



DREAM GATES

Saturday, February 27, 2021 at 7:30pm

ALLEN-BRADLEY HALL

M**S****O** MILWAUKEE
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

KEN-DAVID MASUR / MUSIC DIRECTOR

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Quintet in G minor, Opus 39

- I. Moderato
- II. Andante energico
- III. Allegro sostenuto, ma con brio
- IV. Adagio pesante
- V. Allegro percipitato, ma non troppo presto
- VI. Andantino

ELEANOR ALBERGA

Shining Gate of Morpheus

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Quintet No. 1 in F major, Opus 88

- I. Allegro non troppo ma con brio
- II. Grave ed appassionato – Allegretto vivace –
Tempo I – Presto – Tempo I
- III. Allegro energico – Presto

The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra's Reimagined Season is sponsored by the **United Performing Arts Fund**.

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SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Quintet in G minor, Opus 39

Katherine Young Steele, oboe

Todd Levy, clarinet

John Bian, violin

Samantha Rodriguez, viola

Jon McCullough-Benner, bass



ELEANOR ALBERGA

Shining Gate of Morpheus

Matthew Annin, horn

Alex Ayers, violin

Paul Hauer, violin

Nathan Hackett, viola

Madeleine Kabat, cello



JOHANNES BRAHMS

Quintet No. 1 in F major, Opus 88

Yuka Kadota, violin

Lijia Phang, violin

Elizabeth Breslin, viola

Linda Numagami, viola

Peter Szczepanek, cello

DREAM GATES

Program Notes by J. Mark Baker

The haunting night-sounds of Alberga's work for horn and string quartet. The warm, autumnal textures and timbres of Brahms's first String Quintet. The keen rhythms, angular melodies, and spicy tone colors of Prokofiev's chamber ballet for five players. It's a musical melting pot designed to wake the imagination.

Sergei Prokofiev

Born 23 April 1891; Sontsovka, Russia

Died 5 March 1953; Moscow, Russia



Quintet in G minor, Opus 39

Composed: 1924

First performance: 6 March 1927; Moscow, Russia

Instrumentation: oboe; clarinet; violin; viola; bass

In the last years of tsarist Russia, Sergei Prokofiev, still in his 20s, made his name as a composer of music both weighty and sardonic. Following the Revolution, making his home mainly in the United States and then Paris, his mode of expression progressively became more settled and, one might say, more polished. He spent the last 17 years of his life back in the Soviet Union, however, both spurred on and restrained by the cultural policies of Stalin's regime. Throughout his life, he occupied himself with music for the stage, and was one of the 20th century's most distinguished creators of symphonies, concertos, and piano sonatas. Ironically, he died on the same day as Joseph Stalin.

In addition to the work on today's program, Prokofiev's chamber music output includes, among other pieces, two string quartets, a violin sonata, a cello sonata, a bassoon quartet, and a sonata for two violins. The G minor quintet – colorfully scored for oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, and double bass – is his earliest chamber work, and dates from his years in Paris, the epicenter of the musical avant-garde.

In 1924, Prokofiev received a commission from choreographer and fellow Russian expatriate, Boris Romanov, to write a new ballet for a touring group based in Germany. The troupe, the composer wrote, "wished to present a program of several short pieces accompanied by five instruments. I proposed a quintet consisting of oboe, clarinet, violin, viola, and double bass. The simple plot, based on circus life, was titled *Trapeze*."

The incisive, colorful music Prokofiev set down is appropriately whimsical. Chockfull of angular melodies, dissonant – even polytonal – harmonies, and irregular rhythms, the score ultimately proved too difficult for *Trapeze's* dancers. Wisely, the composer turned the work into the Quintet. The choice of instruments, and the way Prokofiev makes use of them, can elicit an unblended sonority, sometimes giving the piece a gritty but jocular playfulness. As ever, though, his talent for tuneful melodies and well-shaped phrases guides the music.

An oboe solo, rife with "wrong" notes, opens the work. In the middle of the movement, the music comes to an abrupt halt, then presents a couple of variations before the oboe theme returns. The double bass begins the *Andante energico*, intoning a droll melody. Both the theme and its rhythmic figure permeate the movement as the musical material finds its unique form of lyricism.

In the brief, slapstick-like third movement, a relentless pulse and sassy melodic curlicues make it easy to imagine circus acrobats performing. It was the sort of "impractical rhythms" (e.g., eighth-note patterns of 3+4+3 in a 5/4 measure) here that challenged the ballet troupe. The fourth movement, "slow and heavy," restricts its melodic activity to regularly spaced eighth notes, undergirded by viola arpeggios and irregular bass rhythms. Instrumental colors shift as the music grows in intensity.

Despite its various churning layers, the fifth movement retains textural transparency due to melodic echoes and delightful pizzicato bass licks. A wisecracking clarinet solo ends this lighthearted Allegro. The final Andantino begins in a somber mood, but soon becomes more playful. Then the dirge-like music returns, but much more impassioned this time. The Quintet concludes with a raspy passage marked *tumultuoso e precipitato*.

Eleanor Alberga

Born 30 September 1949; Kingston, Jamaica

Shining Gate of Morpheus

Composed: 2012

First performance: 7 October 2012;
Welsh Marches, United Kingdom

Instrumentation: horn; string quartet



At the ripe old age of five, Eleanor Alberga decided she wanted to be a concert pianist; she began composing short pieces. As a teenager, she played the guitar in a folk group, later attending the Jamaica School of Music. In 1970, a scholarship allowed her to study at London's Royal Academy of Music, after which she performed as a concert pianist. She decided, in 2001, to suspend her career as a performer to concentrate on composition. Alberga is a guest lecturer at her U.K. alma mater and now lives in the Herefordshire countryside with her husband, the violinist Thomas Bowes. Together they have founded and cultivated an original festival, Arcadia.

Alberga's list of works includes piano music, chamber music, vocal/choral works, orchestral music (including two violin concertos), and two operas. As her website duly notes, her music is not easy to pigeon-hole. The musical language of her opera *Letters of Love Betrayed* (2009), for example, has drawn comparisons with Berg's *Wozzeck* and Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*; on the other hand, her lighter works show the influence of her time with the Jamaican Folk Singers and as a member of an African dance company.

Chamber music is a favored medium for Alberga – both in the more traditional form of three string quartets and a piano quintet – and for more unusual scorings. Currently, she is composing a series of nocturnes, two of which have been completed: *Succubus Moon* is written for oboe and string quartet; *Shining Gate of Morpheus* calls for horn and string quartet. Regarding the latter, the composer has written the following:

I have always been drawn to Greek mythology and the world of fantasy that it embodies. This work came from the idea of Morpheus, the god best known to govern sleep and dreams. It is said that false dreams enter through gates of ivory and true dreams through gates of shining horn. In Greek, the word for "ivory" is like the word for "deceive" and the word for horn is similar to that for "fulfill;" thus, the use of the horn as a musical instrument is significant.

Homer describes this through Penelope's words in The Odyssey. "Two gates there are for unsubstantiated dreams, one made of horn and one of ivory. The dreams that pass through the carved ivory delude and bring us tales that turn to naught; those that come forth through the polished horn accomplish real things, whenever seen."

The piece is in one movement. A short introduction to the peaceful world of sleep is followed by a fanfare as we enter dreams, which take us through several musical tableaux describing prophetic dreams. Strange things happen in dreams and somehow, along with doors opening into scenes such as "Ancestors speak," "The Beloved" and "Three descend," there is a visit from Puck, an unrelated character who gets into the mix and stirs things up with his antics.

Johannes Brahms

Born 7 March 1833; Hamburg, Germany
Died 3 April 1897; Vienna, Austria

Quintet No. 1 in F major, Opus 88

Composed: 1882

First performance: 29 December 1882;
Frankfurt, Germany

Instrumentation: string quintet



The 49-year-old Brahms had spent the spring of 1882 in Vienna. That summer at Bad Ischl (c30 miles east of Salzburg), his favorite resort town, he completed the C major piano trio, Opus 87, as well as the F major quintet and the choral/orchestral *Gesang der Parzen*, Opus. 89.

The “radiantly joyous” (Karl Geiringer) String Quintet in F major, Opus 88, is the first of two such pieces Brahms composed. Scholars agree that it was written rapidly, inspired by the springtime mood of Vienna. Like Mozart’s six string quintets, the scoring is for two violins, two violas, and cello. The use of two violas, Brahms’s favorite instrument (per Geiringer), adds a luscious richness to the ensemble’s texture. Curiously, there are only three movements. (We usually expect four, as in Brahms’s second quintet – and all of Mozart’s.)

The sunny first movement opens with a felicitous melody, which is soon followed by a second theme based on a Viennese waltz. The development section of this sonata form makes ample use of pedal points, with changing harmonies and textures above long-held bass notes, and there’s a dynamic climax before the movement’s lovely opening music returns. In form, the second movement is essentially a five-part rondo that combines elements of a slow movement and a scherzo. Brahms repurposed the Grave ed appassionato from an 1855 *Sarabande* for piano. It serves as a ritornello, with a light-hearted Allegretto vivace and its variation in Presto as episodes.

Musicologists have noted that Brahms took the finale of Beethoven’s third “Razumovsky” string quartet (Opus 59, No. 3) as his inspiration for the final movement of the quintet, combining fugue and sonata form. After two opening chords, the first viola sounds the fugue subject, followed by the second violin, then the first violin, then second viola and cello together. The various themes of this movement are all variations on this main theme, or in counterpoint to it, providing unity in music of great variety. A final Presto brings the quintet to its carefree conclusion. By all accounts, this life-affirming quintet was greeted with enthusiasm at its premiere in Frankfurt.

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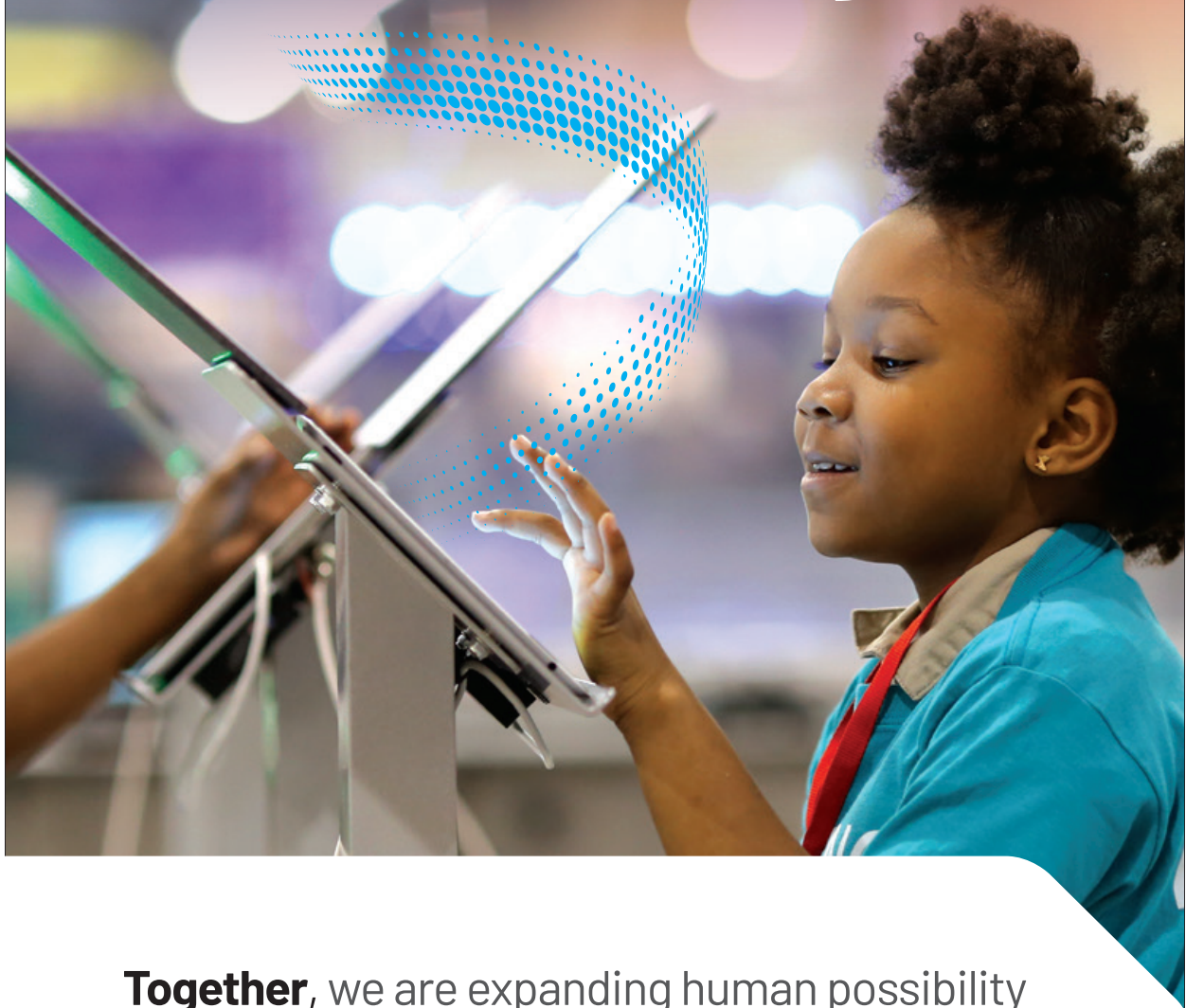
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