

The Red Bank  
Chamber Music Society

*presents*

The Omni Piano Quartet  
with Timothy Cobb, Double Bass  
Bridge • Brahms • Schubert

Suzanne Ornstein, violin

Ronald Carbone, viola

David Heiss, violoncello

Thomas Schmidt, piano

Sunday Afternoon  
November 8, 2015 • 4:30 PM  
Trinity Church Auditorium  
Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

# PROGRAM

Phantasie for Piano Quartet in F# Minor, H.94

Frank Bridge

Allegro vivace – L'istesso tempo – Tempo dell'introduzione  
Pochettino allargando – Tranquillo

Piano Quartet No.3 in C Minor, Op.60 ("Werther")

Johannes Brahms

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

## INTERMISSION

Piano Quintet in A Major, D.667 ("The Trout")

Franz Schubert

- I. Allegro vivace
- II. Andante
- III. Scherzo: Presto
- IV. Theme: Andantino and 5 Variations. Allegretto
- V. Finale: Allegro giusto

# Notes on the Program

## Frank Bridge (1879 – 1941)

### Phantasy Piano Quartet in F-sharp minor, H.94 (1911)

The late Victorian age saw the first flowering of British composers since the death of Henry Purcell two centuries earlier in 1695. The first and most famous of them is Edward Elgar (1857-1934), whose *Enigma Variations* (1899) and *Pomp and Circumstance* marches (the first and best-known published in 1901) put England back on the international musical map.

Many followed in Elgar's path: Frederick Delius, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst are the best known to American concert audiences. Another group of British composers flourished in this golden age, though few of their names and works are as familiar to us: Arnold Bax, John Ireland, and Frank Bridge are among those most heard now in concert halls and salons. The leading composer of the next generation would be Benjamin Britten, who was Bridge's only composition student and a lifelong champion of his works.

There are two distinct stylistic periods of Bridge's compositional output. The first, lasting until the first world war, is in the tradition of the late romantic period, with lyrical melodies and rich harmonies readily accessible to listeners accustomed to nineteenth-century European music. A committed pacifist, he was deeply affected by the war; and his style after 1914 moved increasingly towards dissonance, even atonality, and to more angular and unsettled sounds.

The work we hear today comes from his lyrical pre-war period. He composed it in 1909-10 as an entry into an annual competition sponsored by Walter Cobbett, an English businessman and amateur violinist who wanted to revive the "Fantasy" form of Henry Purcell and earlier British music. In general a *fantasia* is a short, freely constructed musical composition in one movement with sections alternating in mood and texture, suggesting a multi-movement work in condensed form. Bridge's *Phantasy Piano Quartet* follows the British conception of a "fancy" with a symmetrical architecture,

There is just one movement in Frank Bridge's quartet, with six short sections of two or three minutes each, separated by changes in key, tempo, mood, and texture:

1. *Andante con moto* (moderately paced)
2. *Allegro vivace* (quick and lively)
3. *L'istesso tempo* (the same speed)
4. *Tempo dell'introduzione (Andante con moto)*
5. *Pochettino allargando* (a tiny bit slower)
6. *Tranquillo* (peaceful)

Like much Victorian and Edwardian British music it is suffused with an atmosphere of the sea, whether in the gentle rocking of unhurried three-beat rhythms, in wave-like ripples of piano passages, or in the agitation of sudden storms at sea. Rather than try to identify the sections, it is best simply to close the eyes and let the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and moods of the piece cast their spell.

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## **Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)**

### **Piano Quartet #3 in C Minor, Op.60 (“Werther”) (1855–75)**

Brahms was 43 years old before he published his first symphony in 1876. By that age Beethoven had already published the eighth of his nine symphonies, and Mozart had written 41 symphonies before his death at age 35. Brahms was extraordinarily self-critical and self-editing in his musical output, often taking decades to produce a single large-scale work for chamber group or orchestra. Seeing himself in the shadow of Beethoven (1770-1827) he must have felt inadequate to the challenge of producing worthy successors to his predecessor’s large-scale symphonic works.

It has been noted that, of all the composers of his era, Brahms’s music embodies the most passionate expression of the Romantic style while also being the most grounded in the older classical forms of Bach and Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Much of the passion comes from the infusion of folk idioms and textures into his music: Hungarian dances, Austrian waltzes, dance-hall band styles, and gypsy instrumentation.

In 1853 the 20-year-old Brahms first met the 43-year-old Robert Schumann and quickly became closely attached to Schumann and his wife Clara in Düsseldorf. All three were virtuoso pianists: Brahms had recently begun touring in concerts; Schumann had been a virtuoso but had incapacitated one of his fingers through ill-advised practice; Clara was a well-known performer even before she met Robert, and she premiered his piano compositions after he was no longer able to play at concert level. Up until that point Brahms had published practically nothing, and he had destroyed all of his earlier works as not being good enough to publish.

In the following year 1854 Schumann’s mental deterioration led to a suicide attempt and confinement in a mental hospital for the last two years of his life. The young Brahms took on the responsibility of holding the family together, while enduring the conflict between his devotion to Robert and his deep affection for Clara, 14 years his senior. Perhaps the shock of this turn of events and the burden of caretaker led Brahms to take stock of his life and to get down to more serious work on his own musical legacy.

In the midst of this life crisis Brahms sketched the first versions of three piano quartets. He completed the first two in 1859 and 1861, but he wasn’t satisfied with the third quartet and put it aside for another 15 years. It wasn’t until 1873-75 in Vienna that the quartet achieved its final shape. It was first performed in Vienna in 1875 with Brahms at the piano.

Initially conceived during the turmoil and conflict of his life with the Schumanns, then nurtured by the self-doubt that plagued him all his life, the third piano quartet evokes the despair of a man hopelessly in love with an unattainable woman. Brahms himself once described the first movement of the quartet as a musical expression of the suicidal desperation of Werther, a young man similarly in love with a married woman in Goethe’s famous 1774 novel “The Sorrows of Young Werther”, and this is the source of its familiar subtitle. Yet the final completed work is not uniformly tragic but relieved by elements of joy and hope, perhaps a middle-aged man’s reflections twenty years later

of his youthful intense and unrequited love for Clara, a passion that he has survived and channeled into his music.

Brahms's piano quartets were really symphonies masquerading as chamber works. This one is in four movements, like his first two quartets. The overall mood is dark and tragic, with three sombre minor-key outer movements surrounding one lyrically hopeful *andante* movement.



## **Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)**

### **Quintet for Piano & Strings in A Major, D.667 “Trout” (1819)**

Of all the great composers whose music still fills concert halls, salons, private homes, schools, and recordings, Franz Schubert must claim the title of unluckiest. Like Mozart (1756-1791) he died in his early thirties, but Mozart had been famous throughout Europe as a musical prodigy from early childhood, while Schubert was unrecognized almost until his last few years on earth. Mozart had married and had fathered six children, while Schubert died a lifelong bachelor. Mozart's compositions and performances were perennially awaited by an avid Viennese public, while Schubert was barely able to survive on the charity of friends and the performances of his works by amateur musicians. But the unluckiest fact was that Schubert lived forever in the shadow of Beethoven (1770-1827); he was neither the first nor the last composer to find himself wanting in comparison to the great god, but he was the one who most deeply absorbed the essence of Beethoven's style and tried to emulate it with his own voice. Dying just one year after his idol, his last wish, granted, was to be buried next to Beethoven.

In 1819 an amateur cellist commissioned Schubert to write a piano quintet for fellow chamber music enthusiasts who planned to gather for a private performance of an 1802 Hummel quintet for piano with violin, viola, cello, and double-bass. The two stipulations for the commission were (1) that the same instrumentation be used and (2) that the work include a theme and variation movement based on the melody of Schubert's 1817 song *die Forelle* (“the trout”). The result is the archetype of piano/string quintets and, like Schumann's piano quartet, the first one to place the piano in an ensemble role rather than as a soloist accompanied by four string players.

There are five movements, unified by an ascending six-note motif drawn from the piano accompaniment to Schubert's famous song about a carefree trout cruelly tricked by a cold-blooded angler who catches him only by muddying the water, ending with a warning to young maidens to beware the wiles of seducers before it's too late. As in most of Schubert's songs, this motif isn't the melody of the singer's lines but is the piano's tone-painting of the setting in which the singer finds himself: the bubbling brook and trout rising to the lure in



*The Trout*, the spinning wheel in *Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel*; the galloping horse, the terrified dying child, and the desperate father in *Erl-King*; and the desolate wintry landscape of the hopelessly

lovelorn wanderer in *Winterreise* (*Winter Journey*), Schubert's monumental 24-song work for baritone and piano.

The first movement, marked *Allegro vivace* (fast and lively) is the longest of the five, filled with playful exuberance and constantly suggesting the piano accompaniment to the song, whose actual melody won't be heard until the fourth movement. A loud opening chord by everyone sets the A-major key, from which the two motifs of this movement are announced in rapid succession: the piano briefly states the first impulsive motif with an ascending solo arpeggio like the example above, then the strings respond with a contrasting motif in a quietly lyrical chorale resolution. Both are expanded, embellished, and varied throughout the movement, along with a third theme introduced midway through the exposition section.

The second movement, marked *Andante* (a walking pace), offers a quiet respite after the energetic first movement. Mostly lyrical and settled, it offers occasional arpeggios as reminiscences of the *Trout* motifs, but is moved along by the steady eighth-note voices of one or more of the instruments.

The middle movement is a brief scherzo in 3/4 time, marked *presto* (very quick), and is the only one that doesn't in some way suggest the *Trout* motifs that otherwise unify the work. It is in the standard scherzo/trio/scherzo form.

The fourth movement is the one that gives the quintet its name, offering a set of six variations on the song *Die Forelle*. The song theme is presented by the strings alone, *pianissimo*. Each succeeding variation is a bit louder, starting in a soft *piano* for the first variation and rising to a bold *fortissimo* for the fourth, but the fifth variation suddenly drops back down to *piano*, to prepare the mood for the final sixth variation. In the sixth, the tempo changes from *andantino* (a leisurely walking pace) to *allegretto* (lightly quick), and we hear for the first time the "trout" song as it was set for voice and piano, the violin taking up the baritone singer's part and the piano playing the original accompaniment.

The fifth and final movement, marked *allegro giusto* (quickly, in strict tempo), unfolds in the style of a Hungarian dance, announced at the outset with a long sustained octave reinforced by the piano's left hand as a call to the dance and recurring during the movement as a chance to rest for a moment and catch the breath before tearing off in a different key. Though nominally written in A major, the movement spends little time there until quite close to the end, with frequent harmonic changes providing a constant forward impulse.

*Lawrence Bein*

## ARTISTS

Since 2003 the **OMNI PIANO QUARTET** has brought extensive and diverse experience and expression to three centuries of chamber music literature while delighting audiences at the Canaan Chamber Music Festival, the Red Bank Chamber Music Society, CUNY/Staten Island, and other venues. Drawn from the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Composers String Quartet and Arden Trio, its members explore the wide variety of music in their medium with all its combinations and expressive possibilities.

Violinist **SUZANNE ORNSTEIN** is a graduate of the University of Michigan and the Yale School of Music. She is a founding member of the Arden Trio, a piano trio that has been performing concerts and residencies throughout the United States and Europe ever since its 1981 New York debut as a winner of Concert Artists Guild International Competition. Ms. Ornstein's many musical interests have led her to tour with a variety of artists and ensembles, including as concertmaster of the Coffee Club Orchestra for Garrison Keillor's *American Radio Company*. This ensemble went on to become the resident orchestra for City Center's prestigious Encore Series and has been featured on the PBS series "Great Performances". Ms. Ornstein has also served as concertmaster of New York City's Chorale Society, the New York Pops, the American Symphony Orchestra and the Little Orchestra Society among many others. She has an extensive discography as ensemble leader with Dawn Upshaw, Audra MacDonald and Barbara Cook among many others. She recently returned from a European tour with the New York Philharmonic.

Violist **RONALD CARBONE** enjoys a diverse musical life encompassing chamber music, orchestral, and solo performances as well as recording. He was principal violist of the American Ballet Theatre Orchestra and for many years an associate member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Mr Carbone is founder and music director of the Canaan Chamber Music Festival, violist in the Omni Piano Quartet, The New York Piano Quartet, as well as a frequent guest violist with Spectrum Concerts Berlin. He is a member of the Orchestra of Saint Luke's, and was for many years violist in the Composers String Quartet, as well as the Portsmouth Chamber Ensemble, the Lexington Trio, and the Griffes String Quartet. He has taught at Vassar College, the Chamber Music Conference at Bennington College and Smith College. He has recorded for many labels, including Naxos, CRI, Albany, Reference-Records, and Urlicht/Audiovisual. Mr Carbone, a recipient of the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music award and two Artists International awards, was also a member of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and the Barcelona City Orchestra.

Cellist **DAVID HEISS** is a member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and principal cellist of The New York Pops at Carnegie Hall, as well as a sought-after guest principal for many New York City area ensembles. He is a frequent guest artist and teacher at music festivals throughout the eastern United States. In his career he has performed a number of world and American premieres, including concertos by Theodore Antoniou and Irving Robbin and a cello sonata dedicated to him by Robert Manno. Extending beyond classical boundaries, he has played with such divergent groups as Hootie and the Blowfish and the Goo Goo Dolls on *The Today Show* and *Late Night with David Letterman*, and has been recorded in hundreds of sessions for films, albums, and commercials. On Broadway

he was featured in the Tony-award-winning drama *The Elephant Man* as the on-stage solo cellist, performing his own arrangements of incidental music. Mr Heiss was a scholarship student of famed cellist Leonard Rose at the Juilliard School. He plays a John Betts cello, dated 1789.

Pianist **THOMAS SCHMIDT** has had a multifaceted career as pianist, teacher, organist, conductor and composer. He is a founding member of the Arden Trio, which has toured the country and recorded extensively for nearly 30 years. He was professor of music at Concordia College in Bronxville, NY, for over twenty years until 1990. Until his retirement this year he was director of music at St Peter's Lutheran Church in Manhattan for the past 25 years where he played organ, directed the choir and wrote weekly liturgical music as well as conducted their annual performance of Bach's St. Matthew Passion each Good Friday. He is the conductor of the Long Island Symphonic Choral Association and assistant conductor of the Gregg Smith Singers. His doctoral degree is from Yale, his master's from the University of Wisconsin.

**TIMOTHY COBB** is the principal bass of the New York Philharmonic, prior to which he served as principal bass for the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. He is bass department chair for the Juilliard School and serves on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, Purchase College and Rutgers University. He also holds the title 'Distinguished Artist in Residence' at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida. He has appeared at many chamber music festivals worldwide and has toured with the Musicians from Marlboro series, and he is a faculty member of the Sarasota Music Festival. As principal bass with the World Orchestra for Peace, Mr Cobb has been designated a 'UNESCO Artist for Peace'. Mr Cobb graduated from the Curtis Institute where he studied with Roger Scott. While at Curtis, Mr Cobb was a substitute with the Philadelphia Orchestra and in his senior year became a member of the Chicago Symphony under Sir Georg Solti. Mr Cobb can be heard on all Met recordings after 1986, as well as on the Naxos label, in a recording of Giovanni Bottesini's duo bass compositions with fellow bassist Thomas Martin, of London.