



West-Eastern Divan Ensemble

Michael Barenboim / *Music Director and Violin*

Samir Naser Abdel Hamid Obaido / *Violin*

Yamen Saadi / *Violin*

David Strongin / *Violin*

Miriam Manasherov / *Viola*

Sindy Mohamed / *Viola*

Assif Binness / *Cello*

Astrig Spidak Siranossian / *Cello*

Wednesday Evening, February 26, 2020 at 7:30

Rackham Auditorium

Ann Arbor

77th Performance of the 141st Annual Season

57th Annual Chamber Arts Series

Ken Fischer, president emeritus of the University Musical Society and a leader in the national arts community, was awarded an honorary **Doctor of Fine Arts** degree at the University of Michigan Winter 2019 commencement.

Ken is widely known for his significant contributions to the arts. As president of UMS from 1987 until his retirement in 2017, he oversaw the expansion of UMS into many new areas, including a sustained commitment to dance, theater, and global traditions. Under his guiding values of “Everybody In, Nobody Out,” UMS built an extensive education and community engagement program that now includes hundreds of free events each season. In 2015, President Barack Obama presented UMS with the National Medal of Arts, the highest award in the arts given by the US government.

We are delighted to add our congratulations to Ken and celebrate his honorary degree as part of this evening’s West-Eastern Divan Ensemble concert at UMS, a fitting moment to recognize his unwavering commitment to excellence, bringing people of different backgrounds together, and advancing culture in our world.

This evening’s performance is supported by Joel Howell and Linda Samuelson.

Media partnership provided by WGTE 91.3 FM.

Special thanks to Pamela Ruiters-Feenstra, visiting university carillonist, for coordinating this evening’s pre-concert music on the Charles Baird Carillon.

Michael Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble appear on tour with the support of CAMI Music (New York), the Daniel Barenboim Stiftung (Berlin), and the Barenboim-Said Foundation USA.

In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms

Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 18

Allegro ma non troppo
Andante, ma moderato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Poco allegretto e grazioso

Mr. Barenboim, Mr. Saadi, Ms. Manasherov, Ms. Mohamed,
Ms. Siranossian, Mr. Binness

Benjamin Attahir

Jawb for String Octet

Intermission

Giuseppe Tartini

Violin Sonata in g minor, Op. 1, No. 4

Larghetto affectuoso
Tempo giusto della Scuola Tartinista
Sogni dell'autore: Andante, allegro assai

Mr. Barenboim

Felix Mendelssohn

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo
Presto

SEXTET NO. 1 IN B-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 18 (1860)

Johannes Brahms

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna

UMS premiere: Yoko Moore and Martin Chalifour (violins), Stanley Konopka and Lynne Ramsey (violas), and Richard Weiss and Bryan Dumm (cellos) as part of a multi-day residency with The Cleveland Orchestra; February 5, 1995 in Rackham Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1860:

- The Pony Express begins its first run from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California
- South Carolina becomes the first state to secede from the US
- Charles Dickens publishes the first installment of *Great Expectations* in his magazine *All the Year Round*

The two sextets for two violins, two violas, and two cellos are Brahms's earliest chamber works without piano, preceding the string quartets and quintets by several years. They reveal a composer full of youthful energy yet possessed of an emotional maturity well beyond his years.

Brahms in his mid-20s did not feel quite ready to write a string quartet. In that genre, Beethoven's legacy seemed even more oppressive than it did in others. Although the performing forces are larger, a string sextet actually presented a lesser challenge. First of all, string sextets did not have such a daunting history (in fact, they hardly had any history at all), and second, chamber ensembles of six or more players (not necessarily all strings) had previously been associated with lighter, serenade-type music. Brahms, who had composed two orchestral serenades in the late 1850s, adapted their genial atmosphere to the chamber-music medium in his first sextet,

written between 1858 and 1860 and premiered in Hanover by Joseph Joachim and five of his colleagues on October 20, 1860.

Joachim was not only one of the greatest violinists of his time, he was also a composer in his own right. During their long friendship, Brahms often asked Joachim for his opinion in compositional matters. He did so not only in the case of the Violin Concerto where he needed Joachim's violinistic expertise, but also with the Piano Concerto No. 1, as well as the present sextet. In the latter work, Joachim felt that the opening theme of the first movement needed to be stated twice, lest the subsequent modulations begin too soon. Brahms heeded his friend's advice and added 10 measures at the beginning of the work. The first cello thus received the honor of announcing the lyrical theme, which is then taken over by the first violin. The character of this tender and romantic movement is best defined by the performance

instructions *espressivo*, *tranquillo*, and *dolce*, found frequently in the score.

The second movement, in the form of theme and variations, contains some unmistakable echoes of Bach's famous "Chaconne" from the Partita in d minor for unaccompanied violin (a piece that Brahms later arranged for piano). The d-minor melody, like many Baroque variation themes, is dominated by a descending harmonic progression, but Brahms enriched it with some characteristic modal (that is, neither major nor minor) inflections. There are five variations, of which the first three grow gradually more and more impassioned. In variations IV and V, the key changes to D Major, and the music evolves from gentle lyricism to a moment of supreme magic. The theme then reappears in its original form but in a much more subdued instrumentation.

The third movement is an extremely brief scherzo in the Beethovenian mold, with allusions to Symphonies Nos. 5 and 7. The main section, already quite fast, frames a trio that is even more animated. Some of the trio's thematic material returns, a la Beethoven, as the movement's coda.

The last movement's graceful theme is passed from the first cello to the first violin, as in the opening movement. The light serenade tone prevails throughout, except for a brief moment where the music becomes more agitated. Each time the main theme returns, its instrumentation changes. At the last recapitulation, for instance, the melody is divided between two groups of three

instruments each, alternating in every measure. The work ends with a spirited coda, getting faster and faster to the end.

JAWB FOR STRING OCTET (2019)

Benjamin Attahir

Born February 25, 1989 in Toulouse, France

UMS premiere: This piece has never been performed on a UMS concert.

In lieu of a retrospective statement about the themes and processes of his work, the composer provides the following text to accompany the performance of his new commission for the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble: *Jawb* for String Octet.

J'ai traversé des paysages
comme on traverse une frontière
un océan fer et cendres

I have crossed lands
like one crosses a border
an ocean of iron and ashes

Embrasé

Burning

Jamais se retourner
je m'étais dit
jamais plus se retourner
sur ces paysages que mes yeux

Never to go back
I had told myself
never again to go back
to these land that my eyes

Embrassaient

Beheld

Liaient, reliaient
relisaient
sans jamais leur donner sens

Linked, connected
reread
without ever giving them meaning

S'avancer

Stepping forward

Simplement dans l'épaisseur du noir
Jamais le même noir
je me suis dit
je reconnais ce noir
et mes yeux me disaient le contraire

Simply in the thickness of dark
Never the same dark
I said to myself
I recognize this darkness
but my eyes told me the opposite

Oublie

Forget it

Maintenant j'ai tout oublié
les attaches, le port, la barque
il ne reste plus que nous
nous que cette mer toujours
sépare.

Now I've forgotten everything
the ties, the port, the boat
there's nothing left but us
us whom this sea always
separates.

VIOLIN SONATA IN G MINOR, OP. 1, NO. 4 “IL TRILLO DEL DIAVOLO” (THE DEVIL’S TRILL) (1713)

Giuseppe Tartini

Born April 8, 1692 in Pirano (now Piran, Istria peninsula, Slovenia)

Died February 26, 1770 in Padua, Italy

UMS premiere: Violinist William Yunck with pianist Julius Seyler; June 1890 in University Hall.

Snapshots of History...In 1713:

- The Treaty of Portsmouth ends hostilities between the Abenaki Indians and the British Provinces of Massachusetts Bay and New Hampshire
- Arcangelo Corelli dies at the age of 60
- Antoine Watteau paints *Fête galante*

The “Devil’s Trill” sonata is one of the best-known violin works from the rich Italian Baroque repertoire. The author, a celebrated virtuoso, was for many years the concertmaster at St. Anthony’s basilica in Padua (known for its famous Giotto paintings). He left over 100 violin concertos and dozens of sonatas, in addition to sacred vocal works and theoretical writings, but nothing captured the imagination of posterity more than the “Devil’s Trill” and the dream story in which it supposedly originated. His colorful life was the subject of a fictionalized biography by the celebrated American violinist Albert Spalding, entitled *A Fiddle, a Sword and a Lady* (1953), which speaks of Tartini’s artistry on the violin, his prowess as a fencer, and his secret romance with the woman he married in 1710 at the age of 18.

It is not known exactly when Tartini wrote the “Devil’s Trill” sonata. The traditionally accepted date (1713) is now thought to be several decades too early for stylistic reasons. In any event, Tartini was in the habit of returning to his old compositions time and again, making changes and

corrections over a period of many years. The sonata first appeared in print in 1763. Tonight, Mr. Barenboim performs the sonata without accompaniment. While the accompaniment is technically optional, a solo performance is quite rare.

Tartini’s dream, as recounted to his friend the French astronomer Joseph de Lalande:

I dreamed one night that I made a pact with the devil. In return for my soul, the devil promised to be at my side whenever I needed him, anticipating my every wish. On a whim, I handed him my violin, to see what kind of musician he might be. To my astonishment, the music he made was exquisite — a sonata of such unearthly skill and beauty that I stood transfixed as he played. My pulse stopped, breath failed me — and I awoke. Snatching up a fiddle, I tried to recapture the sounds I’d heard. Feverishly, before I should forget, I noted down the music of the sonata. But though it is the best I ever composed, how poor, how far inferior it is to the music the devil played in my tantalizing dream!

OCTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 20 (1825)

Felix Mendelssohn

Born February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany

Died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig

UMS premiere: Stratford Festival Orchestra of Canada with violinist and director Oscar Shumsky; July 1967 at the Fair Lane Festival in Dearborn.

Snapshots of History...In 1825:

- The US House of Representatives elects John Quincy Adams as President after no presidential candidate receives a majority of electoral votes
- The Erie Canal opens
- The Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first modern railway, opens in England

Mendelssohn wrote his Octet in 1825, the same year Beethoven composed his String Quartet in B-flat Major (Op. 130) with its original last movement, the Great Fugue. At 55, Beethoven was nearing the end of his career; the 16-year-old Mendelssohn was just starting his. Much ink has been spilled over who was “modern” and who was “conservative,” who was “classical” and who was “romantic.” Mendelssohn never tried to explode classical forms the way Beethoven did in his late quartets, which broke the conventions at every turn. Yet the younger composer infused those traditional forms with a new energy in ways that were absolutely unheard of. He also invented a whole new genre with his Octet, which calls for what can be considered either a large chamber group or a small orchestra. Mendelssohn noted in his manuscript:

This Octet must be played by all instruments in symphonic orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasized than is usual in pieces of this character.

Yet there were really no other “pieces of this character” of which to speak. True, Louis Spohr, a composer who was counted among the greatest at the time, had written some works for eight string players, but those were double quartets, conceived as dialogs between two separate groups. Mendelssohn, on the other hand, treated his eight players as a single, integrated unit, which was a quite different story.

As for the young prodigy’s melodic style, one need only compare the Octet’s opening with the “sunrise” theme at the beginning of Haydn’s String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 76, No. 4, which has a comparable melodic shape. Haydn’s theme is to Mendelssohn’s what a sunrise would be to a solar flare. The Octet opens with a true stroke of genius, and the continuation is in every way worthy of those exceptional first measures.

In all four movements, classical gestures are similarly magnified and expanded upon. The second movement, in c minor, begins and ends in a gentle *pianissimo*, evoking

a nocturnal mood, but there are some extremely powerful emotional outbursts in between. The third movement is the first in a long line of light-footed “fairy” scherzos by Mendelssohn, a type of movement to which the composer frequently returned in later years. This time, however, he used a modified sonata form, so, the movement is a scherzo only in character and not in terms of its structure (among other things, it lacks a contrasting trio or middle section).

In the concluding “Presto,” finally, Mendelssohn pulled out all the stops. He wrote a brilliant fugue, as a bow to the music of the Baroque which he had already begun to study and which would play such an important role in his later life. The quote from Handel’s *Messiah* (“And He shall reign for ever and ever”) cannot be missed. But there is also plenty of playfulness in the movement, along with some harmonic surprises that would have made Handel — and probably Beethoven, too — raise his eyebrows in disbelief mixed with admiration.

Program notes by Peter Laki.

ARTISTS

The **West-Eastern Divan Ensemble**, led by the Orchestra's concertmaster Michael Barenboim, draws upon players of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Founded in 1999, the origins of the Orchestra lie in the conversations between its founders, Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim. Over the course of their great friendship, the Palestinian author/scholar and Israeli conductor/pianist discussed ideas on music, culture, and humanity. In their exchanges, they realized the urgent need for an alternative way to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The opportunity to do this came when Barenboim and Said held a workshop using their experience as a model. This evolved into the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra that global audiences know today. The group is comprised of Arab and Israeli musicians, defying fierce political divides in the Middle East and globally. Through its work and existence, they demonstrate that bridges can be built to encourage people to listen to the narrative of the other.

The West-Eastern Divan Ensemble is the most recent imprint of this project and brings the highly praised artistry of the large orchestra into an intimate chamber music format. As the Orchestra celebrates its 20th anniversary, Michael Barenboim, who as a soloist has recently appeared with Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, and Chicago Symphony, continues to spread the ideas that built the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra even further and continues to offer the public an opportunity to intimately experience the musicians' unique artistry and personality.

While committed to the core classical and romantic repertoire, **Michael Barenboim** (*music director and violin*) is deeply

invested and recognized for his performances of 20th-century and contemporary music. He celebrates a long history of collaboration with the late Pierre Boulez, whose pieces he regularly performs. His second solo recording, with works by Sciarrino, Berio, and Paganini, was released in early 2018 and hailed by critics as "visionary programming" (*BBC Music Magazine*), "breathtakingly compelling, and one that's full of brilliant revelations" (*The Strad*).

Recent highlights include debuts with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with Robert Trevino and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and with San Diego Symphony and Dresden Philharmonic, performing the Glazunov Violin Concerto. Mr. Barenboim's debut with the Berlin Philharmonic performing Schönberg's Violin Concerto was critically acclaimed, and followed debuts with the Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, and Israel Philharmonic. He has also appeared with London's Philharmonia Orchestra, performing Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No.1, and with the BBC Philharmonic performing Berg's Violin Concerto.

The current season brings debuts with the Orchestre National d'Île de France, where he will perform in a regional tour of the Ligeti Concerto with Case Scaglione conducting, and with Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, where he will perform Dutilleux's Concerto with Fabien Gabel. He will also return to the Enescu Festival Orchestra to perform J. Widmann's Violin Concerto No. 1, and will reprise the Schönberg Concerto, this time at the Musikverein with the ORF Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien under the baton of Pinchas Steinberg. Trio performances

with Daniel Barenboim and Kian Soltani will be featured at the Boulez Saal in Berlin, and Mr. Barenboim will be soloist and leader of a new chamber ensemble of musicians from the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, known as Michael Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble.

Mr. Barenboim is a founding member of the Erlenbusch Quartet and frequently invited to such festivals as the Lucerne Festival, Verbier, Aix en Provence, and Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival. He collaborates regularly with his mother, the pianist Elena Bashkurova, as well as with such artists as Franz Helmerson, Julian Steckel, Guy Braunstein, Andras Schiff, and Martha Argerich. He also serves as concertmaster of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and cultivates a continuous and strong involvement in educational activities. He is head of chamber music at the Barenboim-Said Academy and gives master classes around the world.

UMS welcomes Michael Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Ensemble as they make their UMS debuts tonight.

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TONIGHT'S PERFORMANCE**

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Must have a ticket to that evening's performance to attend.
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