

# VCC Valley Classical Concerts

In Cooperation with the Smith College  
Department of Music, Presents

## The Espressivo! Piano Quartet



Sunday, March 9, 2025, at 3:00 PM,  
Sweeney Concert Hall / Sage Hall, Smith  
College, Northampton, MA

# Espressivo!

Anna Polonsky, piano; Jaime Laredo, violin;  
Milena Pájaro-van de Stadt, viola; and  
Sharon Robinson, cello

## PROGRAM

### **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

Piano Quartet in G minor, K. 478 (1785)

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Rondo

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

Piano Quartet no. 3 in C minor, op. 60 (1875)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Scherzo: Allegro
- III. Andante
- IV. Finale: Allegro comodo

## INTERMISSION

### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

**Piano Quartet No. 2, Op. 87 (1889)**

- I. Allegro con fuoco
- II. Lento
- III. Allegro moderato, grazioso - Un pochettino più mosso
- IV. Finale: Allegro ma non troppo

Espressivo! is represented by:  
Frank Salomon Associates  
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# About Today's Concert

John Montanari, Artistic Director

The piano quartet repertoire may be smaller than those of the string quartet or piano trio, but it features numerous masterworks by prominent composers, three of whom will be heard from this afternoon in what will be among the beefiest programs ever presented by Valley Classical Concerts – a program that will more than satisfy my goal as artistic director to provide our patrons each time with a “bellyful of music.”

Growing out of the accompanied piano sonatas or divertimenti that became popular in the 1760's, works that combined soloistic piano parts with supporting, sometimes optional, string parts (usually two violins and cello), the modern piano quartet (piano, violin, viola, cello) attained prominence in 1780's Vienna, most notably in Mozart's two masterworks in the genre.

In 1785, Mozart accepted a commission from the music publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister for three piano quartets, leading to the composition of the Piano Quartet in G Minor, K. 478. After finding this work too difficult for the amateur market he was serving, Hoffmeister released Mozart from the remainder of the commission, though Mozart went on to compose the E-flat Quartet, featured on last season's *Espressivo!* program, one year later. Contemporaneous with the Piano Concertos Nos. 20-25, these works contain several concerto-like features, including the three-movement layout and the dialogue between the piano and the string ensemble, the latter often taking the form of a mini-orchestra. Though K. 478's opening *Allegro* plumbs the depth of G minor, the key of Mozart's iconic Symphony No. 40 and equally profound String Quintet, K. 516, here the gorgeous *Andante* in B-flat major and the cheerful G major Rondo take the work in a more *gemütlich* direction.

That difficult-to-define German adjective hardly applies to Johannes Brahms's Piano Quartet No. 3, which explores the dark key of C

# About Today's Concert (cont.)

minor, the key of Beethoven's Fifth and Brahms' First Symphonies, in each movement save the Andante in the distant key of E major. The original version of the work was composed in 1856, when Brahms was assisting Clara Schumann in running her household as her husband Robert lay dying in an asylum. Brahms played the piano part in the revised work's 1875 premiere, at a concert attended by Richard and Cosima Wagner. When he sent the work to his publisher Simrock, Brahms attached a note that read, "On the cover you must have a picture, namely a head with a pistol to it. Now you can form some conception of the music! I'll send you my photograph for the purpose. Since you seem to like color printing, you can use blue coat, yellow breeches, and top-boots" – a reference to Goethe's 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which a sensitive young man is driven to suicide after falling in love with a married woman.

Brahms first encountered the music of Antonín Dvořák in 1875 when he sat on a jury for an Austrian State stipend for aspiring composers. Dvořák had submitted several works which impressed Brahms greatly for their melodic abundance. The two composers' close friendship, begun in 1877, continued until Brahms' death 20 years later. While Brahms' influence on the younger Czech composer is often acknowledged, the inspiration Brahms found in Dvořák's works should also be noted. And while Brahms' place in the classical pantheon is more prominent than Dvořák's, the latter's contribution to chamber music is no less significant. Among his masterworks in virtually every genre of chamber music, Dvořák's Piano Quartet in E-flat Major was composed in the summer of 1889 after repeated requests from his publisher, the very same Simrock.

# Artist Information

## ESPRESSIVO!

Espressivo! is an ensemble devoted to the Piano Quartet repertoire – a bastion of great composers’ great achievements. The legendary husband and wife team of Jamie Laredo, violin, and Sharon Robinson, cello have established themselves in every “lane,” every genre, of the classical music world through touring, recording, and concertizing in venues the world over. These two veteran musicians have made a life in Vermont these last many years, and have the freedom to play exactly what they want and with whom they want. Their choice of collaborators is violist Milena Pájaro-Van de Stadt and pianist Anna Polonsky, and the resulting quartet is nothing short of a musical dream team.

Violinist Jaime Laredo has excelled in the multiple roles of soloist, conductor, recitalist, pedagogue, and chamber musician. Since his stunning orchestral debut at the age of 11 with the San Francisco Symphony, he has won the admiration and respect of audiences, critics, and fellow musicians with his passionate and polished performances. That debut inspired one critic to write, “In the 1920’s it was Yehudi Menuhin; in the 1930’s it was Isaac Stern; and last night it was Jaime Laredo.”

His education and development were greatly influenced by his teachers Josef Gingold and Ivan Galamian, as well as by private coaching with eminent masters Pablo Casals and George Szell. At the age of 17, Laredo won the prestigious Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Competition, launching his rise to international prominence. With 2009 marking the 50th anniversary of his prize, he was honored to sit on the jury for the final round of the competition. For fifteen years, Laredo was violist of the piano quartet consisting of renowned pianist Emanuel Ax, celebrated violinist Isaac Stern, and distinguished cellist Yo-Yo Ma, his close colleagues and chamber music collaborators.

## ESPRESSIVO! ARTIST INFORMATION

Together, the quartet recorded nearly the entire piano quartet repertoire on the SONY Classical label, including the works of Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann, Fauré, and Brahms, for which they won a Grammy Award. Recognized internationally as a sought-after violin teacher, Laredo has fostered the education of violinists including Leila Josefowitz, Hillary Hahn, Jennifer Koh, Ivan Chan, Soovin Kim, Pamela Frank, and Bella Hristova.

After 35 years of teaching at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and seven years at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, in 2012 Laredo began teaching at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where his wife, Sharon Robinson, also holds a teaching position. Additionally, Laredo is the conductor of the New York String Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, which brings young musicians from around the world to the stage every December. He was born in Bolivia, and now resides with Sharon Robinson in Guilford, Vermont and Cleveland, Ohio.

Cellist Sharon Robinson hails from Texas and is one of five children who played string instruments and who all became successful professional musicians. She made her New York performance debut in 1974, collaborating in a chamber music recital with violinist Jamie Laredo and pianist Samuel Sanders. Praise of her 1977 solo recital debut, which featured works of Beethoven, Britten, Crumb and Rachmaninoff, was effusive.

Robinson has performed as soloist with numerous symphony orchestras and has appeared on television programs including Sunday Morning, The Kennedy Center Honors, The Today Show, The Tonight Show, Great Conversations in Music (PBS), and The Dick Cavett Show. In 1977, Robinson and two colleagues, violinist Jamie Laredo and pianist Joseph Kalichstein, formed the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio.

## ESPRESSIVO! ARTIST INFORMATION (cont.)

The group, which performed and recorded worldwide while maintaining its original personnel, was considered among the finest chamber ensembles in existence. The Cleveland Institute of Music announced the appointment of Robinson and Jamie Laredo to the string faculty in 2012.

Pianist Anna Polonsky is widely in demand as a soloist and chamber musician. She has appeared with the Moscow Virtuosi, the Buffalo Philharmonic, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, the Memphis Symphony, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, and many others. Ms. Polonsky has collaborated with the Guarneri, Shanghai, and Juilliard Quartets, and with such musicians as Mitsuko Uchida, Yo-Yo Ma, Richard Goode, Emanuel Ax, Arnold Steinhardt, and Michael Tree. She has performed chamber music at such festivals as Marlboro, Chamber Music Northwest, Seattle, Music@Menlo, Cartagena, Bard, and Caramoor.

Ms. Polonsky has given concerts in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Vienna Konzerthaus, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall's Stern, Weill, and Zankel Halls, and has toured extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. After starting music studies in her native Moscow, she emigrated to the United States in 1990, and attended high school at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. She received her Bachelor of Music diploma from The Curtis Institute of Music under the tutelage of the renowned pianist Peter Serkin, and continued her studies with Jerome Lowenthal, earning her Master's Degree from the Juilliard School. In addition to performing, she serves on the piano faculty of Vassar College, and in the summer at the Marlboro and Kneisel Hall chamber music festivals. In addition to appearances as soloist with the New York String Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, the Tokyo Philharmonic, the Jacksonville Symphony, the Sphinx

## ESPRESSIVO! ARTIST INFORMATION (cont.)

Chamber Orchestra, and Symphony in C, she has performed in recitals and chamber music concerts throughout the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

Ms. Pájaro-van de Stadt was the founding violist of the twice-Grammy-nominated Dover Quartet, and played in the group from 2008-2022. During her time in the group, the Dover Quartet was the First Prize-winner and recipient of every special award at the Banff International String Quartet Competition 2013, and winner of the Gold Medal and Grand Prize in the 2010 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. Also during her tenure, the Dover Quartet received the Cleveland Quartet Award and an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Her numerous awards also include First Prize at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition and top prizes at the Sphinx Competition and the Tokyo International Viola Competition. While in the Dover Quartet, Ms. Pájaro-van de Stadt was on the faculty at The Curtis Institute of Music and Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music, and a part of the Quartet in Residence of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The poster features a purple background with a white and red logo of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra in the top left. The text 'Springfield Symphony Orchestra' is in white on a red banner. Below it, the title 'Eternal Echoes' is written in a large, white, serif font. On the left, a portrait of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a light-colored blazer, is shown. On the right, a man in a blue suit and glasses is shown in profile, conducting with a baton. In the center, a black box contains the date 'MAR 15' and the time '3:00PM' in white and gold text. At the bottom, the text 'TICKETS AT SPRINGFIELDSYMPHONY.ORG OR CALL 413-733-2291' is written in white.



# From the Valley Classical Concerts President

On behalf of the Board of Valley Classical Concerts, I would like to welcome you to our 2024-25 season. Founded as Music in Deerfield, VCC is now celebrating its 45th year of presenting internationally known classical chamber music ensembles for the enjoyment of music lovers in the Pioneer Valley and beyond.

We hope you are as excited as we are to hear these fabulous artists, from young prizewinners to musicians who have played together for decades. Many of them are returning simply because they appreciate the enthusiasm of our audience, and the marvelous acoustics of Sweeney Concert Hall.

I would like to thank and to gratefully acknowledge our many generous corporate sponsors, individual and Board donors, and Smith College, who have helped make this season possible and who have supported VCC over the years. They are all listed in the playbill.

Enjoy the music, encourage friends and family and younger adults and students to come to the concerts, and please consider donating to Valley Classical Concerts! Without continued financial support from our loyal patrons and lovers of chamber music, Valley Classical Concerts would not exist.

Dr. William Harbison, Board President

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