



James Ehnes Violin
Orion Weiss Piano



24/25 SEASON



Dear Friends,

We extend our heartfelt thanks to James Ehnes and Orion Weiss for stepping in with just two days' notice to make tonight's performance possible. Their generosity and willingness to adjust their schedules on such short notice speak volumes about their dedication to music and to all of us as music lovers.

I have known James Ehnes from early in his career when we were both at The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. It was already apparent at age 17 that he was someone to watch. That he makes his PUC debut alongside pianist Orion Weiss—who made his own unforgettable debut as part of our 125th anniversary season with Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*—makes this moment all the more special.

Of course, we also want to acknowledge our shared disappointment that Janine Jansen and Denis Kozhukhin are unable to perform as originally planned. We know how eagerly many of you anticipated their recital, and we hope to find another opportunity to welcome them to our stage in the future.

I am grateful that this unfortunate news presented an incredible opportunity to bring a violinist long overdue for his PUC debut. As we gather during this festive season for our final concert of the year, I hope that your holidays are filled with many joys, even if they are unexpected. May the spirit of the season bring warmth and lots of music to you and your loved ones. I look forward to seeing you in the new year for more extraordinary music.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marna Seltzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Marna Seltzer
Director of Princeton University Concerts

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Wednesday, December 11, 2024 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

JAMES EHNES Violin
ORION WEISS Piano

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in D Major, Op. 12, No. 1

Allegro con brio

Tema con variazioni. Andante con moto

Rondo. Allegro

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 5 in F Major, Op. 24 “Spring”

Allegro

Adagio molto espressivo

Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio

Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 “Kreutzer”

Adagio sostenuto – Presto

Andante con variazioni

Finale. Presto

About the Program

By Eric Bromberger © 2024

Beethoven Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in D Major, Op. 12, No. 1 (1797–1798)

At the age of not quite 22, Beethoven arrived in Vienna in November 1792, and he would remain there for the rest of his life. Beethoven quickly made his reputation for his piano-playing, but he wanted to be a composer, and that took time. Mozart appears almost to have been born with an instinctive understanding of sonata form, but it took Beethoven nearly a decade of hard work to master the classical forms Haydn and Mozart had brought to a high level of expression. In his adopted city Beethoven studied with Haydn, Albrechtsberger, and Salieri and began, however tentatively, to compose. He published a set of three piano trios in 1795, followed these with piano sonatas and cello sonatas, and began a set of six string quartets. In 1797–98 he composed three violin sonatas, which Artaria published in 1799 as Beethoven's Opus 12. Beethoven dedicated these sonatas to Antonio Salieri, who was at that time instructing him in writing for the voice.

Beethoven's model in these first efforts was inevitably the violin sonatas of Mozart, also a pianist and violinist who wrote beautifully for both instruments. Mozart's sonatas—which that composer sometimes titled “keyboard sonatas with the accompaniment of violin”—were then very much part of music life in Vienna, and Beethoven adopted the general form of Mozart's late violin sonatas: a sonata-form first movement, a slow movement that might be in variation form, and a fast finale that was often a rondo.

Two centuries later, Beethoven's first violin sonatas do not strike us as unusually distinctive music—they sound like the work of an immensely talented young composer gradually learning to make the form his own. To his contemporaries, however, these sonatas seemed to have come from a different planet. An early reviewer was flattened by them:

After having arduously worked his way through these quite peculiar sonatas, overladen with strange difficulties, he must admit that . . . he felt like a man who had thought he was going to promenade with an ingenious friend through an inviting forest, was detained every moment by hostile entanglements, and finally emerged, weary, exhausted, and without enjoyment. It is undeniable that Herr van Beethoven goes his own way. But what a bizarre, laborious way! Studied, studied, and perpetually studied, and no nature, no song. Indeed . . . there is only a mass of learning here, without good method. There is obstinacy for which we feel little interest, a striving for rare modulations . . . a piling on of difficulty upon difficulty, so that one loses all patience and enjoyment.

It is easy to smile at such reactions, but listening to the very beginning of Beethoven's Sonata in D Major, one can understand that reviewer's concerns: far from offering us "nature" or "song," the opening of this sonata seems to explode in a shower of rockets going off in every direction. The first movement is marked *Allegro con brio*, with the emphasis on the *con brio*: this is spirited music, full of busy energy and explosive chords. A flowing second subject seems to promise relief, but the principal impression here is of energy boiling up off the page and unexpected modulations: Beethoven sets the development in F Major and changes the key signature to be sure that we don't miss that. After a busy development full of rapid exchanges between the instruments, the movement returns to D Major and rushes to its conclusion on the same massive chord with which it began.

The second movement, marked *Andante con moto* and set in A Major, is in variation form, and after the hyperactive first movement it brings a measure of calm. At least at first. The piano introduces the gentle eight-measure theme, which is then repeated by the violin. Four variations follow: the first is for piano accompanied by violin, the second for violin with a complex piano accompaniment, the third moves into A minor and turns tempestuous, and the fourth is built on quiet syncopations. A delicate coda draws the movement to its close. The energetic finale, marked simply *Allegro*, is a rondo in 6/8 whose central theme is energized by off-the-beat accents. This is buoyant music, full of subordinate episodes and piquant pauses. Beethoven teases the audience nicely just before the end.

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 5 in F Major, Op. 24 "Spring" (1800–1801)

The nickname "Spring" for this sonata did not originate with Beethoven, but this is one of those rare instances when someone else's nickname for a piece of music is exactly right—no matter how often one has heard this music, it always sounds fresh.

The "Spring" Sonata opens with a long arc of seamless melody, one of the loveliest Beethoven ever wrote. Beethoven first has the violin play it, then—as if reluctant to give up something so beautiful—he gives the same theme to the piano: the double statement of the opening theme extends over 25 measures. If spring is said to go out like a lamb, there is a darker side to this music that reminds us that it can come in like a lion, and one of the particular pleasures of the opening movement is the contrast between the sunny opening melody and the darker secondary material. After an extended development, the movement ends on a fragment of the opening idea.

The *Adagio molto espressivo* is of extremely simple structure: first the piano and then the violin play the song-like main idea, which develops not through a rise in tension but

by increasingly complex ornamentation. An effective touch here is the steady flow of murmuring sixteenth-notes: that rippling, murmuring sound—present throughout almost the entire movement—complements the music’s serenity.

The Scherzo is brilliant. One of Beethoven’s most original movements, it lasts barely a minute—the ear has only begun to adjust to the dazzling asymmetry of its rhythms when it ends. Beethoven intentionally makes it sound “wrong”—the violin appears to be one beat late—and the real fun of this movement comes at the very end, where “wrong” music resolves so gracefully that listeners suddenly become aware just how “right” it has been all along.

The concluding Rondo returns to the mood of the opening movement, for it too is built on what seems to be a never-ending flow of melody, music that spins on effortlessly. Full of good-spirited energy, this movement offers several varied episodes along the way, but the chief impression is the graceful ease of what is some of the sunniest music Beethoven ever wrote.

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47 “Kreutzer” (1802–1804)

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Beethoven was beginning to get restless. The young man who had arrived in Vienna in 1792 was a tremendous pianist, but as a composer still had much to learn, and he spent the next decade slowly mastering the High Classical form of Haydn and Mozart. By 1802 he had composed two symphonies, three piano concertos, a set of six string quartets, and numerous sonatas for piano, for violin, and for cello. These had all been acclaimed in Vienna, but in that same year Beethoven wrote to



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his friend Werner Krumpholz: “I’m not satisfied with what I’ve composed up to now. From now on I intend to embark on a new path.” That “new path” would become clear late in 1803 with the composition of the “Eroica.” That symphony revolutionized music—it engaged the most serious issues, and in music of unparalleled drama and scope it resolved them.

But even before the “Eroica,” there were indications of Beethoven’s “new path.” Early in 1803 the composer met the violinist George Polgreen Bridgetower (1778–1860). Bridgetower, then 25, was the son of Joanis Fredericus de Augustus, who was of African descent, and Maria Schmid, who was German-Polish. A decade earlier, he had performed in the orchestra for Haydn’s concerts in London and was now establishing himself as a touring virtuoso across Europe. Bridgetower and Beethoven quickly became friends, and when the violinist proposed a joint concert at which they would perform a new sonata, the composer agreed. But, as was often the case, Beethoven found himself pressed for time. He made the process easier by retrieving a final movement that he had written for a violin sonata the previous year and then discarded. Now, in effect working backwards, he rushed to get the first two movements done in time for the scheduled concert on May 22. He didn’t make it. The concert had to be postponed two days, and even then Beethoven barely got it done: he called his copyist at 4:30 that morning to begin copying a part for him, and at the concert he and Bridgetower had to perform some of the music from Beethoven’s manuscript; the piano part for the first movement was still in such fragmentary form that Beethoven was probably playing some of it just from sketches.

As soon as he completed this sonata, Beethoven set to work on the “Eroica,” which would occupy him for the next six months. While the sonata does not engage the heroic issues of the first movement of that symphony, it has something of the Eroica’s slashing power and vast scope. Beethoven was well aware of this and warned performers that the sonata was “written in a very concertante style, quasi-concerto-like.” From the first instant, one senses that this is music conceived on a grand scale. The sonata opens with a slow introduction (the only one in Beethoven’s ten violin sonatas), a cadenza-like entrance for the violin alone. The piano makes a similarly dramatic entrance, and gradually the two instruments outline the interval of a rising second (E to F#). At the Presto, that interval collapses into a half-step, the movement jumps into A minor, and the music whips ahead. Beethoven provides a chorale-like second subject marked *dolce*, but this island of calm makes only the briefest of returns in the course of this furious movement. The burning energy of that Presto opening is never far off: the music rips along an almost machine-gun-like patter of eighth-notes, and after a hyperactive development, the movement drives to its abrupt cadence.

Relief comes in the *Andante con Variazioni*. The piano introduces the melody, amiable but already fairly complex, the violin repeats it, and the two instruments briefly extend it. There follow four lengthy and highly elaborated variations, and while the gentle mood of the fundamental theme is never violated, these variations demand some complex and demanding playing. For all its complexities, this is a lovely movement, and Beethoven and Bridgetower had to repeat it at the premiere.

The final movement opens with a bang—a stark A Major chord—and off the music goes. Beethoven had composed this movement, a tarantella, a year earlier, intending that it should be the finale of his *Violin Sonata in A Major, Opus 30, No. 1*. But he pulled it out and wrote a new finale for the earlier sonata, and that was a wise decision: this fiery finale would have overpowered that gentle sonata. Here, it dances with a furious energy that makes it a worthy counterpart to the first movement. At several points, Beethoven moves out of the driving 6/8 tarantella meter and offers brief interludes in 2/4. These stately, reserved moments bring the only relief in a movement that overflows with seething energy, a movement that here becomes the perfect conclusion to one of the most powerful pieces of chamber music ever written.

Beethoven was so taken with Bridgetower's playing that he intended to dedicate the sonata to him. And so we might know this music today as the "Bridgetower" Sonata but for the fact that the composer and the violinist quarreled, apparently over a remark that Bridgetower made about a woman Beethoven knew. The two eventually made up, but in the meantime Beethoven had dedicated the sonata to the French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, and so we know it today as the "Kreutzer" Sonata. Ironically, Kreutzer did not like this music—Berlioz reported that "the celebrated violinist could never bring himself to play this outrageously incomprehensible composition."

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About *the* Artists

JAMES EHNES

Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism, and an unflinching musicality, Ehnes is a favorite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls. Recent orchestral highlights include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, London Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra. Throughout the 24/25 season, Ehnes will be Artist-in-Residence with Melbourne Symphony and will tour to Asia, where he will perform the complete Beethoven sonatas at Kioi Hall, Tokyo, as well as performances with Hong Kong Philharmonic and Singapore Symphony Orchestras. Alongside his concerto work, Ehnes maintains a busy recital schedule. He performs regularly at Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Symphony Center Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Ravinia Festival, Verbier Festival, Dresden Music Festival, and Festival de Pâques in Aix.

A devoted chamber musician, he is the leader of the Ehnes Quartet and the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society. Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including two Grammys, three Gramophone Awards, and twelve Juno Awards. In 2021, Ehnes was announced as the recipient of the coveted Artist of the Year title in the 2021 Gramophone Awards which celebrated his recent contributions to the recording industry, including the launch of a new online recital series entitled 'Recitals

from Home' which was released in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of concert halls. Ehnes recorded the six Bach Sonatas and Partitas and six Sonatas of Ysaÿe from his home with state-of-the-art recording equipment and released six episodes over the period of two months. These recordings have been met with great critical acclaim by audiences worldwide and Ehnes was described by *Le Devoir* as being "at the absolute forefront of the streaming evolution."

Ehnes began violin studies at the age of five, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin at age nine, and made his orchestra debut with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal at thirteen. He continued his studies with Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music upon his graduation in 1997. He is a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and an honorary fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is a Visiting Professor. As of summer 2024, he is appointed as Professor of Violin at the Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. Ehnes plays the "Marsick" Stradivarius of 1715. This concert marks Ehnes' Princeton University Concerts debut, and we are profoundly grateful to him for agreeing to step in for violinist Janine Jansen on such short notice.

ORION WEISS

Orion Weiss has performed with all the major orchestras of North America, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and New York Philharmonic. This season Weiss will release *Arc III*, the final album in his *Arc* recital trilogy, on First Hand Records. His live performance schedule includes engagements with violinist James Ehnes, who joins Weiss for his return to London's Wigmore Hall as well as for performances in Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong, Seattle, Bloomington (Indiana), and Bergen, Norway. Among numerous engagements with orchestras in the United States he makes his David Geffen Hall debut with the American Symphony Orchestra. He is featured in recitals at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Italy's Teatro Marrucino Biglietteria, and Washington University in St. Louis, as well as on a tour with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and an appearance at La Musica Chamber Music Festival in Sarasota, Florida.

Over the last year, he returned to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, led by Michael Tilson Thomas; debuted with the National Symphony; gave multiple performances with violinist Augustin Hadelich in North America and Asia; and appeared at the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, and Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Weiss performs regularly with violinists Augustin Hadelich, William Hagen, and James Ehnes; pianists Michael Brown and Shai Wosner; and the Ariel, Parker, and Pacifica Quartets. He has appeared across the United States at venues and festivals including the Ravinia Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, Tanglewood, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, The Mariinsky Theatre (St. Petersburg), The Edinburgh International Festival, Seattle, and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festivals.

Weiss can be heard on the Naxos, Telos, Bridge, First Hand, Yarlung, and Artek labels. His discography includes a recording of Christopher Rouse's *Seeing*; the two previous installments in his Arc trilogy; a recording of Korngold's Left Hand concerto, plus other works with The Orchestra Now; and recordings of Gershwin's complete works for piano and orchestra with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and JoAnn Falletta.

His career honors include the Classical Recording Foundation's Young Artist of the Year, Gilmore Young Artist Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Gina Bachauer Scholarship at The Juilliard School, and the Mieczyslaw Munz Scholarship.

A native of Ohio, Weiss attended the Cleveland Institute of Music and made his Cleveland Orchestra debut performing Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1 in 1999. The next month, with less than 24 hours' notice, Weiss stepped in to replace André Watts for a performance of Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No. 2 with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and was immediately invited to return later that year. In 2000, he graduated from the Young Artist High School program at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with Paul Schenly, Daniel Shapiro, and Sergei Babayan. In 2004, he graduated from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Emanuel Ax and Jerome Lowenthal. In 2005, he toured Israel with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Itzhak Perlman. That same year, he made his New York recital debut at Alice Tully Hall and his European debut in a recital at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. He last appeared at Princeton University Concerts during our 125th anniversary season with a chamber ensemble playing Olivier's Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*.

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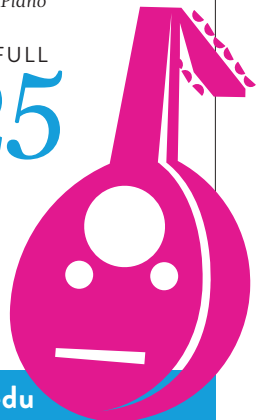
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