

Saturday, March 9, 2019 7:30 p.m. Lloyd Ultan Recital Hall

Alexander Woods, piano

Alyssa Becker, mezzo-soprano

Megan Reich, flute

Sonata No. 1 (1953, rev. 1991)
II. Theme and Six Variations

George Walker (1922-2018)

Three Songs, Op. 45
Now have I fed and eaten up the rose
A Green Lowland of Pianos
O boundless, boundless evening

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Sonata for flute and piano (1936)
Heiter bewegt
Sehr langsam
Sehr lebhaft — Marsch

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

Three River Songs

The Housatonic at Stockbridge (1914/1921)
Where the River Bends *from Raspberry Island Dreaming* (2002)
The Lordly Hudson (1947)

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

Libby Larsen (b. 1950)

Ned Rorem (b. 1923)

PAUSE

Nachtstück *from 1922 Suite for Piano*, Op. 26
Nude at the Piano (2001)
Largo maestoso *from Five Improvisations*, Op. 148

Hindemith

John Musto (b. 1954)

Amy Beach (1867-1944)

Cabaret Songs (2011)
Who Could Have Known?
You Are A Love Song
The Luckiest Woman
Sai Tu Perchè
You

Dominick Argento (1927-2019)

Master's Recital

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree Master of Music in Collaborative Piano and Coaching. Alexander Woods is a student of Timothy Lovelace.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Program Notes

WALKER George Walker began his studies at Oberlin Conservatory at the age of 14, and later became the first African-American to graduate from Curtis. A virtuoso pianist as well as a composer, Walker garnered fame in his early years performing concertos of Rachmaninoff, Brahms, and Beethoven, and would go on to premiere many of his own works in concerts and recordings. His oeuvre includes a wide variety of orchestral and chamber works, concertos for violin, cello, and piano, several songs, and five piano sonatas. In 1996, Walker became the first African-American composer to win the Pulitzer Prize, awarded for his soprano and orchestra piece *Lilacs*. His eclectic compositional style can be characterized by its rhythmic complexity, striking instrumental colors, and expansive harmonic language. It also bears influences of jazz and black folk music, smoothly integrated with sounds of the twentieth-century Western classical tradition. Walker's Piano Sonata No. 1 embraces traditional models of Baroque- and Classical-era form, but within a persistently modern sense of tonality. The second movement is a set of six variations on the traditional bluegrass song *O Bury Me Beneath the Willow*, recast as a tuneful ballad amidst pandiatonic and quartal harmonies. It explores several distinct characters within Walker's harmonization of the tune. The first variation is marked *legato vigoroso*, with a forward-leaning contrapuntal texture. The second and third variations are more clangorous, using thicker chords and a wider range of the keyboard. In the fourth variation we are offered a moment of peaceful respite, while the fifth is driven by several cheeky shifts of character and dynamics. The final variation features a vibrant drone of 32nd notes with declamatory melodic gestures played in leaping octaves.

BARBER In addition to his formidable prowess as a composer, pianist, and singer, Samuel Barber possessed an immense depth of literary and linguistic expertise. As his longtime editor and friend Paul Wittke quipped, Barber "read Proust in French, Goethe in German, Dante in Italian, Neruda in Spanish, and *Moby Dick* in Italian..."¹ In the same vein, Barber's art songs draw upon a wide breadth of texts from writers across the centuries. His settings range from the journal entries of medieval Irish monks to the French of Rainer Maria Rilke to the poems of Langston Hughes and James Joyce. Indeed, Barber's songs can be considered staples of the repertoire not only for the poignant expressivity of the music, but also for the remarkable variety of poetry that they offer to concert audiences.

The Op. 45 songs were the last to be published during Barber's lifetime, and are all based on English translations of German and Polish texts. They were premiered in 1974 by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Charles Wordsworth, on a commission from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. The three poems contrast greatly in their temperaments, and the music is written with a lush and oftentimes strikingly dissonant harmonic palette. The first song is based on a poem from Gottfried Keller's 1846 cycle *Gedanken eines Lebendig-Begrabenen (Thoughts of a Living Burial)*.² Here, stark and expressively chromatic harmonies help to convey intertwined themes of mortality, love, and piety. In "A Green Lowland of Pianos," Barber sets the surrealist poetry of Polish writer Jerzy Harasymowicz (winner of the 1980 Nobel Prize in Literature) to a charming and carefree tune with a richly textured accompaniment. The final song of the set portrays the splendor of a vibrant landscape, suspending our sense of time to envisage the fleeting moments of light just before nightfall.

HINDEMITH In 1935, Paul Hindemith began the task of writing a sonata for virtually every orchestral instrument. This project took him two decades, culminating with his sonata for bass tuba and piano in 1955. The total set of 26 pieces represents a significant contribution to the modern chamber music repertoire, particularly for wind instruments. Hindemith's focus on sonatas must also be considered within the political circumstances of the time. In 1936, the Nazis banned public performances of his works, dismissing them as "cultural Bolshevism." Relegated to the fringe of sanctioned artistic life, Hindemith turned towards a genre that could be readily performed in both international concerts and private settings. In 1938, this lack of opportunity spurred by political

¹ "Samuel Barber: An Improvisatory Portrait," quoted in *Samuel Barber: 65 Songs*, G. Schirmer, Inc, 1994.

² Although Keller was the original author, James Joyce composed his translation from a version of the poem that had been excerpted and altered by the German composer and conductor Othmar Schoek (1886-1957).

and musical isolation led Hindemith and his wife Gertrude to emigrate to Switzerland, where they lived for two years before moving to New Haven, CT.

By the 1930s, Hindemith's compositions were becoming increasingly influenced by the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement, which had gained ground in artistic circles during the post-WWI Weimar Republic. In reaction to trends of expressionism prevalent in the pre-war years, followers of the New Objectivity touted matter-of-fact practicality over extravagant emotion. Hindemith's 1936 sonata for flute and piano does reflect this approach to a certain extent, as much of the material is generated through orderly motivic development. However, the sonata is by no means devoid of expression. The first movement features a perplexing combination of nostalgically tuneful thematic material, sweeping melodic gestures, and swaths of orchestral color. We continue to hear lyrical melodic lines in the *Sehr langsam* (very slow) second movement, though here they are cast amidst bleak harmonies and an unrelenting double-dotted motif in the piano. The last movement resembles a playful "hunt" finale of the Classical era, but with the addition of a satirical military march (perhaps a derisive response to Germany's increasingly violent and martial sociopolitical climate).

THREE RIVER SONGS Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several groups of American artists and writers drew inspiration from the natural landscapes of the northeastern United States. Painters of the Hudson River School such as Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902) sought to depict the sublime in scenes of upstate New York. In a similar vein, transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) saw in their natural surroundings a path to achieving a purer, more spiritually engaged sense of humanity. In her poetry, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) found endless fascination in flowers and gardens, while Walt Whitman (1819-1892) often harnessed natural imagery to address themes of love, sensuality, and individual freedom (among others). In tonight's songs, we can hear how American composers have also followed in the tradition of admiring the country's natural beauty. This set focuses upon the sentiments of majesty, nostalgia, and wonder inspired by rivers.

Charles Ives (a proud New Englander) was intimately familiar with the works of the transcendentalists, and in many of his compositions provides a direct musical link to the aforementioned artists.³ He originally wrote "The Housatonic at Stockbridge" as a movement of his orchestral work *Three Places in New England* (1914). The 1921 song version, set to an excerpt of Robert Underwood Johnson's synonymous poem, illustrates both the hazy calm and roaring grandeur associated with the Housatonic River. Libby Larsen's *Raspberry Island Dreaming* (2002) offers images of the Mississippi River just outside of downtown Saint Paul. In "Where the River Bends" Larsen quotes snippets of "Shenandoah," while Sutphen's poetry draws our attention to memories of home and childhood associated with the river. Likewise, Ned Rorem's setting of Goodman's "The Lordly Hudson" features an awestruck speaker who emphatically celebrates the sense of home found at the Hudson.

HINDEMITH, MUSTO, BEACH In this set, two short solo works bookend John Musto's song "Nude at the Piano." Though the pieces originate from vastly different eras and styles, they all inhabit a harmonic universe rife with extended chords and ambiguous tonality. Even further, these works all exhibit some influence from popular styles, perhaps evoking the sounds of a salon or an early jazz club. In the *Suite 1922*, Paul Hindemith embraces popular "kitsch" with open arms. During the early 1920s, the young composer found himself spending more and more time at the piano, experimenting with popular American dance styles, film music, and operetta. In one letter to his publisher he wrote, "Can you also use foxtrots, bostons, rags, and other forms of kitsch? [...] (After all, good kitsch is terribly rare.)"⁴ The contemplative *Nachtstück* from *Suite 1922* bears some resemblance to a lyrical ballad, with a melodious (though somewhat detached) refrain that provides balance between the piece's extreme dynamic and textural contrasts. "Nude at the Piano" is a theatrical lament that transports us to the universe of cabaret and popular song, but in a distinctive non-tonal language. The character of Mark Campbell's poem is rather elusive, exhibiting a poignant blend of both comic and tragic imagery. The final piece in the set is the last

³ The four movements of his second piano sonata ("Concord") are named after Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bronson and Louisa May Alcott, and Thoreau. Ives also wrote four accompanying essays, explaining how each of the figures' intellectual traits are embodied within the music.

⁴ 22 March 1920, quoted in Preface, *1922 Suite für Klavier*, Schott, 1990.

of Amy Beach's *Five Improvisations*, Op. 148. In contrast to her earlier, post-Romantic works, these salon-style miniatures are unstable in their sense of tonality. The *Five Improvisations* are Beach's last published opus, capping off an impressive output that includes the *Gaelic Symphony* (1897), a piano concerto (1899), several chamber works for piano and strings, upwards of thirty assorted keyboard works, a wide array of sacred and secular choral music, and over 130 songs.

ARGENTO The late Dominick Argento is recognized as one of the leading American composers of contemporary vocal music. His works include thirteen operas, about two dozen choral works, and several song cycles. His cycle *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1975, and his *Casa Guidi* for mezzo soprano and orchestra won a Grammy in 2004. His *Six Elizabethan Songs* (1957), in addition, are standards of the American concert repertoire. Through the early 1950s Argento studied with composers such as Luigi Dallapiccola and Henry Cowell, and from 1958-1997 he taught theory and composition at the University of Minnesota. He was named Composer Laureate for the Minnesota Orchestra, and played a vital role in enriching the Twin Cities' music scene for over half a century. Argento's compositional style is extremely varied: across his vocal works, he embraces a variety of tonal and atonal techniques in service of the most suitable text setting.

The *Cabaret Songs* (2011) follow in the tradition of composers such as Kurt Weill or William Bolcom, whose songs have infused the world of art song with the sounds of jazz, musical theatre, and Great American Songbook tunes. Argento's cabaret songs are strongly rooted in these styles, but contain subtle idiosyncrasies of harmony and form that set them apart. All five are set to text written by the composer, and each features a firm (if not somewhat overzealous) declaration of love to an unspecified person of interest. The fourth song, "Sai Tu Perché," is written in Italian and leans a bit more towards the *bel canto* style. Throughout the cycle, the piano part is written relatively simply, leaving ample room for the accompanist to improvise and elaborate upon the score, if desired.

—AW

Texts and Translations

Now have I fed and eaten up the rose

by James Joyce (1882-1941), from the German of Gottfried Keller (1819-1890) & Othmar Schoek (1886-1957)

Now have I fed and eaten up the rose
Which then she laid within my stiffcold hand.
That I should ever feed upon a rose
I never had believed in liveman's land.

Da hab' ich gar die Rose aufgeessen,
Die sie mir in die starre Hand gegeben!
Dass ich noch einmal würde Rosen essen,
Hätt nimmer ich geglaubt in meinem Leben!

Only I wonder was it white or red
The flower that in the darkness my food has been.
Give us, and if Thou give, thy daily bread,
Deliver us from evil, Lord, Amen.

Ich möcht' nur wissen, ob es eine rote,
Ob eine weisse Rose das gewesen?
Gib täglich uns, o Herr! von deinem Brote,
Und wenn du willst erlös' uns von dem Bösen

A Green Lowland of Pianos

by Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), from the Polish of Jerzy Harasymowicz (1933-1999)

In the evening
as far as the eye can see
herds
of black pianos

Wieczorem
jak okiem sięgnąć
stada
czarnych fortepianów

up to their knees
in the mire
they listen to the frogs

po kolana
w bajorze
żab słuchają

they gurgle in water
with chords of rapture

w wodzie akordami
zachwytów bulgocą

they are entranced
by froggish, moonish spontaneity

zachwyca je
żabia księżycowa spontaniczność

after the vacation
they cause scandals
in a concert hall
during the artistic milking
suddenly they lie down
like cows

po wakacjach
w koncertowej sali
skandale czynią
podczas artystycznego dojenia
kładą się naraz
jak krowy

looking with indifference
at the white flowers
of the audience

patrzac obojętnie
na białe kwiaty
publiczności

at the gesticulating
of the ushers

na woźnych
gestykulacje

O boundless, boundless evening

by Christopher Middleton (1926-2015) from the German of Georg Heym (1887-1912)

O boundless, boundless evening. Soon the glow
Of long hills on the skyline will be gone,
Like clear dream country now, rich-hued by sun.
O boundless evening where the cornfields throw
The scattered daylight back in an aureole.
Swallows high up are singing, very small.
On every meadow glitters their swift flight,
In woods of rushes and where tall masts stand
In brilliant bays. Yet in ravines beyond
Between the hills already nests the night.

O weiter, weiter Abend. Da verglühn
Die langen Hügel an dem Horizont,
Wie klare Träume Landschaft bunt besonnt.
O weiter Abend, wo die Saaten sprühen
Des Tages Licht zurück in goldnem Schein.
Hoch oben singen Schwalben, winzig klein.
Auf allen Feldern glitzert ihre Jagd,
Im Wald des Rohres und in hellen Buchten,
Wo hohe Masten stehn. Doch in den Schluchten
Der Hügel hinten nistet schon die Nacht.

To the Housatonic at Stockbridge (excerpt)

by Robert Underwood Johnson (1853-1937)

Contented river! In thy dreamy realm
The cloudy willow and the plummy elm:
Thou beautiful!
From ev'ry dreamy hill
what eye but wanders with thee at thy will,
Contented river!
And yet over-shy
To mask thy beauty from the eager eye;
Hast thou a thought to hide from field and town?
In some deep current of the sunlit brown
Ah! there's a restive ripple,
And the swift red leaves
September's firstlings faster drift;
Wouldst thou away, dear stream?
Come whisper near!
I also of much resting have a fear:
Let me tomorrow thy companion be,
By fall and shallow to the adventurous sea!

Where the River Bent

by Joyce Sutphen (b. 1949)

One Sunday we went down to the river,
all of us in our forty-nine Chevy,
until we reached the gate and my father
said, "Come on, I'll lead the rest of the way."

There were horses in the fields where we walked,
there were hawks circling where the river bent,
we were blue-jeaned pilgrims who only talked
of northern pike, of carp and of pheasants.
I put my feet down where that river ran,
and sat on a stone that nothing could move,
and watched that gray ribbon slip through the land
light as the wind, like a hand in a glove.

Years late, when it was time to go home
we walked single file, filled up to the brim

The Lordly Hudson

by Paul Goodman (1911-1972)

“Driver, what stream is it?” I asked, well knowing
it was our lordly Hudson hardly flowing.
“It is our lordly Hudson hardly flowing,”
he said, “under the green-grown cliffs.”

Be still, heart! No one needs
your passionate suffrage to select this glory,
this is our lordly Hudson hardly flowing
under the green-grown cliffs.

“Driver, has this a peer in Europe or the East?”
“No, no!” he said. Home! Home!
Be quiet, heart! This is our lordly Hudson
and has no peer in Europe or the east.

This is our lordly Hudson hardly flowing
under the green-grown cliffs
and has no peer in Europe or the East.
Be quiet, heart! Home! Home!

Nude at the Piano

by Mark Campbell (b. 1953)

Here I sit,
Nude at the piano,
On this cold, cold stool.
I got with me here
A bottle of beer
And I’m feeling like a fool.

And while I
Brood at the piano
You are somewhere faraway.
So I sit and I freeze
And I stare at the keys
Wishing I knew how to play.

I would jump
Off the Verrazano
But I’m really just too blue...

So I sit,
Nude at the piano,
The piano I bought
For you

Cabaret Songs

by Dominick Argento (1927-2019)

“Who Could Have Known?”

Who could have known
That we’d end up like this?
Who knew that you
Would change my blues to bliss?

Who could express
All that you mean to me?
Deeds pale, words fail,
To convey my love’s immensity.

During all those years,
We’d nod and grin,
then go our ways, apart.
We used the language
Old friends speak in
‘til we learned the language of the heart
(When it sings).

Who could have known
I could start life anew?
It’s clear, my dear,
Now that you are here, it was you.

“You Are A Love Song”

You are a love song
I hear all the time.
The words — short and simple:
“I’m yours. You’re mine.”
A song that will resonate
As long as life endures.
In tones as sweet as you are:
“You’re mine. I’m yours.”

Though the heart is mute
It found a way
Through the pow’r of music
To convey
“I’m yours. You’re mine.”
What more is there to say?

Our song will reverberate
Eternally, a sign
To tell the world
Who we are:
“I’m yours. You’re mine!”

“Sai tu perchè”

Sai tu perchè la lune splende?
Sai tu perchè il sole brilla?
Perchè riflettono la luce d’un amor,
La luce d’un amore grande quante’ il mio

Non trovo mai parole giuste;
Non potrei dirti quanto t’amo
Ma se tu vuoi saper i miei ver pensier
Bisogna legger quell ch’è scritto nel cuore mio

Ed ecco cos’è scritto

“Senza te fianc’a fianco con me
Il cuor si spezzerebbe;
Senza te tra le braccia mie
La vita finerebbe.”

Solo tu mi fai contento,
Tu sei la musica che sento.
La luna ed il sol aiutano narrar
La storia d’un amore grande come il nostro.

“The Luckiest Woman”

I never won the lottery,
Or a prize of any worth.
And yet to me I’ll always be
The luckiest woman on earth.

I’m hopeless at Monopoly
And at cards I vainly strive.
But nonetheless, I must confess,
I’m the luckiest woman alive.

I wash the car; it’s sure to rain.
Invest my dough; right down the drain.
Get a great job Monday; Tuesday: fired.
Go to pay my bill; find the credit card’s expired
a month ago! Oh, no! Oh, no!

But damnit! I reiterate
I’m as lucky as can be,
‘Cause neither fame nor fortune compensate
For all that your love means to me.

Do you know why the moon is glowing?
Do you know why the sun’s so bright?
Because they are reflecting the light of a love,
The light of a love as great as mine.

I can never find the proper words;
I’m unable to tell you how much I love you.
But if you wish to know my truest thoughts,
You must read what is written in my heart.

And this is what it says:

“Without you side by side with me
My heart would break;
Without you in my arms
My life would end.”

You alone can make me happy,
You are the music that I hear.
The moon and sun are helping to narrate
The story of a love as great as ours.

“You”

You are the gift Love sent to charm my days.
Your smile can disarm me in a thousand
different ways.

At times we sit and reminisce.

You talk of that, I talk of this.

And I am at my happiest whenever there's
a chance to simply gaze and gaze at You!

You're the reason that my heart's so light.

The love that you show me makes my future feel
as bright

As blue skies on a sunny day and school boys on
a holiday.

One person makes me feel that way and that is you.

Thanks to you I now believe that miracles come true:

I ask you what you're thinking. You reply: "It's
always you."

At first we were uncertain yet when all is said and done,

Love is better late than never. Now's our moment in
the sun.

O You, you are music, a tremendous theme,

Mere words are unworthy to describe so dear a dream,

I'll never have my fill of you, the endless joy and
thrill of you,

I'll keep right on until you too say "I'm in love with you!"