



S Schubert Club

ACCORDO

Monday, March 14, 2022 • 7:30 PM

Sanctuary at Westminster Presbyterian Church

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Sang Yoon Kim, clarinet • Steven Copes, violin
Erin Keefe, violin • Rebecca Albers, viola
Anthony Ross, cello

Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, Op. 12 (1920)

Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967)

- I. Allegramente - Sostenuto ma non troppo
- II. Lento ma non troppo
- III. Vivo

Keefe, Copes, Albers

The Fence, The Rooftop, and the Distant Sea for Clarinet and Cello (2016)

Kinan Azmeh (b. 1976)

- I. Prologue
- II. Ammonite
- III. Monologue
- IV. Dance
- V. Epilogue

Kim, Ross

Intermission

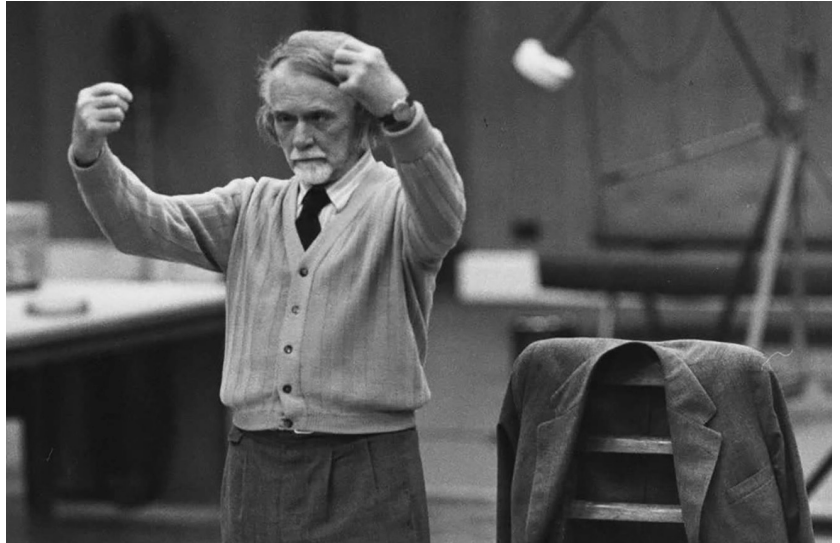
Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115 (1891)

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Andantino
- IV. Con moto

Kim, Copes, Keefe, Albers, Ross

Zoltán Kodály conducts
his *Hary Janos* suite
in rehearsal, 1960.
Photo: Getty



Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, Op. 12 (1920)
Zoltán Kodály (b. Hungary, 1882; d. Budapest, 1967)

Hungarian composer Bela Bartók once wrote “If I were to name the composer whose works are the most perfect embodiment of the Hungarian spirit, I would answer Zoltán Kodály.” High praise indeed.

No musician, Bartók included, contributed more to the evolution of modern Hungarian music than Kodály. During his 60-year career, Kodály was an indefatigable teacher, composer, and folk music scholar, who is remembered primarily for colorful orchestral works like the *Háry Janós Suite*, the *Dances of Galánta*, *Dances of Marosszék*, and the *Peacock Variations*. He is also remembered for a name that requires a pronunciation guide. (The “L” is silent: “KOE-die-ye”.)

The *Serenade* was written in 1920, during one of the most tumultuous periods in European history. The Hapsburg Empire had finally collapsed in 1918, after ruling Hungary since the 16th century. Politics—like nature—abhors a vacuum, and communist fever spread from Russia to fill the void, taking took root in Hungary.

When the new Communist regime was in place, the highly respected Kodály was stripped of his position at the Budapest Conservatory, barred from teaching, and subjected to twelve hearings in the space of six months to determine the nature of his “patriotism.” (If that sounds familiar, imagine the McCarthy hearings, but in reverse, with the Communists in charge.)

Kodály was blacklisted and performances of his music were banned in Hungary. Just when his international reputation was growing, Kodály virtually disappeared from the music scene at home and abroad.

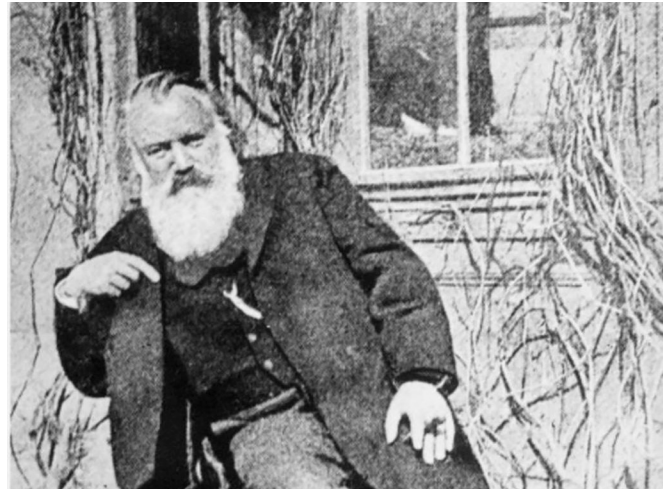
Thankfully, that regime lasted only two years and eventually his teaching post was restored. But it was during that two-year period of chaos that he wrote this *Serenade*, a title which ironically implies a “light entertainment piece”.

Kodály played the violin, viola, and cello very well, so most of his chamber works are for strings. The *Serenade* is without a doubt one of his best, despite the economy of means, just three instruments, that all play in more or less the same register. Despite those limitations, it is full of novel effects, ethnic-sounding melodies and exotic harmonies that borrow heavily from the folk music of Hungary that he spent his life collecting and documenting, often alongside his compatriot Bela Bartók.

It would be remiss not to mention the invaluable contribution Kodály made to the field of music education. He distilled his lifelong experience of teaching children into the Kodály Method, recognized internationally as an excellent pedagogical model that exploits the natural musicality of children.



Kinan Azmeh ©Martina Novak



Johannes Brahms c. 1896

The Fence, The Rooftop, and the Distant Sea for Clarinet and Cello

Kinan Azmeh (b. Damascus, Syria 1976)

Kinan Azmeh, born in Damascus in 1976, is that rare instrumentalist who excels as both a performer and composer. The Juilliard-trained clarinetist has been hailed as a “Virtuoso....Intensely soulful” by the *New York Times*; “Spellbinding” and “Brilliant” by the *New Yorker*. His works have been commissioned by an impressive list of collaborators, including The New York Philharmonic, The Seattle Symphony, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Elbphilharmonie (Hamburg), Brooklyn Rider, and the Aizuri and Apple Hill string quartets. Azmeh is also a member of Yo-Yo Ma’s *Silk Road Ensemble* with whom he was awarded a Grammy in 2017.

Improbably, Azmeh first earned a bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering at Damascus University while at the same time pursuing studies at the Conservatory of Music. His next stop was New York City—where he still resides—to enroll at Juilliard, where he earned a master’s degree and graduate diploma.

Azmeh’s works incorporate music from a rich array of eastern and western cultures that transcends styles and defies categorization. He has written works for solo

clarinet, dozens of chamber and orchestral works, as well as music for film, live illustration, and electronics. He is currently working on his first opera which is scheduled to premiere in June 2022.

The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea for clarinet and cello was written for himself and Yo-Yo Ma, commissioned by the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg and first performed there in January 2017. About the piece, the composer says:

“A fence, a rooftop, and the distant sea were all present facing my desk while I finished the piece in Beirut in December 2016. These elements were a reminder of how near my hometown of Damascus was, yet how far it seemed after being away for five years. The piece is about the random memories of individuals, more precisely about two characters searching for memories from home. The memories jump, sometimes abruptly from one to another, until they realize that the most powerful memories were the simplest.”

Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115 (1891)
Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, 1833; d. Vienna, 1897)

The spirit of Brahms' Clarinet Quintet is haunted from start to finish by an amiable ghost—Mozart—whose own clarinet quintet from a century before is the obvious model.

When Brahms' publisher received the manuscript, he was quite surprised, because a year earlier Brahms had announced his retirement, saying "I have worked enough. Now let the young folks take over." He was ready to pass the torch.

That was a premature gesture apparently, because Brahms was inspired to compose again when he heard the clarinet playing of one Richard Mühlfeld and was entranced. Over three years—in the Indian summer of his career—he composed four works featuring the clarinet that are all solid gold: the clarinet quintet, a trio for clarinet, piano and cello, and two clarinet sonatas. All four are often described as melancholic and warmly nostalgic, especially in the quintet, which captures perfectly all of the expressive qualities of the clarinet.

The way Brahms begins the piece shows the sure hand of a composer with nothing to prove. He just ambles into it, almost unobtrusively, with a tenderness that catches you off guard, before the more passionate

material is introduced. There are vivid contrasts between the power of the string ensemble and the intimate charm of the solo clarinet.

The emotional centerpiece of the quintet is clearly the slow movement Adagio, a beautiful love song that belongs to the clarinet, accompanied by muted strings that give the music a hushed, hazy quality. Then comes a stormy episode that is darker and full of tension, anguish, even despair. The clarinet is at center stage throughout, with Brahms taking full advantage of its characteristics.

Brahms finishes off the quintet with two shorter movements that almost bind together into a single continuum, first with an easygoing Andantino that serves as a quasi-introduction to the finale: a theme with five variations that shows off Brahms' ingenious ability to write variations.

And be listening particularly closely at the very end, where the final variation gives way to the theme that opened the first movement, which guides the Clarinet Quintet to a quiet, noble, and dignified conclusion. It is easy to imagine that Brahms, who deeply respected Mozart, is suggesting that had Wolfgang still been alive, his music might have sounded like this.

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American violinist **Erin Keefe**, who became concertmaster of the Minnesota Orchestra in September 2011, has established a reputation as an artist who combines exhilarating temperament and fierce integrity. At Sommerfest 2012 she made her concerto solo debut with the Orchestra, performing Beethoven's Violin Concerto.

Winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Pro Musicis International Award as well as numerous international competitions, she has appeared as soloist in recent seasons with the Minnesota Orchestra, New Mexico Symphony, New York City Ballet Orchestra, Korean Symphony Orchestra, Amadeus Chamber Orchestra, Turku Philharmonic, Sendai Philharmonic and the Gottingen Symphony and has given recitals throughout the United States, Austria, Italy, Germany, Korea, Poland, Finland, Japan, and Denmark.

Among the leading chamber musicians of her generation, Keefe has been an Artist of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center since 2010 after previously being a member of The Bowers Program (CMS Two) from 2006 to 2009. She has been featured on "Live from Lincoln Center" three times with the Society, performing works by Brahms, Schoenberg, Bach, and Corelli. Keefe is a member of Accordo, a string ensemble composed of present and former principal string players of the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra and has performed frequently with the Brooklyn and Boston Chamber Music Societies.

Keefe has collaborated with many leading artists of today including the Emerson String Quartet, Edgar Meyer, Gary Hoffman, David Finckel, Wu Han, Richard Goode, Roberto and Andrés Díaz, Menahem Pressler, Gary Graffman, and Leon Fleisher. Her recording credits include Schoenberg's Second String Quartet with Ida Kavafian, Paul Neubauer, Fred Sherry, and Jennifer Welch-Babidge for Robert Craft and the Naxos Label, recordings of the Dvořák Terzetto and the Schumann, Dvořák and Mendelssohn's third Piano Quartet in E-flat with Paul Neubauer, David Finckel and Wu Han for the CMS Studio Recordings label as well as live performances of the Bartók Contrasts, Dvořák Piano Quintet, Mozart E-flat Piano Quartet, Respighi's *Il Tramonto* and Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos* recorded for Deutsche Grammophon with Menahem Pressler, Gary Hoffman, Ani Kavafian and Ewa Podles. She has also released a solo CD including works by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Ravel, Sibelius, Lutoslawski, and Hindemith recorded with pianist Anna Polonsky. Her festival appearances have included the Marlboro Music Festival, Music@Menlo, La Jolla Summerfest, Mainly Mozart, Music Academy of the West, Music from Angel Fire, Ravinia and the Seattle, OK Mozart, Mimir, Bravo! Vail Valley, Colorado College, Skaneateles,

Salt Bay, Music in the Vineyards, and Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festivals.

Steven Copes joined the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra as Concertmaster in 1998, and since then has led the SPCO from the first chair in many highly acclaimed, eclectic programs. He appears frequently as soloist with the SPCO and many other ensembles around the world.

A zealous advocate of the music of today, he gave the world premiere of George Tsontakis' Grammy-nominated Violin Concerto No. 2 (2003), which won the 2005 Grawemeyer award and has been recorded for KOCH Records, and also gave the NY premiere of Lutoslawski's *Subito* (1992) for Violin and Piano. In June of 2017 he gave the World Premiere of Pierre Jalbert's Violin Concerto with Thomas Zehetmair conducting the SPCO.

An avid chamber musician, Copes has performed at festivals and concert series such as Aspen, Boston Chamber Music Society, Caramoor, Cartagena, Chamber Music Northwest, Chestnut Hill, La Jolla Summerfest, Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival, Mainly Mozart, Marlboro, Moritzburg, Mozaic, Norfolk, Olympic Music Festival, Piccolo Spoleto, Salt Bay Chamberfest, Santa Fe, Seattle Chamber Music Society, Skaneateles, Styriarte, and at other festivals across the globe. He co-founded the Alpenglow Chamber Music Festival in Colorado as well as Accordo, a chamber music group in the Twin Cities, now in its 12th season.

A frequent guest Concertmaster/Leader, Copes has recorded and toured extensively throughout Europe and Asia with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and has performed in the same capacity with the likes of the Baltimore Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Halle Orchestra, Houston Symphony, London Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the San Francisco Symphony.

Rebecca Albers joined the Minnesota Orchestra as assistant principal viola in 2010 and won the position of principal viola in 2017. She has performed throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe, making her New York debut at Lincoln Center, performing the New York premiere of Samuel Adler's *Viola Concerto* with the Juilliard Orchestra. An avid chamber musician, she performs often at such festivals as the Marlboro Music Festival, Seattle Chamber Music Society Summer and Winter Festivals, and Rome Chamber Music Festival.

Albers is a member of Accordo, a Twin Cities-based chamber ensemble whose members are present and former principal players from the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Minnesota Orchestra. She has toured extensively with Musicians from Marlboro and with the Albers Trio, an ensemble formed with her sisters Laura and Julie Albers, and has been featured on many of the Orchestra's chamber concerts, performing music by Schumann, Beethoven, Dvořák, and Schubert.

Albers is a Distinguished Artist faculty member at Mercer University's Robert McDuffie Center for Strings in Macon, Georgia, where she shares a viola studio with Victoria Chiang. She has also taught at such festivals as the Perlman Music Program and the Bowdoin International Music Festival.

Principal Cello **Anthony Ross** joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1988 and assumed the principal cello post in 1991. He has been a soloist many times with the Orchestra, performing concertos by Schumann, Dvořák, Victor Herbert, James MacMillan, Beethoven, Saint-Saëns, Elgar, Bloch and Shostakovich, as well as many chamber works.

In recent seasons Ross has performed Prokofiev's Sinfonia concertante for Cello and Orchestra, the Walton Cello Concerto and the Brahms Double Concerto, the latter alongside former First Associate Concertmaster Sarah Kwak. In April 2014 he was soloist in performances of Eric Whitacre's *The River Cam*, with the composer conducting. At Sommerfest 2014 he performed Prokofiev's Sonata for Cello and Piano with Sommerfest Artistic Director Andrew Litton.

Before joining the Minnesota Orchestra, Ross was principal cello of the Rochester Philharmonic. Away from Orchestra Hall, he is active as a chamber musician, festival performer and educator. He is a member of Accordo, a chamber group made up of principal string players from the Minnesota Orchestra and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. He also performs with the Chamber Music Society of Minnesota. He has appeared in the Mostly Mozart, Music in the Vineyards, Cactus Pear (San Antonio), Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society (Madison) and Orcas Island festivals, and has performed on stages from Pensacola, Florida, to Rhodes, Greece. He has taught at the Eastman School of Music, the Aspen Festival, the Grand Teton orchestra seminar and Madeline Island Chamber Music.

South Korean clarinetist **Sang Yoon Kim** is the first prize winner of several international competitions, including the 67th Prague Spring International Music Competition in 2015,

the UNISA International Flute and Clarinet Competition in 2014, and the Jacques Lancelot International Clarinet Competition in 2012. He is also a past laureate of the International Clarinet Competition in Ghent.

Sang Yoon Kim is a sought-after chamber musician, working with leading international artists, among them Swedish clarinetist Martin Fröst at the Stavanger International Chamber Music Festival, the celebrated French string quartet Quatuor Ebene, pianists Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Robert Levin. Kim also made his debut at the Ravinia Festival with the Calidore String Quartet in 2013.

As a passionate orchestra player, he has played as the guest principal clarinet of The Cleveland Orchestra and the London Philharmonic, with Vladimir Jurowski, Christoph Eschenbach, Franz-Welser Most and Jaap Van Zweden. He made his debut at the Prague Spring International Festival in 2016 as a soloist with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of their Music Director, Sakari Oramo.

A graduate of the Conservatoire de Paris, where he was accepted as the first Korean clarinetist in the school's history, he studied with distinguished professors Michel Arrignon and Pascal Moragues. After Paris he went on to study in Los Angeles at the Colburn Conservatory of Music, gaining an artist diploma under Yehuda Gilad in 2014. He served as Young Artist in Residence with Classical Minnesota Public Radio in 2013.

Sang Yoon Kim is a Buffet Crampon and Silverstein ligature artist.

For more information about Accordo and upcoming concerts, please visit schubert.org/accordo



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