Chamber Music Amici

Once Upon a Time

August 31 • 7:00 PM
The Shedd Institute for The Arts

Amici
Steven Pologe cello, Sharon Schuman violin

Guests
MacIntyre Dixon narrator, Nathalie Fortin piano,
Arnaud Ghillebaert viola, Hal Grossman violin
Steve Vacchi bassoon

Ernst von Dohnányi
Piano Quintet No. 2 in E-flat Minor, Op. 26

Colin Pip Dixon
Chaucer’s The Rooster and the Fox:
Sextet for Bassoon, Piano, String Quartet, & Narrator
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Chamber Music Amici receives support from the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the State of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts.
Welcome!

I am excited that you are able to join me for the final concert of Chamber Music Amici’s 2020-21 season. Today’s performance includes the world premiere of “Chaucer’s The Rooster and the Fox” by Colin Pip Dixon and Dohnányi’s fabulous but rarely performed piano quintet, which will bring you Hungary’s rich musical tradition and elevate your musical experience on this gorgeous summer evening. As we conclude this unwonted season, Amici is staying auspicious and even jubilant, having never stopped making beautiful music with and for our friends. On behalf of Chamber Music Amici, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you who believed in us and continued to be an integral part of our musical journey. With hopeful anticipation, I look forward to seeing you at the first concert of our new season as we return to our home venue, the Wildish Community Theater.

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Program

Piano Quintet No. 2 in E-flat Minor, Op. 26  
Ernst von Dohnányi (1877-1960)

I. Allegro non troppo  
II. Intermezzo: Allegretto  
III. Moderato - Tempo del primo pezzo

Nathalie Fortin, piano; Hal Grossman, violin; Sharon Schuman, violin; 
Arnaud Ghillebaert, viola; Steven Pologe, cello

Chaucer’s The Rooster and the Fox:  
Colin Pip Dixon (b. 1972)

Sextet for Bassoon, Piano, String Quartet & Narrator

Prologue – Pilgrim’s March
I. The Widow  
II. Chaunticleer  
III. The Seven Wives  
IV. The Nightmare  
V. Twilight  
VI. Goodnight  
VII. Morning Sun  
VIII. The Fox  
IX. Chaunticleer’s Song to the Sun  
X. The Chase  
XI. Celebration and Epilogue

Steve Vacchi, bassoon; Nathalie Fortin, piano; Hal Grossman, violin; Sharon Schuman, violin; 
Arnaud Ghillebaert, viola; Steven Pologe, cello; MacIntyre Dixon, narrator
Program Notes

Ernst von Dohnányi was born in Pozsony (modern day Bratislava) on 27 July 1877. His first musical lessons were in piano and theory, given by his father (a cellist) and the local organist Károly Forstner. All promising musicians of the day were expected to travel to one of Europe’s major cities to receive formal instruction at one of their conservatories (see Vienna, Paris, etc.) once they reached maturity. Dohnányi broke this tradition when he enrolled at the Budapest Academy. He was easily the most significant musician to do so and, in a sense, led the way for noted musicians like Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály to follow suit. He went on to have a stellar performing career—he is considered the greatest pianist/composer of Hungarian descent after Liszt—and his compositions were even supported by luminaries such as Johannes Brahms. Dohnányi performed relentlessly in Hungary, giving approximately 250 concerts in Budapest alone from 1919-1921—an astonishing number. All the while he toured the U.S. regularly, was chief conductor of the Philharmonic Society in Budapest (a post he held for 25 years) and taught for a while/was director of his alma mater. The 1930s and early 40s weren’t as kind to him. He fought against illness, familial issues, and persistent (and completely unsubstantiated) rumors coming from both sides of the political divide. All of this led to the near collapse of his performance career and shortly after the Nazis invaded his country, he fled to Austria, then Argentina, and eventually the U.S. where a professorship of piano and composition at Florida State University kept him stateside from 1949 until his death in 1960.

Dohnányi was a rare breed—a soloist who also regularly played chamber music. This is evident from the onset of the first movement (Allegro non troppo) of his Piano Quintet No.2, Op.26 in E-flat minor. Here there are doubled, tripled, and sometimes quadrupled melodies in the strings (by way of octave displacement) to keep the ensemble balanced. There is something remarkably efficient about this piece. It isn’t virtuosic simply for the sake of showing off. Here is a musician aware of his own place in the pantheon of keyboardists and simultaneously truly comfortable with his abilities as a composer. The second movement (Intermezzo: Allegretto) starts as a wonderfully danceable waltz but then Dohnányi offers a set of variations on that Hungarian-informed melody, each more playful than the last. He even cleverly quotes the first movement’s secondary theme at one point. The third and final movement (Moderato) begins with a somber canon led by the cello before cascading upwards to the rest of the strings. Dohnányi keeps the keyboard silent for quite some time as if the sentiments expressed here are so personal that he wishes not to draw attention to himself. When the piano finally does enter, it is reverent, hymn like. Later in the movement, intervallic motives very reminiscent of the first movement are presented. Like in the Intermezzo, the viola is asked to carry the melody surprisingly often. This choice by Dohnányi only adds to the dark and mysterious nature of the work. With around four minutes to spare, an even more overt return to the first movement’s opening bars is presented. Shortly after, the key shifts to E-flat major,
the piano takes the lead while the writing becomes nostalgic and borderline heroic. Just as soon as it hints at a bold finale, though, it disappears back into the mist from which it sprouted. The work was premiered by him with the Klingler Quartet on 12 November 1914 in Berlin.

—Dr. M. Brent Williams

**Colin Pip Dixon** Chaucer’s tale seemed to jump off the page with music. The fable, on the surface, has a childlike quality to it, but at its core there is sophistication and biting humor in Chaucer’s world of farm animals. I knew immediately that melody would be central along with uneven dance rhythms. I tried to allow the music to emerge from Chaucer’s verses and create musical motifs that would evoke the essence of the animals and their character rather than imitate or illustrate. I worked to create a dramatic arc that intertwined words and music in such a way that both were telling the story together. How often is a rooster the hero of a story? How often do we get to hear the bassoon as the featured instrument?

The work opens and closes with the Pilgrim’s March. The piano begins alone. I imagined it reaching back in time, contemporary harmonies which search for fragments of music from the Middle Ages. The bassoon enters with a melody which I could almost hear being played in the distance as the pilgrims marched along the road. The strings join with a mix of dissonance and sacred, perfect intervals, suggesting our disparate time periods coming together.

As the story unfolds, each of the characters’ motifs has its own color: the poor widow’s ensemble is stripped down to a couple of fiddles and a viola playing an improvised country dance; Chaunticleer’s theme (the rooster’s), is rich, noble and a little pompous; the seven hens find themselves in a jumpy 7/8 ditty; and for the sly fox – a seductive, chromatic tango with a bite to it. There were moments that begged to be expanded upon with music: the nightmare, Chaunticleer’s song, and, one of my favorite moments, a gentle, nostalgic interlude written for Chaunticleer and his hen-love-wife, Pertelote: a moment of tenderness under the stars.

In the end, to be honest, I am more interested in what all of you have to say about this work than anything I can tell you about it! A piece isn’t complete until it has met its audience. This creation has been a pilgrimage in its own way, delayed 16 months because of the pandemic, and I am thrilled that you are all finally able to join us now on this journey!

—Colin Pip Dixon
Translation, Canterbury Tales

At the very beginning of our performance the narrator delivers the opening of the Canterbury Tales in Chaucer's English of 600 years ago. It celebrates life bursting forth in the Spring. Here it is with the translation by Sharon Schuman:

*Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote*
*The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,*
*And bathed every veyne in swich licour,*
*Of which vertu engendred is the flour;*
*Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth*
*Inspired hath in every holt and heeth,*
*The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne*
*Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,*

*And smale fowles maken melodye,*
*That slepen al the night with open yö,*
*(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):*
*Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages*

---

*When April with its sweet showers*
*has pierced to the root the drought of March*
*And bathed every vine with such moisture*
*That flowers burst forth,*
*When the wind-god also uses his sweet breath*
*To create breezes in the fields,*
*To inspire the tender crops to grow, and the sun*
*Is half-way across the sky, in the constellation of the Ram,*
*And small birds (prompted in their hearts by nature)*
*Sleep all night with their eyes open,*
*Singing melodies,*
*Then people long to go on pilgrimages*
Amici Bios

Steven Pologe has performed throughout the United States, and in Italy, Sweden, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, New Zealand, and Canada. His CDs include quartets by William Grant Still and All That Jazz (both with the Oregon String Quartet), works by Jon Deak for solo cello and piano trio, and the piano trio of Lev Abeliovich.

Steven is professor of Cello at the University of Oregon. He has performed frequently with the Oregon Bach Festival, Grand Teton Music Festival, Aspen Music Festival, Rome Festival Orchestra, and the Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival. In 2006, Pologe and a colleague in neuroscience won a grant from the organization behind the coveted Grammy awards, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. The award supported his research and publications documenting the precise movements of string players. Prior to moving to Oregon, Pologe was principal cellist with the Honolulu Symphony and faculty member at the University of Hawaii. To keep up with all Steven’s activities, find him here, on his website, www.stevenpologe-cello.com/.

Sharon Schuman is co-founder of Chamber Music Amici and served as Artistic Director for the first six years. As a child, she studied violin with Carol Weston, a student of Leopold Auer. After a summer grant to the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, she won a full scholarship in music to Stanford University, where she performed on a resident Strad. After she graduated with a degree in English, she earned a Ph.D. in that discipline at the University of Chicago. She has performed in a master class for Vladimir Spivakov and as concerto soloist with Oregon Mozart Players and the Salem Chamber Orchestra. She has also performed with the Oregon Bach Festival and Eugene Symphony, and she has served as concertmaster for Eugene Opera, Eugene Ballet, Eugene Concert Choir, and Oregon Mozart Players. She is now Assistant Concertmaster of the Eugene Opera Orchestra. After publishing Freedom and Dialogue in a Polarized World (2014), she edited A Voice for Justice: Writings of David Schuman (2021). Sharon is the 2021 recipient of the Eugene Arts and Letters Award.

Guest Bios

Colin Pip Dixon is a violinist and composer who calls Eugene, Oregon home since 2017. Originally from New York City, he studied, lived, and worked in Paris, France for many years. As a founding member and co-artistic director of The Elsewhere Ensemble (www.elsewhereensemble.com) he has composed, performed and produced many works bringing together music with stories, theater,
and poetry: Icarus Quartet (2021) (based on the myth of Icarus); Chekhov Triptych – three Chekhov stories in concert; The Happy Prince (based on the Oscar Wilde story); Invocation – a prayer for peace; His Majesty, the Devil – a play with music (based on Dostoyevsky); The Velveteen Rabbit, among others. His works have been performed in New York, Boston, Eugene, Portland, Paris, Lyon, Beirut & Hammana (Lebanon), Brussels, Montreal, in the Edinburgh and New York International Fringe Festivals, and the Max International Music Festival in Belgium. Recent commissions include: Beethoven in the Stars – for string orchestra and narrator (a remote film/recording of original music and writing coupled with the music of Beethoven for the Pacific University Philharmonic); Birds Flying Through – songs and instrumental interludes (a collective work by five composers scheduled for 2022). Other important works include Underground – a musical (based on Dostoyevsky) which is still in development. In France he worked closely for many years with Théâtre de l’Arc-en-Ciel (now Compagnie de la Première Seconde) as a violinist, composer and music director, receiving grants from the French institutions SACEM & SPEDIDAM and touring all over France, Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec. He was honored to perform Beethoven’s Kreutzer Sonata at Les Invalides in Paris for the centennial of Leo Tolstoy’s death in 2010. In Eugene he performs regularly as a violinist in the Eugene Symphony and has appeared with groups such as Oregon Mozart Players, microphilharmonic, and Chamber Music Amici. A certified Feldenkrais Method practitioner, he has given workshops on body awareness for musicians in Europe and in the US at universities, music schools as well as the ASTA National Conference and at Virtuosity.Online.

MacIntyre Dixon has performed on Broadway, Off-Broadway, in regional theatres all over the country, and in films and television. He most recently filmed a role in Alice Wu’s Netflix film The Half of It. On stage he was part of the legendary musical, The Fantasticks for eight years in New York. Some of his Broadway performances were in Cyrano de Bergerac (with Kevin Kline, also PBS Great Performances), The Tempest (with Patrick Stewart), The Crucible (with Liam Neeson), Gypsy (Bernadette Peters), The Threepenny Opera (with Sting), Beauty And The Beast, 1776, A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum, and the National Tour of Guys and Dolls. At New York’s Shakespeare in the Park and The Public Theater: As You Like It, Kevin Kline’s Hamlet (also PBS Great Performances), The Winter’s Tale (dir. James Lapine), Much Ado About Nothing, The Taming Of The Shrew. Films include It’s Kind of a Funny Story, School of Rock, In And Out, A River Runs Through it, Secret Of My Success, Popeye, and Reds. In Oregon he performs regularly with the Elsewhere Ensemble.
Nathalie Fortin was born in Montreal, Canada. She holds degrees from the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal, Eastman School of Music, and University of Southern California. Locally, she has performed with the Oregon Bach Festival, Eugene Opera, Eugene Symphony, Chamber Music Amici, Ballet Fantastique, the Oregon Mozart Players, and for a number of productions at the Shedd Institute for the Arts with artist Siri Vik. She currently does collaborative work with the University of Oregon’s School of Music and Dance, Eugene Vocal Arts, the Eugene Gleemen, and co-produces COVID-era outdoor concerts with soprano Laura Wayte.

Arnaud Ghillebaert has played under the baton of great conductors such as Sir Colin Davis and Herbert Blomstedt and in the following orchestras: the London Symphony Orchestra, the Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields, the Bournemouth Symphony, Scottish Opera, Opera North, touring all over Europe. An avid chamber musician, he performed at the Louis Moreau Institute in New Orleans and in the “Starry Nights” music series at the Staller Center for the Arts (NY) alongside Eugene Drucker (Emerson String Quartet) and Nick Cords (Silkroad Ensemble); he recently performed in a recital with pianist Anton Nel. He is a founding member of the Elsewhere Ensemble, a chamber group mixing music and spoken word/theater. He completed his Doctorate in viola and violin performance at Stony Brook University and is the current University of Oregon viola instructor.

Hal Grossman has been enthusiastically acclaimed by critics and audiences alike for his “vibrant tone” and “superb technique”. Grand Award Winner of the Lima Young Artist Competition and Silver Medalist of the International Stulberg String Competition, Mr. Grossman also received First Prize Awards at the prestigious International Cleveland Quartet Competition and the National Fischoff Chamber Music Competition. His New York Debut at Carnegie Hall received exceptional reviews from the New York Times. He was invited to perform for their Royal Highnesses, Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Recital appearances have taken him throughout North America and Europe.

Steve Vacchi, Professor of bassoon at the University of Oregon since 2000, holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music, The Hartt School, and Louisiana State University. He has taught at Wichita State University (KS) and the Brevard Music Center (NC), and he served as a sabbatical replacement at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. A member of the Oregon Bach Festival, Eugene Symphony Orchestra, and the Oregon and Arcturus Wind Quintets, Vacchi has performed with The Florida Orchestra, Santa Fe ProMusica, the Rhode Island, Tulsa, and Rochester Philharmonics, and the Saint Louis, New World, Baton Rouge, Colorado, Honolulu, Kansas City, Oregon, Sarasota, New Haven, and Wichita Symphony Orchestras.
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