

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society

presents

New York Woodwind Quintet

Carol Wincenc, flute

Stephen Taylor, oboe

Charles Neidich, clarinet

Marc Goldberg, bassoon

William Purvis, horn

Barber • Nielsen • Monteverdi • Mendelssohn

Sunday Afternoon

November 13, 2016 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

ADVANCE NOTES

PROGRAM

Summer Music (1956)

Samuel Barber

Quintet, Op. 43 (1922)

Carl Nielsen

- I. Allegro ben moderato
- II. Menuet
- III. Praeludium; Tema con variazioni

INTERMISSION

Two Madrigals

Claudio Monteverdi

(Transcribed by William Purvis)

Cruda Amarilli (1605)

Ah dolente partita (1603)

String Quartet Op. 13, #2 in A minor (1827)

Felix Mendelssohn

(Transcribed by William Purvis)

- I. Adagio; Allegro vivace
- II. Adagio non lento
- III. Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto; Allegro di molto
- IV. Presto; Adagio non lento

Notes on the Program

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) Summer Music (1956)

(~11 minutes)



In a letter dated June 7, 1989, Samuel Baron, flutist of the NYWQ wrote bassoonist Sol Schoenbach regarding the origin of Samuel Barber's "Summer Music". Edited slightly, omitting some detail, nothing new is added to Sam's text. Perhaps a little long for a program note, but it is both fascinating and enlightening:

"In the summer of 1955 the NYWQ played a concert in Blue Hill, Maine. It was a Sunday afternoon, and a very quiet, sunny, and summery day. Unbeknownst to us, Samuel Barber came to this concert. A few days afterwards, he called John Barrows in NY. (I should mention here that our personnel at that period was Jerome Roth, oboe, David Glazer, clarinet, Bernard Garfield, bassoon, John Barrows, horn, and your humble self on flute). Barber knew personally only Barrows, of the five of us. He had a strange request to make. Could we invite him to a rehearsal of the NYWQ so that he might get used to the sounds of a woodwind quintet, because he was thinking that he might write a woodwind quintet.

Needless to say, we invited him. When we asked what he wanted to hear, he replied "Anything that you happen to be rehearsing. I will just sit quietly in the corner."

Now we were working on a great intonation project at that period. John Barrows had developed a fantastic chart of all the pitches that a woodwind quintet can play from the lowest notes of the bassoon and horn to the highest notes of the flute and clarinet. There are 5 octaves of pitches on this chart, actually almost 5 ½ octaves. Across from each pitch there was an entry for each instrument that could play that pitch. As you know there is about an

octave which can be played by all five instruments, so in that octave there were 5 entries for each tone. John made the entries by interviewing us about the tones. “Is it naturally sharp, flat, or in tune? Is it harder to play soft or loud? Is it hard to attack? At which dynamic? Does it have a distinctive tone quality relative to the tones around it on the instrument? Hollow? Nasty?” And so forth. When John finished this chart, it stood about five feet tall and was quite impressive. Next he composed about four or five little studies for quintet all based on the bad notes and tough registers of our instruments.

John was not a bad composer, and these little studies were quite fascinating. When Barber came to our rehearsal, we played them. Barber was very taken with the ideas, asked to borrow John’s chart, which he folded up and took away with him.

Would you believe that Barber composed some of this material into Summer Music? The little chordal section from rehearsal 23 to rehearsal 24 is based on those bad notes. Barber concluded that a chord of all “bad” notes had more personality (when well played) than a chord of all “good” notes. What else did we play at rehearsal? We rehearsed the Hindemith Quintet and the Francaix Quintet. These were quite uneventful, but I believe that Barber took something from each of these works.

A week or so went by and Barber called us to say that he had some sketches ready and could we read them for him. We scheduled a rehearsal and were totally blown away by the beginning of Summer Music (it was still untitled) and bits and pieces of the middle.

In a few more days of time, Barber had some sketches ready and as I recall he never had to change a thing. Barber explained to us when the piece was almost finished that he was going to call it Summer Music, that he wanted it to be a loose rhapsody in form, and that he wanted it to suggest a lazy summer day – exactly the kind of day he came to the concert in Blue Hill, Maine.”



Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

Quintet, Op. 43 (1922)

(~25 minutes)



Carl Nielsen had a great deal in common with Jean Sibelius, who was born in the same year. As Sibelius became the unofficial composer laureate of Finland, Nielsen occupied a similar position in his native Denmark. Like Sibelius, too, he developed a strong, highly individual musical style. Both men became famous as composers of symphonies, but unlike Sibelius, Nielsen wrote a quantity of chamber music and two operas.

It was not until quite some time after Nielsen's death in 1931 that his music, long loved and respected in Denmark, came to be known in other parts of the world. Musically conservative, he played no role in the many technical upheavals and innovations of avant-garde composition that seemed to dominate European music in the first half of the twentieth century. Nielsen is never mentioned with the likes of Stravinsky and Schoenberg, the two musical giants of the twentieth century, as a composer who explored the limits of musical language. Even so, his works are permeated with a sense of psychological struggle - at times quite dramatic - that is very much of the twentieth century. In the United States, there was an initial flurry of interest in Nielsen's work during the 1950's, but it subsided after a few years, to be revived with more vigor and permanence in the following decades.

The Quintet for Winds, Op 43, was Nielsen's only composition for this instrumental combination, and it was his last chamber music work. Completed in 1922, it was inspired by the playing of the Copenhagen Wind Quintet, which Nielsen first heard rehearsing Mozart. All of these musicians became his friends, and the Quintet is written with the quirks of their personalities and their interrelationships in mind. This is most particularly in evidence in the Theme and Variations of the third movement, in which each instrument has solo appearances (including variations for the bassoon and the horn alone.) Nielsen intended to write a concerto for each of his friends, but, unfortunately, only completed the ones for flute and clarinet.

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) (Transcribed by William Purvis)

Two Madrigals:

- 1. Cruda Amarilli (1605)**
- 2. Ah, dolente partita (1603)**

(~5 minutes)



Few composers in the history of Western Music have stood so squarely at a stylistic intersection to the extent of Claudio Monteverdi, who embodied the transition from the late Renaissance to the early Baroque. For many music historians, both "Cruda Amarilli" and "Ah, dolente partita" epitomize this transition.

"Cruda Amarilli" paints the poignant frustration of a lover, Mirtillo, in love with Amarillo, who is engaged to Silvio, who is more interested in hunting and his dog than with love in general, and with Amarillo in particular. It is worth noting that Amarilli is related to "amer" which means bitter, but also "amor" which means love. The word painting throughout this short piece is quite striking.

The same can be said of the expressive character painting that persists throughout "Ah, dolente partita" (Ah, painful parting) as well. The stunning opening of the piece portrays the painful separation of the lovers with a unison that separates into a painful minor second in the upper voices.

The transition from the late Renaissance to the early Baroque style, from melodic lines derived from the rules of counterpoint, to material more based on dissonances derived from a bass line, is perhaps somewhat elusive to us today. Much like the difference between daylight and night is ambiguous at dusk (or night and daylight at dawn), we are more comfortable viewing this transition from the perspective of, for example, Palestrina to Bach. Regardless, the passionate expression of these short pieces is irresistible.



Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) (Transcribed by William Purvis)
String Quartet Op. 13, #2 in A minor

(~32 minutes)



Felix Mendelssohn, born in 1809, was raised in an intensely intellectual family environment. His grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn, was a towering philosophical thinker of his time, and already at age twelve his father introduced the precocious Felix to the elderly Goethe, with whom he then spent 2 weeks. He also immersed himself in the works of Shakespeare, and subsequently composed his Overture to *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1825 at the age of 16. This was followed soon after by the exuberant Octet in E♭ Major for double string quartet, notable not only for the remarkable maturity of the work composed at that young age, but also because it was the first important work for this ensemble. Of course, these are only highlights; by the time he composed the String Quartet in A Minor in 1827 at the age of eighteen, he had already completed well over 100 compositions.

Another manifestation of Mendelssohn's precocity was his fascination with and appreciation for the final string quartets of Beethoven when he first encountered them in the period immediately following Beethoven's death. This was unlike the prevailing view, concisely expressed by Ludwig Spohr, that the works were indecipherable. The String Quartet in a minor Op. 13 #2, Mendelssohn's first string quartet, shows a remarkable assimilation of the language and techniques of the final quartets of Beethoven in numerous ways.

Throughout much of the Quartet there is intensely contrapuntal writing, Mendelssohn incorporating what he learned from Bach, but also from Beethoven looking back to Bach. Several members of Mendelssohn's family appreciated the works of Bach, and an important moment in Mendelssohn's development came when he was given a score to the St. Matthew Passion in 1924.

Perhaps the clearest homage to Beethoven by Mendelssohn is the inclusion of text, although for quite different purpose for Mendelssohn than for Beethoven. Whereas the philosophical question Beethoven poses in his last string quartet, Op. 135, “Muss es Sein?” reflects the intense search for meaning of an older man, the question Mendelssohn poses, “Ist es Wahr?”, shows the passionate yearning of youth. The quote is from the opening line of a song he had composed a few months earlier, “Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arbored walkway?” Mendelssohn returns to this material to close the final movement, so providing a cyclical frame for one of the most passionate works in the chamber music repertoire.

From the transcriber, William Purvis:

I first began working on a transcription of this work for winds in 1989. During that time we were playing (and recording) Samuel Baron's stunning transcriptions of the Brahms String Quartet in A minor and Piano Quartet in G Minor. Inspired by Sam Baron, I had the idea that the intensely contrapuntal writing in the Mendelssohn could work quite well for winds, and also the Intermezzo, which is reminiscent of the wind writing in Midsummer Night's Dream. Somehow it took me twenty five years to complete this project. I dedicate this transcription to Sam Baron - friend, colleague and mentor.



ARTISTS

Now entering its seventh decade, the New York Woodwind Quintet continues to maintain an active concert presence around the world while also teaching and mentoring the next generation of woodwind performers.

One of the oldest continuously active chamber ensembles in the US, the Quintet has commissioned and premiered numerous compositions, some of which have become classics of the woodwind repertoire. They include Samuel Barber's Summer Music, and quintets by Gunther Schuller, Ezra Laderman, William Bergsma, Alec Wilder, William Sydeman, Wallingford Riegger, Jon Deak, and Yehudi Wyner. The Quintet has also featured many of these works in recordings for such labels as Boston Skyline, Bridge, New World and Nonesuch.

The Quintet also honors the legacy of departed members, including the late Samuel Baron, by continuing to perform his transcriptions of works such as Bach's Art of the Fugue and the Scherzo from Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream, and the late Ronald Roseman, by performing his Wind Quintet No. 2 and Sextet for Piano and Winds which was dedicated to the New York Woodwind Quintet and completed shortly before his death. Hornist William Purvis and clarinetist Charles Neidich continue with the Quintet's tradition of transcribing and composing, Mr. Purvis with arrangements of works by Mozart and Gesualdo, among others, and Mr. Neidich with his own work Sound and Fury for woodwind quintet and taped English horn (premiered by the NYWQ).

Unique among all woodwind quintet's touring today, the New York Woodwind Quintet is comprised of artists dedicated to chamber music yet who are individually known as soloists with far-ranging careers. Current NYWQ members are flutist **Carol Wincenc**, clarinetist **Charles Neidich**, oboist **Stephen Taylor**, bassoonist Marc Goldberg, and French hornist **William Purvis**.

The NYWQ was an Ensemble-in-Residence of The Juilliard School for twenty-five years where most taught individually as well as coached and

administered the woodwind chamber music seminar and program. The NYWQ now offers mini-residencies throughout the U.S. based upon their teaching, seminars, and wind chamber music coaching developed in their Seminar at The Juilliard School