

A Brahms triptych

Music@Menlo festival focuses on the composer's music, works that inspired him, and those he inspired

By Rebecca Wallace

Embarcadero Media

From his beginnings as an impressive, burgeoning composer dubbed “The Young Eagle” to the contemplative works of his final years, Johannes Brahms left an indelible stamp on classical music.

While Brahms (1833-1897) venerated the greats who came before him — Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Hayden and especially Bach — he in turn became an inspiration for composers of the 20th and 21st centuries. The German composer was known for his virtuosic piano compositions, intimate vocal works, and three string quartets, which pianist Wu Han and cellist David Finckel call a perfect marriage of “passion and technique.”

This summer, Midpeninsula audiences will hear a Brahms triptych of sorts: the composer's music, together with works that inspired him and those he inspired. Ms. Wu and Mr. Finckel, artistic direc-

tors of Music@Menlo, are dedicating the summer chamber-music festival to him.

Music@Menlo runs July 22 through Aug. 13, with concerts, lectures, master classes and a chamber-music institute for young musicians. Performances are at St. Mark's Episcopal Church at 600 Colorado Ave. in Palo Alto; The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton High School at 555 Middlefield Road in Atherton; and Menlo School at 50 Valparaiso Ave. in Atherton.

The festival attracts many respected names in classical music. Returning favorites include pianists Alessio Bax and Menahem Pressler, violinist Jorja Fleezanis and mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke. Besides performing in groups, Mr. Bax and Mr. Pressler will also give individual recitals.

Music@Menlo's major concerts begin with “The Young Eagle,” named after the moniker that composers Robert and Clara Schumann gave to Brahms. Performed on July 23 and 24, the program features earlier works, including Brahms'

See **MUSIC@MENLO**, page 19

On the cover: Violist Paul Neubauer. Photo courtesy of Chamber Music Lincoln Center.

Below: A Music@Menlo Concert Program performance. Photo by Kimberly Hsu, courtesy of Music@Menlo.





Photo by Tristan Cook, courtesy of Music@Menlo

Cellist **David Finckel** and pianist **Wu Han** are artistic directors of Music@Menlo.



Photo by Tristan Cook, courtesy of Music@Menlo

Participants in Music@Menlo's Chamber Music Institute International Program at Menlo School.



Photo by Kimberly Hsu, courtesy of Music@Menlo

Mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and pianist Inon Barnatan at a Music@Menlo performance in 2010.



Photo by Tom Bonner, courtesy of Music@Menlo

Exterior of Performing Arts Center at Menlo-Atherton High School.



Photo by Tristan Cook, courtesy of Music@Menlo

Sasha Cooke performs in Stent Hall at Menlo School

MUSIC@MENLO

continued from page 17

Piano Trio in B Major, op. 8, which the composer wrote at 21. His influences are reflected in such works as Mozart's Violin Sonata in E Minor, K. 304. Musicians include Ms. Wu and fellow pianist Juho Pohjonen, and clarinetist Carey Bell.

Later concert programs include Aug. 2's "Songs of Love," featuring vocal pieces by Brahms, Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann. The festival brochure bills Brahms' "Liebeslieder Waltzes" as full of "warmth, intimacy, expressive nuance and beguiling lyricism." Performers include Ms. Cooke, soprano Erin Morley, tenor Paul Appleby and baritone Kelly Markgraf.

Brahms was fascinated with the Gypsy folk music that came to Germany in the 1840s, courtesy of immigrating Hungarians. The Aug. 5-6 concert programs focus on compositions both lively and melancholic inspired by Hungarian folk music, written by Brahms, Haydn, Dvorak and others. Violinist Elmar Oliveira joins Ms. Wu and Mr. Finckel, pianist Jon Kimura Parker and violist Paul Neubauer on the stage.

The concert lineup also includes "Brahms: The Quartet in Context," two programs featuring Brahms' three string quartets and other quartets by Leon Kirchner, Beethoven and Anton Webern. Mr. Kirchner (1919-2009) was a student of Arnold Schoenberg, who greatly admired Brahms. The Orion String Quartet will perform three of these works on Aug. 4 and three on Aug. 7.

To help put Brahms in the context of his world and times, Music@Menlo also hosts a quartet of lectures. This summer, they include a July 22 talk by festival artistic administrator Patrick Castillo on lifelong bachelor Brahms' "loneliness and legacy." On Aug. 11, Ara Guzelimian, provost and dean of the Juilliard School, will speak on the wisdom and poignancy of Brahms' last compositions.

Performances by the Chamber Music Institute's young musicians are free. Ticket prices vary for other events. For details and a full schedule, go to musicatmenlo.org or call 650-331-0202.