

Tabea Zimmermann Viola
Javier Perianes Piano





Dear Friends,

Over the past thirty years of presenting concerts, I've had the privilege of experiencing countless unforgettable performances. Yet some remain especially vivid in my memory, and among them is Tabea Zimmermann's Princeton University Concerts recital debut in 2017. Her artistry that evening was so expressive, so searching, so deeply musical that it left an indelible impression, and I have waited ever since for another opportunity to welcome her back to Princeton.

A recital centered on the viola is also a special occasion for us. Though the instrument holds a beloved place in chamber music and the orchestra, opportunities to hear it in the spotlight are surprisingly rare. In Tabea's hands, the viola's unique voice—warm, human, and expressive—comes fully into focus, a reminder of the instrument's remarkable depth and expressive range.

We are equally delighted to welcome Javier Perianes for his Princeton debut. Javier is a musician who listens as deeply as he plays—an ideal partner in the kind of musical conversation that makes chamber music so compelling. It is a pleasure to introduce him to Princeton audiences in collaboration with an artist we admire so much.

Please join me in warmly welcoming Tabea and Javier back—and for the first time—to Princeton University Concerts.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marna Seltzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "M" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marna Seltzer
Director of Princeton University Concerts

Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

TABEA ZIMMERMANN Viola

JAVIER PERIANES Piano

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(1810–1856)

Fantasiestücke, Op. 73
Zart und mit Ausdruck
Lebhaft, leicht
Rasch und mit Feuer

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2
Allegro amabile
Allegro appassionato
Andante con moto—Allegro

INTERMISSION

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

*Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of
John Dowland*, Op. 48

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(1906–1975)

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147
Moderato
Allegretto
Adagio

*Photographs and audio/video recording are prohibited during the performance. Out of respect for the artists and enjoyment of your fellow concertgoers, **please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices** before the concert. Scan this QR code with your smartphone to view instructions for silencing your phone.*





About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2026 • Program Annotator

*Lucy Caplan is Assistant Professor of Music at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Her first book is *Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera* (Harvard University Press, 2025).*

Many great composers, it's often noted, were also violists. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven performed on the instrument. Antonín Dvořák spent his early career as principal violist for a Czech opera house. Benjamin Britten, whose music is featured on this evening's program, began studying the viola as a child and continued to play throughout his life.

Why is this the case? One possible answer is that violists gain unique access to music's inner workings: as middle voices within larger ensembles, they have firsthand knowledge of how music is put together, beyond the instrument's most sonically obvious melodic and rhythmic qualities. The viola's understated warmth welds together the more pointed timbres of higher and lower voices into a cohesive ensemble, making possible the blended sound that renders great instrumental music greater than the sum of its parts. It is hardly a surprise that the viola would entice musicians curious about the interplay between performance and creation.

“ violists gain unique access to music's inner workings: as middle voices...they have firsthand knowledge of how music is put together, beyond the instrument's most sonically obvious melodic and rhythmic qualities.”

Yet these same sonic qualities and compositional conventions mean that the viola rarely takes the spotlight. This is a shame. Its generous, enveloping sound differs subtly from that of other string instruments. The solo repertoire for the instrument (some written with the viola in mind, some borrowed from other instruments) allows us to revisit familiar composers in a new light. By hearing how they approach the instrument—and, just as importantly, how violists approach their music—we gain a new perspective on an aspect of their creative process that all too often remains just out of earshot.

Robert Schumann, Fantasiestücke, Op. 73 (1849)

Schumann wrote several collections of “Fantasiestücke”—a term he borrowed from the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, whose collection of short stories and music criticism, titled *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (“Fantasy Pieces in Callot’s Manner”), was a hallmark of German Romanticism. As an ardent admirer of Hoffmann’s writing and a lifelong connoisseur of literature, Schumann frequently incorporated literary references and ideas into his compositions. Hoffmann’s work inspired him to consider how short forms (be they essays, short stories, or musical character pieces) could explore the fantastical, creating miniature worlds with maximal expressive depth.

Written during a flurry of creative activity in the winter of 1849 (a year during which Schumann produced more than 40 compositions), this set of three short pieces was originally conceived for clarinet, cello, or violin. Subsequent arrangements for the viola have made it a standard part of the instrument’s solo repertoire. Like a collection of short stories, the *Fantasiestücke* can stand independently but are clearly interlinked. The first, marked “Zart und mit Ausdruck” (“tenderly and with expression”), features a yearning melodic line stretching over near-constant triplets in the piano. The slow-paced melody intersperses half steps and arpeggios with dramatic larger intervals—sixths, sevenths, octaves. The effect is one of perpetual searching, and the eventual tranquility of its major-key ending feels hard-won. The second piece, “Lebhaft, leicht” (“lively and light”) picks up where the first left off, in the key of A major. The viola and piano trade off triplet figures, and the mostly piano dynamic is punctuated by frequent *sforzando-pianos*, like bubbles bursting in a pot of barely simmering water. “Rasch und mit Feuer” (“quick and with fire”) reaches a full boil, its loud exuberance capping off the set with a dash of energy.

Johannes Brahms, Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2 (1894)

Music by Brahms is often described as “autumnal,” and this sonata is no exception. One of Brahms’s last works, it was written for clarinet and later transcribed by the composer for viola—both instruments whose warm-hued timbres might evoke red leaves and golden sunlight. The opening movement, aptly called “Allegro amabile,” opens with a gentle, meandering melody. A gust of fervor blows through the second movement, a densely textured scherzo

that broadens into a gleaming B-major trio section. The final movement has a nostalgic sensibility, looking backward in both content and structure as a theme of Mozartean elegance wends its way through a series of lyrical variations.

What does it mean, exactly, to call a piece of music autumnal? The term is paradoxical, conveying both specificity (a certain time of year) and timelessness (it could be any autumn of any year, after all). Also paradoxical is the fact that by the time Brahms composed this sonata, he was distinctly out of step with contemporary musical trends. The composer effectively retired in 1890, but after hearing the superstar clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld play, he was inspired to write a few more pieces, including this sonata. By the early 1890s, other European composers were already pushing at the limits of tonality and musical structure, ushering in a newly modern soundscape. Ironically enough, the sonata’s “timeless” sound made it unlike other music of its time. Perhaps this is another of its autumnal qualities: this is music that aligned itself with the year’s—or century’s—preceding seasons, even as the rest of the world spun on.

Benjamin Britten, *Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of John Dowland*, Op. 48 (1950)

Around the age of 11, Benjamin Britten began taking lessons with a fellow British composer-violist of an older generation, Frank Bridge. Bridge—who, according to Britten’s sister Beth, “had long hair, was very excitable, and talked a lot”—would overwhelm the young student with ideas, such that Britten would emerge from the room “blinking and twitching nervously, and white with exhaustion.” Their strenuous nature notwithstanding, the lessons clearly had a positive impact. By the 1940s, Britten was firmly established as a star of English art music and of the transatlantic scene of Western classical music more broadly.

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Britten composed the *Lachrymae* while at work on his monumental opera *Billy Budd*, and the piece journeys to operatic emotional extremes, even as its scale is far smaller. (Originally written for the viola and piano duo featured on this evening's program, it is more often performed with a soloist accompanied by string orchestra.) It is based on "If my complaints could passions move," a song by the Renaissance composer John Dowland. A theme and variations in reverse, it moves through a series of nine eerie, quasi-improvisatory variations. At the beginning, we are unmoored: tremolos, harmonics, and uncertain harmonies create a sense of unstable grief, evoking the mood of Dowland's song ("O Love, I live and die in thee, / Thy grief in my deep sighs still speaks: / Thy wounds do freshly bleed in me, / My heart for thy unkindness breaks") without yet making direct reference to its contents. The first few variations are jumpy, almost haunted; the next ones are angry and assertive. Their extreme grief and anger recall other postwar European music, such as the deeply tragic symphonic works of Krzysztof Penderecki. The sixth variation quotes from another song by Dowland, the much-loved "Flow my tears," taking an indirect historical route back to the source material. Then we swerve back to Britten's more modern, fragmented world. An atmosphere of spookiness pervades in the *sul ponticello* playing and high-pitched harmonics, yet the piece's momentum never lets up. It then melts—magically, inexorably—into Dowland's song. Audible at long last, its plainspoken grief is unspeakably powerful

Dmitri Shostakovich, Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147 (1975)

Shostakovich was not a violist. But he seems to have shared his fellow composers' sense of the instrument's curious power, its deep capacity for subtlety and introspection. His final composition—which he completed just before entering the hospital where he would spend the last month of his life—was a sonata for viola and piano. The piece is elegiac without being exclusively autobiographical, an oblique meditation on the nature of death and remembrance. Each of its three movements concludes with the instruction "morendo," or "dying away." And its second and third movements make reference to the composer's literary and musical ancestors (Pushkin and Beethoven, respectively), whom he sensed he was about to join.

The first movement of the sonata begins in the simplest way imaginable: open-string pizzicatos, sounding out spare open fifths. With the entrance of the piano, chromatic, stretched-out phrases intersect haphazardly with the open intervals of the introductory figure. In conversations with the work's dedicatee, Fyodor Druzhinin, Shostakovich described this movement as a "novella," and it unfolds in distinct scenes: the first spooky and uncertain, the next agitated and angry, then a mournful cadenza for solo viola, and finally a return to the opening mood of despair. The second movement is accompanied by an inscription from Alexander Pushkin, "the work of long-ago days." On the most literal level, this refers to the fact that the movement quotes music from Shostakovich's unfinished World War II-era opera *The Gamblers*. More figuratively, it has a nostalgic ambience: there are folk-dance motifs with rustic grace notes and double stops, and a bitonal passage in which the piano and viola move in entirely different keys might be said to stage a contest between past and present. The final movement, which Shostakovich characterized as an adagio "in memory of Beethoven," is expansive in scope. A recitative-like passage for solo viola opens the movement; later on, we hear an arpeggiated figure in the piano which recalls Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. Shostakovich's own compositional past resurfaces as well. Each of his symphonies is quoted in their original order, making plain that the sonata is meant to stand as a summing-up of his life's work. Poignantly, he also quotes a piece he wrote at age sixteen, in memory of his father.

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TABEA ZIMMERMANN

Tabea Zimmermann is widely regarded as one of the most exceptional violists of our time. As a soloist, chamber musician, and educator, she shapes the international music scene with artistic integrity, intellectual independence, and a deep sense of purpose.

Born in southern Germany, she made her debut at the Berlin Philharmonie at the age of eleven. Following major competition wins in Geneva, Paris, and Budapest, she was appointed Germany's youngest professor at just 21. Today, she teaches at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts and the Kronberg Academy.

Contemporary music plays a central role in her artistic life. Numerous works by composers such as György Ligeti, Wolfgang Rihm, Heinz Holliger, Enno Poppe, and others were written for or premiered by her. Her approach combines a commitment to new musical ideas with a profound understanding of classical traditions.

Zimmermann is also a passionate chamber musician and a strong advocate of the "play & lead" concept, leading orchestral projects from within the ensemble. She

has collaborated in this role with Ensemble Resonanz, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the German National Youth Orchestra.

She has held residencies with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and maintains a close artistic partnership with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Deeply committed to cultural advocacy, she serves as president of the Hindemith Foundation, chairs the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, and supports socially relevant projects through her own David Shallon Foundation. Her many awards include the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

This is Tabea Zimmermann's third visit to Princeton University Concerts. She made her debut in 2015 with the Arcanto Quartet and returned in 2017 in solo recital. For her official biography, please visit tabeazimmermann.de.

JAVIER PERIANES

The international career of Javier Perianes has led him to perform in the most prestigious concert halls, with the world's foremost orchestras, working with celebrated conductors including Daniel Barenboim, Charles Dutoit, Zubin Mehta, Gustavo Dudamel, Klaus Mäkelä, Gianandrea Noseda, Gustavo Gimeno, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Simone Young, and Vladimir Jurowski.

The 2025/26 season features an array of high-profile concerts, including San Francisco, San Diego, Dallas, and Baltimore symphony orchestras, Bamberger Symphoniker, Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, Orquestra Sinfónica de Castilla y León, Teatro Real, and Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, Sydney and Tasmanian symphony orchestras. Perianes returns to Orquestra de la Comunitat Valencia to play-direct all five Beethoven Concerti, and concludes the play-direct Beethoven cycle with Galicia Symphony.

As an avid chamber musician, he regularly collaborates violist Tabea Zimmermann. This year the duo will tour Germany and North America including dates at Carnegie

Hall, Montréal Salle Bourgie, Club Musical de Québec, and Library of Congress, in addition to Princeton.

Career highlights have included concerts with Vienna Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, and San Francisco Symphonies, and Washington's National Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Swedish and Norwegian Radio orchestras, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, and Budapest Festival Orchestra.

Perianes exclusively records for Harmonia Mundi. His most recent releases feature a selection of Scarlatti's Sonatas, Granados' Goyescas, and Chopin's Sonatas No. 2 and No. 3 interspersed with the three Mazurkas from Op. 63. In 2025, Euroarts released a documentary recorded with Perianes at the Reales Alcazares in Seville, showing the special relationship between Scarlatti and Albéniz, linked to the city of Seville. Perianes was awarded the National Music Prize by the Ministry of Culture of Spain and named Artist of the Year at the International Classical Music Awards.

This is Javier Perianes' Princeton University Concerts debut. For his official biography, please visit www.javierperianes.com.



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The first concert in what is known today as Princeton University Concerts was presented on October 29, 1894, thus establishing one of the oldest continuous series of musical events in the country. From 1894 to 1914, the “Ladies Musical Committee” presented concerts by the Kneisel Quartet. After 1914, the programs diversified. In 1929, the Ladies Committee became the Princeton University Concerts Committee—a town and gown group of interested and knowledgeable music lovers—which has guided the University Concerts to date

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