat reserved overall, this sextet allows us to experience Brahms's coming of age not only in qualities such as compositional complexity and musical brilliance, but also a glimpse into the inner workings of a genius struggling to understand and communicate perhaps the most complicated and evasive human emotion—love.

The first viola opens the sextet with a sonorous ostinato between the tonic and the leading tone, creating a cocoon of sound for the violin's opening melody. Peppared with ascending fifths, the strings pass through the tonic key of G Major only to quickly make a detour into the unforeseen key of E-flat—a departure from the ultra-Romantic melodies typical of Brahms, and a foray into uncharted territory of more complex harmony. The years this sextet was being written coincided with the time Brahms was involved in a love affair with the singer Agathe von Siebold. In an unexpected turn of events, Brahms broke off the affair, but memorialized her name at the climax of the second theme; replacing the letters with proper German notation, Brahms spelled "AGATHE" within the music in various voices. It is thought that this



sextet was Brahms's farewell to Agathe, represented by the somewhat contradictory elegance of the melodic lines juxtaposed against the brooding landscape of the inner voices. Brahms creates a feeling of intimacy in the second movement by playing with the complicated relationship between both major and minor, and duple and triple meter—it is the composer at his most creative and poignant. With a spritely and almost mischievous plucking being passed around between the strings, the dynamic is hushed and elegant with a slight aura of secrecy. The middle section explodes with an unmistakably Hungarian sound, joyous and hearty but only for a brief moment when we are once again shepherded back to the original theme.

The introductory phrase of the third movement is a lyrical passage taken directly from a melodic love letter that he had written to Clara Schumann nearly a decade earlier, further underscoring the contention that this sextet was written with the dual purpose of musical and personal expression. The movement is a set of variations which carry a wide range of expressiveness, demonstrating Brahms's skill and maturity as a composer and contrapuntalist. The variations lead directly into an extremely robust and physically demanding fourth movement, creating a sense of perpetual motion that drives through to the end of the sextet. The emotional breadth of Opus 36, with its thick and debonair 19th-century melodies imbued with deep emotional unrest and elegantly crafted harmonies, introduces us to a new Brahms, and to an era filled with his exquisite and profound mature works which remain a beloved part of the canon and a testament to his genius.