

# Benjamin Beilman

Violin



# Roman Rabinovich

Piano

*2022 Spring Season*



Dear Friends,

Welcome to Princeton University Concerts!

We have been awaiting this shared moment with you for a long time and are grateful to have the magic of live music finally pierce through the heavy silence of the past few years. I have always been in awe of music's inimitable ability to provide solace, to heal, and to make us feel connected to one another. I am sure that you join my sentiment of cherishing this capacity all the more after the trauma that we have all experienced, and I hope that tonight's program will help propel us forward.

I am keenly aware that we all sit in Richardson Auditorium tonight as changed people. While it has always been Princeton University Concerts' intention to help serve as a bridge between the world of music and the perpetually changing times in which we live—to help us experience and consider music within the context of our personal and communal histories—I am now approaching this mission with a renewed sense of urgency. With every offering, live or digital, Princeton University Concerts will strive to refine this essential and intricate relationship. And I am sincere in my invitation to you to be a part of this process as together we rebuild our community and look towards the future.

Thank you for your presence, your support, and your devotion to music.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Marna Seltzer'. The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'M' and a long, trailing flourish at the end.

Marna Seltzer

Director of Princeton University Concerts

Welcome back to Princeton University Concerts!  
*We've missed you!*

Wednesday, March 16, 2022 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

## **BENJAMIN BEILMAN** Violin **ROMAN RABINOVICH** Piano

### **CLAUDE DEBUSSY**

(1862–1918)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor (1917)

Allegro vivo

Intermède: fantastique et léger

Finale: très animé

### **FREDERIC RZEWSKI**

(1938–2021)

*Demons* (2017)—PUC premiere\*

Nervous

Slow, measured but free

Timeless (senza misura)

♩=126

### INTERMISSION

### **CLARA SCHUMANN**

(1819–1896)

Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22 (1855)

Andante molto

Allegretto

Leidenschaftlich schnell (“passionately quick”)

### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

(1770–1827)

Sonata No. 10 for Violin and Piano in G Major, Op. 96 (1812)

Allegro moderato

Adagio espressivo

Scherzo. Allegro

Poco allegretto

*\*This premiere performance is a co-commission by  
Princeton University Concerts and Music Accord.*

PLEASE NOTE: Wearing a mask over your mouth and nose is required while inside the venue. Thank you for keeping our community safe.



## About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2022 • Program Annotator

*Lucy Caplan is a Lecturer on History and Literature at Harvard University. In 2016 she received the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism.*

Is music political? Considered in the abstract, this oft-posed question rarely generates satisfying answers; it's too general to be illuminating. Things start to get more interesting when we get into the messy, experiential details: the artist who speaks his mind from the stage, the composer who considers herself an activist. In recent weeks, there has been no shortage of opportunities to contemplate such scenarios. Cultural institutions across Europe and the United States have made highly visible moves to express support for the people of Ukraine or cut ties with Russian artists who maintain ties to Putin—most notably, the conductor Valery Gergiev, whose longtime support for Putin has now led to a flood of canceled engagements. In some instances, Russian music has come under scrutiny, too: The Polish National Opera, for instance, elected to scrap a planned performance of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*.

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“Is music political?...Tonight's program...showcases myriad possibilities for just how we might hear politics in art.”

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If these developments make clear the impossibility of separating musical life from its political surroundings, they also invite a number of thornier questions about how, precisely, music and politics interact. What can a piece of music illuminate about the political world in which it was composed—or about our own? Can music express protest or dissent? Or might it offer us something else in times of turmoil: a respite, an escape? Tonight's program offers ample opportunity to consider these questions. Ranging from music written in times of crisis to music that more openly engages societal exigencies, it showcases myriad possibilities for just how we might hear politics in art.

### **Claude Debussy, Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor (1917)**

In terms that resonate eerily with the overlapping crises of our own historical moment, Debussy described his Violin Sonata, in a letter to a friend, as “interesting from a documentary viewpoint and as an example of what may be

produced by a sick man in time of war.” As World War I raged on, his beloved Paris was suffering: Food and coal were in short supply, and further economic troubles loomed. Debussy was also in the throes of an ongoing struggle with terminal cancer, which would end his life the following year. Little wonder that, under such circumstances, he turned to Edgar Allan Poe’s macabre short story *The Imp of the Perverse* for creative inspiration: He wrote that Poe’s creepy tale of an unsolved murder might be heard “between the staves” of the Sonata.

Yet if the Sonata is a document of personal and social discontent, it is also an expression of how musical beauty might retain its power under difficult conditions. One of six sonatas for various instruments that Debussy composed during the final three years of his life, it marks a departure from the formal experimentalism that had preoccupied the composer for decades and a return to older structures more often associated with his French Baroque and Classical predecessors. A ball of coiled energy, the Sonata begins *pianissimo* and rapidly gathers volume and intensity. The first movement oscillates between extremes as impassioned gestures interrupt passages of reverie. The playfully fantastical second movement, a frenetic dance between violin and piano, is as impish as the figure haunting Poe’s story. The technically virtuosic third movement veers from kinetic passagework to hyperromantic, slide-filed rubato, culminating in a burst of light: heroic trills, sweeping arpeggios, and a triumphant final chord.

### **Frederic Rzewski, *Demons* (2018)**

Known for his unusually explicit political commitments and dedication to expressing those commitments in musical works, Frederic Rzewski cut an iconoclastic figure in the often cerebral world of contemporary concert music. In improvisatory collaborations with other musicians, as well as in compositions like *Coming Together* (inspired by the Attica prison uprising) and *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* (a set of variations on a Chilean protest song), he embraced the idea that music could speak to the urgent questions of our time. This perspective carries through to *Demons*, one of his final works. Rzewski describes the piece as follows:

In Dostoyevsky’s novel of the same name (1871), the character Kirillov kills himself in order “to become God.” Inspired by the Russian Nihilist movement of the 1860s and specifically by the charismatic figure Nechayev, Dostoyevsky’s book is a study of the self-destructive forces present in the

Russian society of his time. It foreshadows Lenin and the Revolution of 1917, as well as the ideas of Nietzsche and Freud and had a deep influence on writers like Thomas Mann, whose *Doctor Faustus* is a similar study of modern Germany.

While it is futile to try to express musical ideas in words, it is possible to say that my piece is a meditation on similar trends in the world of today. In early November 2016, I had the honor to assist at a spectacular performance of my composition *Coming Together* (1972) at the San Francisco Conservatory, with Angela Davis as the speaking soloist, a few days before the presidential elections. There was a public discussion that followed. Davis seemed to know the results already. She said that, if the Left had done its job, the present situation would not have arisen. These and similar ideas were all going through my head as I was writing *Demons* a few months later. I am not religious and don't know much about devils and such, but as an artist I cannot help feeling sensitive to whatever it is that awakens these ideas in humans, causing them to go crazy. I am not sure that scientists or doctors understand these things any better than writers or musicians. Perhaps, on the contrary, although we cannot explain them in rational terms, we can nevertheless throw some light on them, in our own way.

My piece is in four movements and so is a kind of sonata, like the piece that preceded it, *Notasonata*. There are periodic references to two songs throughout the piece: "Iroes," made popular in the 1990s by the singer Maria Dimitriadi, and a song that became known during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (notably as performed by Barbara Dane), "Freedom Is a Constant Struggle," which also provided the title for the recent book of Angela Davis. Thanks to a new generation of classical musicians like Benjamin Beilman, there is a revival of interest among younger players in new music that in some way continues the classical tradition. One can only hope that this trend will continue. Although Marx's analysis of capitalism as a ruthless system following its relentless course independently of human will continues to be valid, there are nonetheless reasons to think that alternatives are possible. As Mark Twain put it, prophecy is really hard, especially when it's about the future.

### **Clara Schumann, Three Romances, Op. 22 (1855)**

Lush and heartfelt, Schumann's Three Romances for violin and piano unspool at a gently unhurried pace. The first has an enveloping warmth, sustained over seemingly endless phrases. A stormier mood pervades at the beginning of the second piece, before giving way to a lighter section characterized by jaunty rhythms and off-kilter grace notes. In the third romance—marked *Leidenschaftlich schnell*, or “passionately quick”—unabashed emotion takes over as violinist and pianist both dig in with abandon. The set is dedicated to violinist Joseph Joachim, who lauded them as “a sheer delight to play.”

As character pieces, the romances are not “about” any particular event or situation. Their political dimension might best be captured, instead, by the feminist catchphrase, “The personal is political.” Schumann composed these pieces, and all of her compositions, under systemic conditions which made it very difficult to be both a woman and a composer. Beyond general incredulity regarding the idea that a woman might compose music, she also contended with the demands of an active career as a concert pianist and the domestic labor involved in taking care of children, grandchildren, and a husband who was often ill. Robert Schumann lamented but did not question these conditions: He once wrote to a friend, “To have children, and a husband who is always living in the realm of imagination, does not go together with composing.” Even if we cannot locate specific allusions to these conditions in Schumann's music, they nonetheless inform the way we listen to it. An exciting recent upsurge of interest in Schumann's life and work, including new books and festivals dedicated to her music, might prompt us to ask how what we hear is also shaped by contemporary perceptions of Schumann: How might our own political circumstances influence how we listen to music of the past?

### **Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata No. 10 in G Major, Op. 96 (1812)**

After composing nine violin sonatas in a five-year period between 1798 and 1803, Beethoven took a nearly decade-long hiatus before writing his tenth and final such work in 1812. It was a contemplative period for the composer; that same year, he wrote in a diary that “Everything that is called life should be sacrificed to the sublime and be a sanctuary of art.” These aspirations—away from the messiness of “everything,” toward art's presumed transcendence—seem to guide the Sonata's musical language. It is unfailingly elegant music, from its opening trill and throughout the meandering thematic variety of the first movement. In the stately slow movement that follows, an august theme melts into an achingly



sweet middle section. After a relatively restrained scherzo, the final movement is an expansive set of variations. Diverse in mood and character, they nevertheless maintain the understated quality of the Sonata as a whole.

One way to hear this music, especially in relation to its counterparts on this program, might be as an escape from politics—an exemplar of the “sanctuary” that Beethoven thought art might enable. That idea can often feel unsatisfactory, at least to this writer: If music compels us to turn away from the wider world, can it really be a force for good? Heard in this context, though, the Sonata’s insistence on gentle beauty seems to offer its own sort of political statement about what else music might offer us in times of tumult—the deeply needed feelings of comfort, imagination, and peace.

# Ways of Hearing Reflections on Music in 26 Pieces

Edited by  
SCOTT BURNHAM,  
MARNA SELTZER &  
DOROTHEA VON MOLTEE

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# About the Artists



## BENJAMIN BEILMAN

Born in 1989, American violinist Benjamin Beilman is winning plaudits across the globe for his compelling and impassioned performances, his deep rich tone, and his searing lyricism. In past seasons, Beilman has performed with many major orchestras worldwide including the Rotterdam Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, Zurich Tonhalle, Sydney Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, and Philadelphia Orchestra, both at home and at Carnegie Hall.

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### EXTEND THE LISTENING!

We asked Benjamin Beilman to share a musical playlist with you. Point your smartphone camera to this code to hear it.

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In recital and chamber music, Beilman performs regularly at the major halls across the world, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Wigmore Hall (London), Louvre (Paris), Philharmonie (Berlin), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), and Bunka Kaikan (Tokyo), and at festivals such as Verbier, Aix-en-Provence Easter, Prague Dvorak, Robeco Summer Concerts (Amsterdam), Music@Menlo, Marlboro, and Seattle Chamber Music. Highlights of Beilman's 2021/2022 season include performances of the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Concerto with the Indianapolis, Toledo, and Charlotte Symphonies, as well as the premiere a new violin concerto by Chris Rogerson with the Kansas City Symphony. In Europe, highlights include performances with the Swedish Radio Symphony, Antwerp Symphony,

Toulouse Symphony, and Trondheim Symphony. He will return to the BBC Scottish Symphony and the Tonkünstler Orchestra, with whom he has recorded a concerto by Thomas Larcher.

Beilman studied with Almita and Roland Vamos at the Music Institute of Chicago, Ida Kavafian and Pamela Frank at the Curtis Institute of Music, and Christian Tetzlaff at the Kronberg Academy, and has received many prestigious accolades including a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, and a London Music Masters Award. He has an exclusive recording contract with Warner Classics and released his first disc in 2016 featuring works by Stravinsky, Janáček, and Schubert. Beilman plays the “Engleman” Stradivarius from 1709, generously on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.

In early 2018 he premiered Frederic Rzewski’s *Demons* and has now performed it extensively across the United States. His originally scheduled PUC debut in April 2020 included the premiere of the work but was canceled due to COVID-19. We are pleased to finally be able to welcome him back.

## ROMAN RABINOVICH

The eloquent young pianist Roman Rabinovich was top prizewinner of the 12th Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition in Israel in 2008. He made his Israel Philharmonic debut under Zubin Mehta at the age of 10 and has since appeared as a soloist throughout Europe and the United States, most recently with orchestras including the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Meiningen Hofkapelle, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra, and Szczecin Philharmonic in Europe, and the Seattle Symphony, Sarasota Orchestra, Des Moines Symphony, and Symphonia Boca Raton in the United States.

He has given recitals in venues such as Wigmore Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York City, the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory, the Cité de la Musique in Paris, and the Terrace Theater of Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, and has participated in festivals including Marlboro, Lucerne, Davos, Prague Spring, Klavier-

Festival Ruhr, and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. An avid chamber musician, he is a regular guest at ChamberFest Cleveland. Through the 2020-21 global pandemic, Rabinovich and his wife, violinist Diana Cohen, gave a successful series of free weekly concerts from their front yard in Calgary.

Roman Rabinovich has earned critical praise for his explorations of the piano music of Haydn. At the 2018 Bath Festival, he presented a 10-recital, 42-sonata series, earning praise in *The Sunday Times*. Prior to that, in 2016 as artist-in-residence at the Lammermuir Festival in Scotland, he performed 25 Haydn sonatas in five days, and he has also performed a complete sonata cycle in Tel Aviv. He is currently undertaking a recording project of the complete sonatas for First Hand Records.

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## EXTEND THE LISTENING!

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Highlights of Roman Rabinovich's 2021/2022 season include the Alban Berg Kammerkonzert with violinist Kolja Blacher, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, solo recital tours in the United Kingdom and United States, including a three-concert "Haydn Day" at Wigmore Hall, and his debut at the Lofoten Piano Festival. Chamber music partnerships this season include violinists Kristóf Boráti and Benjamin Beilman, cellist Camille Thomas, pianist Zoltán Fejérvári, and the Escher and Dover Quartets.

In 2015, he was selected by Sir András Schiff as one of three pianists for the inaugural "Building Bridges" series, created to highlight young pianists of unusual promise. Born in Tashkent, Roman Rabinovich immigrated to Israel with his family in 1994 where he began his studies with Irena Vishnevitsky and Arie Vardi. He went on to graduate from the Curtis Institute of Music as a student of Seymour Lipkin and earned his master's degree at the Juilliard School where he studied with Robert McDonald. Rabinovich is also a composer and visual artist, who regularly enhances his performances and CDs with his own artwork. Tonight's concert marks his PUC debut.

## FREDERIC RZEWSKI

Frederic Rzewski, whom music critic Mark Swed once called “the greatest pianist-composer of our time,” studied music first with Charles Mackey of Springfield, and subsequently with Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, and Milton Babbitt at Harvard and Princeton Universities. He went to Italy in 1960, where he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola. In 2002, Nonesuch Records celebrated Rzewski’s distinctive body of work with the release of a seven-CD, 25-year retrospective of the composer’s piano-based work. The discs feature new recordings performed by the composer of such classic works as *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* and *De Profundis*, a dramatic work incorporating the Oscar Wilde letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, spoken by the pianist. Known for his anti-establishment views, Rzewski created works inspired by the Attica prison uprising and a Chilean protest song. *The People United* has captured the imagination of virtuosos including Marc-André Hamelin and, more recently, younger pianists like Igor Levit and Conrad Tao. It is the closest thing to a war horse in the contemporary piano repertory. In 2015, Rzewski performed the entire work at the Pittsburgh fish market Wholey’s, a fabled event in contemporary music circles.

## MUSIC ACCORD

Comprised of top classical music presenting organizations throughout the US, Music Accord ([www.musicaccord.org](http://www.musicaccord.org)) is a consortium that commissions new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital, and song genres. The consortium’s goal is to create a significant number of new works and to ensure presentation of these works in venues throughout this country and, if the occasion arises, internationally. Music Accord awards commissions to performers who are U.S. citizens and assists these performers in selecting composers who are also U.S. citizens. Member organizations include Boston Symphony Orchestra/Tanglewood, Celebrity Series of Boston, Center for the Performing Arts at Penn State, The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Hancher Auditorium/The University of Iowa, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts/University of Illinois, Middlebury Performing Arts Series, Princeton University Concerts, San Francisco Performances, and University Musical Society/University of Michigan.

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# 2022

## SPRING SEASON

Isata Kanneh-Mason

Sheku Kanneh-Mason

All events take place at 7:30PM at Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall.

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Thursday, March 24

**Mahler Chamber Orchestra**

**Mitsuko Uchida** Piano

**Mark Steinberg** Violin/Concertmaster

Thursday, March 31

**Ébène String Quartet**

Thursday, April 7

**Dover String Quartet**

Thursday, April 21

**Tetzlaff String Quartet**

Wednesday, April 27

**Sheku Kanneh-Mason** Cello

**Isata Kanneh-Mason** Piano

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