**LISA SAPINKOPF ARTISTS**

9 Commodore Drive, Suite 309 (800) 923-1973; (510) 428-1533

Emeryville, CA 94608 USA LSapinkopf@aol.com

www.chambermuse.com

**St. Petersburg Piano Quartet**

**Repertoire**

Juantio Becenti\* (b.1983, Diné/Navajo) — Divertimento No.4 for Piano Quartet (2014)

Beethoven — Piano Quartet in E flat major, Op. 16

Beethoven — Piano Quartet in C major, No.3, WoO 36

Jeremiah Bornfield (b.1976) As it Happened (Commemorating the events of 9/11)

*(Written for the St. Petersburg Piano Quartet)*

Brahms — Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

Brahms — Piano Quartet in A major, Op. 26

Brahms — Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 60

Gershwin — It Ain't Necessarily So

Mack McCray (b.1943) — Piano Quartet (2020) *(Written for the St. Petersburg Piano Quartet)*

Mozart — Piano Quartet in G minor, K.478

Mozart — Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K. 493

Robert Schumann — Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47

\*Press about Mr. Becenti:

www.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/arts/nyfos-next-features-a-new-work-by-juantio-becenti.html

www.navajotimes.com/entertainment/music/2011/0111/010711composer

www.musicalamerica.com/news/newsstory.cfm?archived=0&storyID=36045&categoryID=5

**PROGRAM NOTES:**

**BEETHOVEN:**

In 1797, the 27-year-old Beethoven had yet to try his hand at the “serious” big-ticket genres: string quartet, symphony or opera. Indeed, at the time, he was noteworthy not so much as a composer but as a brilliant pianist, particularly for his stunning improvisations. So far, Beethoven had composed piano sonatas, trios, serenades and various other genres typically with a live performance in mind: to showcase the master at the keyboard.

Beethoven took special inspiration from Mozart’s Quintet for Piano and Winds (K. 452) written thirteen years earlier and decided to write his own. Beethoven’s quintet shares much in common with Mozart’s: the same instrumentation (piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and horn), the same key (E-flat major), the same three-movement layout and even the same approximate forms for each movement (including the dramatic slow introduction). This is in fact Beethoven at his most Mozartian.

But when he published the work in 1810, Beethoven also included a version for piano quartet (piano, violin, viola and cello). It is not a mere transcription, but a careful re-casting of the music with alterations to take advantage of strings vs. winds. This was not Beethoven’s first piano quartet; he had written three several years before possibly even preceding Mozart’s foray into the same genre. What remains unchanged between the quintet with winds and the quartet with strings is the piano. In some ways, Op. 16 is actually like a miniature chamber piano concerto, so crucial is the virtuosic keyboard part. Lovers of Beethoven’s piano sonatas and concertos will find something of both in this sparkling work.

Beethoven launches Op. 16 with a grand introduction marked Grave. Nearly three minutes of drama pass before the curtain rises on the main theme, a much lighter and livelier vehicle naturally introduced by the piano. The sonata form movement is fully appointed with contrasting themes, a development, a “fake” recapitulation leading to more development, and a significantly modified recapitulation and a coda. Beethoven is bold, ambitious and generous with his musical ideas.

The middle movement could have come from a Mozart piano concerto with its graceful, lyrical beauty and its “singing” piano, but the “orchestra” is a string trio and Beethoven distributes and balances the parts in a true chamber style achieving a remarkably gorgeous texture. Beethoven’s brilliant pianism subjects the keyboard part to a wide variety of rhythms and figurations so that even when “accompanying” the foreground string parts, there is virtuosity of color and decorative line. The invention extends to the recurrence of the main theme that is always changing making the slow movement a hybrid of rondo and variation form.

The finale is also in rondo form (a main theme recurs with contrasting episodes intervening) but its terse “hunting” theme, brisk pace, charged drama and occasional riotousness make it a perfectly sparkling and witty conclusion, perhaps more Haydnesque than Mozartian. Beethoven even provides for a concerto-like cadenza for the piano where, to the delight of his audience and the dismay of his fellow musicians, Beethoven took great liberties during the premiere.

**BORNFIELD:**

American composer Jeremiah Bornfield was born in Flagstaff, Arizona, and began studying music at age 4 with his father in the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. By 11 he was touring the nation as a singer in the Tucson Arizona Boys Chorus. After studying strings with the Tucson Symphony's principal violinist, Jeremiah decided his talents were best suited for hardcore gangster rap. After re-evaluating his position within society's legal structure, Bornfield thought it better to become a classical composer. He received his masters degree in composition at Hunter College in January 2009.

Since then, Bornfield has created musical commissions for many leading classical performers and ensembles. His output includes three one-act multimedia operas, two concerti, several string quartets, and many works for piano, soloists and chamber ensembles. Bornfield is deeply interested in creating music that entertains and nourishes the spirit.

His works have been heard and premiered at venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Beijing Central Conservatory, DiMenna Center and National Concert Hall Taipei. His work with award-winning animators has been seen at Walter Reade Theater, SVA Theater and Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art among others. He has written music for commercial advertisements for PayPal, Rizzoli Books, and Duty Free Shopping co-branded by Chloe, Michael Kors, Clarins, Tumi, Jaeger LeCoultre, and Hermès.

The composer writes:

"*As it Happened* takes us through a musical timescape which presents one composer’s feel of New York before, during and after September 11th. From ordinary business to the terror itself, the numbing, the anger and the vast joyful connections we made through it as New Yorkers, here is one of millions of stories.”

**BRAHMS**:

Brahms’ three piano quartets were conceived together (although the third was published, with alterations, much later) during a time that was fraught with turmoil for the composer. He had returned to his native Hamburg after the death of his close friend and mentor Robert Schumann. A failed romance with Agathe von Siebold and the complex nature of his relationship with Clara Wieck, Schumann’s widow, surely caused him emotional distress.

This was also a period of intense study for the young composer. When many of his contemporaries were exploring the possibilities of programatic music (romantic notions, myths and patriotic themes), Brahms dedicated enormous amounts of time to the study the music of his forebears, and he was devoted to the idea of absolute music (music for which no references are stated).

The G minor quartet opens with the statement of a simple melodic idea by the three string players and the piano in unison, answered by some gentle chords. This, along with the second more lyrical and tender theme, are developed and expanded in a myriad of ways. In this, Brahms owes much to the music of Beethoven. They both had the ability to manipulate a simple idea brilliantly to create some very memorable melodies, not to mention the countermelodies and harmony to go with them.

The second movement was originally entitled Scherzo, but later renamed Intermezzo, a title Brahms reserved for some of his most magical music. Muted strings, a rippling piano part and the use of duple and triple time, so characteristic of the composer, are used to great effect in this movement. A more animated trio section follows. The third movement begins with a broad melody that eventually evolves into a curiously martial mid-section, again reminiscent of Beethoven (the Turkish march from the Ninth Symphony comes to mind)! The wild Rondo alla Zingarese, or Gypsy Rondo, with its three bar rhythms, virtuoso parts and a very orchestral ending make for a rousing finale. Brahms’ biographer Ivor Keys wrote of it, “It was obviously designed to bring the house down, and it did.”

**MOZART:**

In 1785 Mozart was commissioned by his publisher friend Franz Anton Hoffmeister to write three quartets for piano and strings. In itself the form was unusal, the piano trio being the preferred chamber music idiom in Vienna at the time. Also unusal, was Mozart's treatment of the piano as an equal partner in the music. Other works of that period, with similar instrumentation, were generally constructed like miniature concerti, with the keyboard in an accompaniing role.

Dated June 1786, Mozart's E-flat piano quartet K.493 was completed despite the fact that Hoffmeister had cancelled the commission due to the disappointing sales of the first quartet, in G minor. It was finally published in 1787 by Artaria, whom Mozart luckily managed to convince to take over the project. Perhaps the Viennese audience was reluctant to embrace music so revolutionary in style. It is more likely that the amateur musicians of the time found the challenging piano parts altogether too difficult.

This second quartet, finished only one month after the composer completed his brilliantly successful work, The Marriage of Figaro, shares the exhilaration and subversive humor of the opera. Opening with a virtuosic display in the piano, the spirited runs give way to a lyrical and graceful theme which is revisited in many guises throughout the movement. The exceedingly beautiful A flat Larghetto displays Mozart's mastery in balancing different instrumental weights. The first theme of the Allegretto was described by Einstein as "the purest, most childlike and godlike melody ever sung." This lovely rondo has a quality of the utmost sparkle and finesse, concluding the work as brightly as it began.

**SCHUMANN:**

In September of 1840, Robert Schumann married the love of his life, Clara Wieck. Clara was a gifted pianist and composer in her own right and Schumann obviously found her inspirational. The 12 months after their marriage saw him complete his famous song cycles, his first 2 symphonies, several other orchestral works and the first movement of his great piano concerto. Despite her obvious positive influence, their relationship could be quite tempestuous. When she embarked on a concert tour of Denmark in 1841, Schumann felt slighted and his creativity seemed to stall. He launched himself into studying the string quartet scores of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn, drowning his melancholy in "beer and Champagne." When Clara returned, he once again took up his pen, and it was during this period of renewed productivity that he completed not only this piano quartet, but his three string quartets Op 41 and his piano quintet.

The Andante cantabile is a poignant, tender melody exchanged between the different instruments. This material is varied only slightly. A delicate coda brings this warm, noble movement to a close.