

Geisinger

and

Northwest

are the *Up Close and Virtual* 2020–21 season sponsors.

Contributions from the members of the Center for the Performing Arts and a grant from the University Park Student Fee Board make this program free of charge.

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's

Front Row: National

Anthony McGill, clarinetist

The presentation runs approximately 1 hour and 6 minutes, and will be available for streaming from 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 21–7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 28.

Organization Co-Artistic Directors David Finckel and Wu Han introduce the program and engage in a discussion with McGill during intermission.

PROGRAM

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Front Row: National

Anthony McGill, clarinetist

“Abyss of the Birds” from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the End of Time) for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano Olivier Messiaen

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano Francis Poulenc

Allegro tristamente

Romanza: Très calme

Allegro con fuoco

(Featuring Gloria Chien, piano)

INTERMISSION

Trio in A minor for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano, Op. 114 Johannes Brahms

Allegro

Adagio

Andantino grazioso

Allegro

(Featuring Alisa Weilerstein, cello, and Inon Barnatan, piano)

PROGRAM NOTES

Olivier Messiaen

(Born 1908 in Avignon, France; died in 1992 in Paris)

“Abyss of the Birds” from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (*Quartet for the End of Time*) for Clarinet, Violin, Cello, and Piano

Quartet for the End of Time had one of the most remarkable premieres of the twentieth century. Messiaen served in the French army during World War II and was captured by the Germans at Verdun in June 1940. He was sent to Stalag VIII-A in Görlitz, Germany (today in Poland), where he was imprisoned during the winter of 1940–41. The prisoner-of-war camp was bitterly cold and food was in short supply, but Messiaen’s fame helped him greatly. A sympathetic guard provided him with the materials to compose this quartet and arranged the premiere on January 15, 1941, in a barely heated hall in front of a few hundred spellbound prisoners and guards. “Never was I listened to with such rapt attention and comprehension,” Messiaen said.

The instrumentation was determined by the musicians available—Messiaen himself played the piano alongside clarinetist Henri Akoka, violinist Jean Le Boulair, and cellist Étienne Pasquier. The work’s movements are a mix of solos, duos, and trios, with only four of the eight movements using the full quartet. “Abyss of the Birds” was actually the first music Messiaen composed. He met Akoka while serving at Verdun and began a piece for him based on the birdsongs that he heard at the end of his night watch. They were captured before Akoka could try the piece, and the clarinetist first played it in an open field in Nancy, where they were held while waiting to be transported to the prisoner-of-war camp. Messiaen’s sprightly birdsongs are surrounded by meter-less, meditative reveries.

Messiaen was freed and allowed to return to Paris just a month after the January 1941 premiere of the full quartet. Akoka, who was Jewish, was not so lucky, but he made his way out of captivity in a daring escape. He was briefly transferred from Germany to western France, and on the ride back to the prisoner-of-war camp he jumped from the top of the train in the middle of the night. He lay injured and unconscious by the tracks and luckily was found by railway workers and taken to the home of a sympathetic doctor

who hid him for more than a month while he recovered. He reached the French Free Zone on May 17, 1941. (For the full story of Messiaen, Akoka, and the quartet, see *For the End of Time: The Story of the Messiaen Quartet* by Rebecca Rischin.)

Francis Poulenc
(Born in 1899 in Paris; died in 1963)
Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

The Clarinet Sonata was one of Poulenc's last works. Its style is out of step with the avant-garde 1960s, and it doesn't reflect his (relatively) advanced age. Rather, it hearkens back to his beginnings. He launched his career in the heady atmosphere of post-World War I Europe and embraced the spirit of novelty and experimentation that was so popular at the time. He created his own sound inspired by café music—cheeky, irreverent, and slightly absurd. It wasn't like anyone else. He said, "I am not a cubist musician, even less a futurist, and of course, not an Impressionist. I am a musician without a label." To create his unique sound, he used winds. After exploring unusual combinations of winds in his earlier years in pieces like the sonatas for two clarinets and for clarinet and bassoon, he returned to more traditional pairings for his late flute sonata, clarinet sonata, and oboe sonata, each with piano. French musicologist Claude Rostand famously described Poulenc as part monk-part troublemaker, and the droll, insouciant sound of winds suited him perfectly.

Poulenc wrote his Clarinet Sonata for Benny Goodman. Though known as a jazz clarinetist, Goodman had a strong interest in classical music and commissioned and premiered many works in the mid-twentieth century: Béla Bartók's *Contrasts*, Glenn Gould's *Derivations*, and concertos by Aaron Copland, Paul Hindemith, and Darius Milhaud. Poulenc was supposed to play the piano at the premiere, but he passed away from a heart attack on January 30, 1963. Leonard Bernstein joined Goodman for the premiere on April 10, 1963, at Carnegie Hall.

Johannes Brahms
(Born in 1833 in Hamburg, Germany; died in 1897 in Vienna, Austria)
Trio in A minor for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano, Op. 114

Brahms met clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld in March 1891 on a visit to Meiningen, Germany, where the clarinetist played in the court orchestra. Brahms had recently declared himself retired, but his fondness of Mühlfeld's playing inspired him to compose again. He wrote this trio and a clarinet quintet in summer 1891, and Mühlfeld premiered them before the end of the year in Berlin with Brahms at the piano. Three years later, Brahms wrote two sonatas for Mühlfeld and again accompanied him on the piano. He liked Mühlfeld, calling him "Fräulein Klarinette" and "Dear Nightingale," and treated him very well, giving him the manuscript scores for the sonatas and allowing him to have the full fees from their joint performances.

Though Brahms' focus on the clarinet was new, the trio looks back. Brahms knew it was probably one of his last pieces, and it is a work of memory, of wistful longing for a lost

past. The deep, dark-hued cello and the clear, bright clarinet are not natural companions, but in the first movement they co-exist by echoing each other in long phrases. The effect of hearing two similar phrases in two different sound worlds is like hearing a story from different points of view. Every time the clarinet enters over the cello, there's a subtle twist in the plot, a new way of understanding the narrative. It's a reminder that the past is ephemeral, but we hold on to the faded memories of once strong emotions. The movement ends with running *arpeggios* in contrary motion—both instruments moving quickly but collectively not going anywhere. The acceptance at the end is sweet but inevitable. The two middle movements are similarly bittersweet. The energy picks up a bit in the last movement for a satisfying conclusion to this late retrospective work.

*Program notes by Laura Keller, CMS Editorial Manager
© 2020 Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center*

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

“One of the most admired pianists of his generation” (*The New York Times*), Israeli pianist **Inon Barnatan** is celebrated for his poetic sensibility, musical intelligence, and consummate artistry. He inaugurated his tenure as music director of California’s La Jolla Music Society Summerfest in 2019. He is the recipient of a 2009 Avery Fisher Career Grant and Lincoln Center’s 2015 Martin E. Segal Award; served as the inaugural artist-in-association of the New York Philharmonic; and is an alum of Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s Bowers Program. His recent concerto collaborations include those with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Symphony, the New Jersey Symphony, and the Cincinnati Symphony. Last season, he played Felix Mendelssohn, George Gershwin, and Franz Schubert for his solo recital debut at Carnegie’s Zankel Hall. He reunited with his frequent recital partner, cellist Alisa Weilerstein, for tours on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, including performances of Ludwig Van Beethoven’s complete cello sonatas in San Francisco and other U.S. cities. His latest album is Beethoven’s complete piano concertos, recorded with Alan Gilbert and London’s Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Other recent releases include a live recording of Olivier Messiaen’s ninety-minute masterpiece *Des canyons aux étoiles (From the Canyons to the Stars)* at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and Schubert’s late piano sonatas on the Avie label.

Taiwanese-born pianist **Gloria Chien** has a diverse musical life as a noted performer, concert presenter, and educator. She was selected by *The Boston Globe* as one of its Superior Pianists of the year. She made her orchestral debut at the age of 16 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Thomas Dausgaard; she performed again with the orchestra with Keith Lockhart. In recent seasons, she has performed as a recitalist and chamber musician at Alice Tully Hall, the Library of Congress, the Phillips Collection, the Kissinger Sommer festival, the Dresden Chamber Music Festival, and the National Concert Hall in Taiwan. She performs frequently with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and is an alum of the society’s Bowers Program. In 2009, she launched

String Theory, a chamber music series at the Hunter Museum of American Art in Chattanooga that has become one of Tennessee's premier classical music presenters. The following year, she was appointed director of the Chamber Music Institute at the Music@Menlo festival, a post she held for the next decade. In 2017, she joined her husband, violinist Soovin Kim, as co-artistic director of the Lake Champlain Chamber Music Festival in Burlington, Vermont. The duo serve as the new artistic directors at Chamber Music Northwest in Portland, Oregon. Chien received her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music as a student of Russell Sherman and Wha-Kyung Byun. She is an artist-in-residence at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, and is a Steinway Artist.

Clarinetist **Anthony McGill**, hailed for his "trademark brilliance, penetrating sound, and rich character" (*The New York Times*), enjoys a dynamic international solo and chamber music career. He is principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic—the first African-American principal player in the organization's history. In 2020, he was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize, one of classical music's most significant awards given in recognition of soloists who represent the highest level of musical excellence. He appears regularly as a soloist with top orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, San Diego Symphony, and Kansas City Symphony. He was honored to perform at the inauguration of President Barack Obama, premiering a piece by John Williams and performing alongside Itzhak Perlman, Yo-Yo Ma, and Gabriela Montero. As a chamber musician, he is a favorite collaborator of the Brentano, Daedalus, Guarneri, Jack, Miró, Pacifica, Shanghai, Takács, and Tokyo quartets. He also has collaborated with Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnatan, Gloria Chien, Yefim Bronfman, Gil Shaham, Midori, Mitsuko Uchida, and Lang Lang. He is an alum of Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Bowers Program. In demand as a teacher, he serves on the faculty of The Juilliard School, Curtis Institute of Music, and Bard College Conservatory of Music. He is the artistic director for the Music Advancement Program at The Juilliard School. In May 2020, McGill launched #TakeTwoKnees, a viral musical protest video campaign against the death of George Floyd and historic racial injustice.

Alisa Weilerstein is one of the foremost cellists of our time. Since making her professional and Carnegie Hall debuts in her early teens, she has been in high demand as a solo recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist with leading orchestras worldwide. She was recognized with a MacArthur Fellowship in 2011. Weilerstein is an authority on Johann Sebastian Bach's music for unaccompanied cello. She recently released a best-selling recording of his solo suites on the Pentatone label, streamed them in her innovative #36DaysOfBach project, and deconstructed his beloved G Major prelude in a Vox video, which was viewed almost 1.5 million times. Her discography also includes chart-topping albums and a winner of BBC Music's "Recording of the Year" award. As Artistic Partner of the Trondheim Soloists, she regularly tours and records with the Norwegian orchestra. She is an ardent advocate of contemporary music, and she has premiered and championed important new works by composers including Pascal Dusapin, Osvaldo Golijov, and Matthias Pintscher. Other career milestones include a performance at the White House for President and Mrs. Obama.