Printable program, including notes on the program

Celebrity Series of Boston, in partnership with Groton Hill Music Center, presents

Thursday | March 6 | 8pm

Groton Hill Music Center's Meadow Hall

Midori violin
Özgür Aydin piano

Robert Schumann *Stücke im Volkston* for violin and piano, Op. 102

I. Mit humor, in A minor, “Vanitas vanitatum”
II. Langsam, in F Major
III. Nicht schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen, in A minor
IV. Nicht zu rasch, in D Major
V. Stark and markirt, in A minor

Johannes Brahms Sonata No. 1 in G Major for violin and piano, Op. 78

Vivace, ma non troppo
Adagio
Allegro molto moderato

INTERMISSION

Francis Poulenc Sonata for violin and piano, FP 119

Allegro con fuoco
Intermezzo
Presto tragico

Continued...

Maurice Ravel “Kaddish” from Two Hebrew Songs (arr. Lucien Garban)

Ravel *Tzigane, rhapsodie de concert,* M. 76

This evening's performance will run approximately one hour and 45 minutes, including intermission.

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Midori’s recordings are available on Warner Classics, Sony Classical, Sony Japan, Onyx Classics, and Accentus Music.

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Celebrity Series of Boston is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
***Stücke im Volkston* ("Pieces in the folk style"), for violin and piano, Op. 102**

I. *Mit humor* (“with humor”) “Vanitas vanitatum” (“Vanity of vanities”)
II. *Langsam* (“slow”)
III. *Nicht schnell, mit viel Ton zu spielen* (“not fast, play with a lot of sound”)
IV. *Nicht zu rasch* (“not too fast”)
V. *Stark and markirt* (“Strong and marked”)

This work has no commissioned note available to accompany it. We thought adding the translations above would help a little with context. The other notable piece of information is that the work, from 1849, was originally written for cello and piano. The composer himself prepared a version for violin and piano, heard tonight, and the first edition's title page includes the words "ad libitum violine" ("violin optional").

When the work was performed on a pre-BSO chamber concert in January 1983, program annotator Steven Ledbetter wrote this note* about the work.

*Courtesy: HENRY, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Performance History Search module

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Sonata No. 1 in G Major for violin and piano, Op. 78

In his first twenty years, Johannes Brahms made an astonishing leap from a miserable childhood in the downtrodden harbor area of Hamburg to an eminent position as a distinguished young composer. He began his career as a musician at the age of twelve by giving piano lessons for pennies, and at thirteen, he was playing in harborside sailors’ bars. By the age of sixteen, however, he had progressed to playing Beethoven’s “Waldstein” Sonata as well as one of his own compositions in a public concert. In April 1853, just before his twentieth birthday, he set out from Hamburg on a modest concert tour, traveling mostly on foot. In Hanover, he called on the violinist Joseph Joachim, who, at twenty-two, had just become the head of the royal court orchestra there. Joachim was so impressed by Brahms that he gave him a letter of introduction to Liszt in Weimar and sent him to see Schumann in Düsseldorf. Robert Schumann was then Germany’s leading composer, and his

wife, Clara, was one of Europe's greatest pianists. When the Schumanns heard Brahms play, they invited him to their home.

Although this sonata purports to be Brahms' first sonata for violin and piano, according to the reflections of a student of Brahms, the composer discarded five violin sonatas that he had composed before he wrote this one, the first that he thought good enough to preserve and present to the world. He wrote this sonata during the summers of 1878 and 1879, when he had already become a mature artist. It was his only piece of chamber music from the productive period in which he composed his Symphony No. 2, the "Academic Festival" and "Tragic" overtures, the violin concerto and the second piano concerto.

This sonata, like the Violin Concerto, Op. 77, owes a great deal to Joachim as well as to Clara Schumann, who by then was a widow. Clara was a distinguished pianist and composer in her own right. When Brahms sent Clara a manuscript of this new work, she wrote back, "I must send you a line to tell you how excited I am about your Sonata. It came today. Of course, I played it through at once, and at the end could not help bursting into tears of joy." Ten years later, when Clara was seventy years old and in failing health, she still loved the sonata and treasured the friendship of both Joachim and Brahms. From her house in Frankfurt she wrote a touching letter to Brahms, in which she said, "Joachim was here on Robert's eightieth birthday and we had a lot of music. We played the [Op. 78] Sonata again and I reveled in it. I wish that the last movement could accompany me in my journey from here to the next world."

This sonata is one of the most lyrical compositions among all of Brahms' instrumental works. The violin always has the leading voice, and the piano writing is always so clear and transparent that an imbalance never exists between the two instruments. There are only three movements, not the usual four frequently considered traditional for a sonata. Brahms wrote to his publisher, clearly in jest, that since he came up one movement short, he would, therefore, accept 25% less than his usual fee for this work.

As in many of Brahms' compositions, the movements are intimately interrelated. A three-note motto figure is common to all three movements. A mood of gentle nostalgia permeates the first movement, Vivace ma non troppo, and sets the tone and character for the entire sonata. Brahms here works much like Beethoven had before him: he introduces a germ out of which themes for the whole movement will eventually evolve and grow. The second movement is a solemn and dramatic Adagio, and the third, a rondo, Allegro molto moderato, contains an episode in which Brahms brings back the slow movement theme. The principal melodic material of this movement, however, comes from a related pair of his songs, "Regenlied" ("Rain Song") and "Nachklang" ("Reminiscence"), Op. 59, nos. 3 and 4.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
Sonata for violin and piano, FP 119

Francis Poulenc belonged to a group of French composers, which also included Milhaud and Honegger, who in 1920 were dubbed “The Six.” This group helped to turn French music away from stultifying formality, elevated pretense, and empty pomp.

Poulenc’s most widely known chamber music involves wind instruments, not strings. He discarded two violin sonatas before he composed this one, which was a long time in reaching its final form. He originally wrote this sonata in 1942 and 1943 for the magnificent young French violinist Ginette Neveu, who lost her life in a plane crash at the age of thirty, in 1949. Poulenc decided to revise the sonata in that year; he particularly made many changes in the last movement. The sonata recalls the composer’s memory of the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1899-1936), who was shot by the Fascist Falangists soon after the outbreak of civil war in his country.

This Romantic and melodic work is infused with tragedy that is expressed in the opening Allegro con fuoco in a musical language related to that of the best-known French sonata, one by César Franck. Poulenc headed his second movement, Intermezzo, with a quotation from García Lorca, “The guitar makes dreams weep,” an allusion to the poet’s own guitar arrangements of Spanish folk and popular songs. The third movement carries the uncommon indication, Presto tragico, calling for a very quick beat but a tragic mood. The sonata progresses lyrically, yet speedily, to its close.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
"Kaddish" from Two Hebrew Melodies (arr. Lucien Garban)

A common mantra for instrumentalists of any kind goes something like this: play like you’re singing. Performers often set their ambitions to meet this simple but lofty goal, feeling that the zenith of great performing hinges on the elusive characteristic. This is especially true for strings, whose expressive flexibility is maximized by use of a bow, giving them the best chance to surmount that Olympus. It is fitting, then, that songs such as Ravel’s “Kaddish” from Two Hebrew Songs, one of the most expressive vocal pieces in the modern repertoire, should be performed on the violin.

Ravel’s investigation of the “other” (see the note for Tzigane for more discussion on this) here mines the rich Jewish cantor tradition, using a version of a traditional melody to set the mourner’s Kaddish, or prayer for the dead.

Ravel was sensitive to the idea that accompaniment should clarify rather than aggrandize a melody, especially one as meaningful as a setting of the Kaddish. Nowhere in his work did he more expertly apply this principle than in this simple little tune. After a first section where the piano chimes transparently in its upper register, an “amen” sounds in the melody, beginning a long, slow descent toward the end of the piece accentuated by evocative harmonic motion that gives the sense of a story being told. The melody never loses its predominance as the broad accompaniment gives space for the violin to adorn itself. It is a beautiful setting that skillfully conveys the virtuosic performance of emotion that characterizes the cantor tradition.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
***Tzigane, rhapsodie de concert*, M. 76**

Ravel is a composer, like Debussy, who is so associated with a particular kind of Frenchness that his frequent musical globetrotting can be surprising even to experienced listeners. His *Tzigane* for violin and piano, inspired by Hungarian music, is exactly the kind of thing that might shock listeners used to *Jeux d’eau* and *Daphnis et Chloé*. It is in line with a long tradition: since at least the seventeenth century, the perception of the “other” has played a prominent role in Western Classical composition. Composers of German, Italian, French, and English cultural backgrounds would sometimes attempt to convey exoticism to their listener by, say, adding guitar to an orchestra to evoke Spanishness, or using orientalist tropes to evoke Arabness. Composers of the early twentieth century frequently took advantage of this tradition to express their supposed freedom from the norms of European high art, and to signal newness in a climate of fervent modernism. Increasingly during this period, the “other” that composers found inspiring were peasants from understudied European folk traditions, fueled by academic interest in describing and cataloging these traditions. It is this context, as well as the music of Liszt, that allowed Ravel to musically describe a peasant gathering in Hungary, albeit one that is highly stylized and contextually removed.

The piece is structured as a single movement, beginning with a dramatic, extended solo cadenza for the violin. Its rhapsodic structure is reminiscent of Béla Bartók’s later Violin Sonata No. 2, itself partly a version of the *hora lungă,* a type of rhythmically flexible improvised song. The first two notes of the piece recall the opening of Bach’s Second Violin Partita, an allusion that signals the piece’s virtuosic ambitions. The remainder of the solo is a tour de force of techniques and expressive variation, and its push and pull in tempo and intensity lends a sense of anticipation of what’s to come.

When the accompaniment finally enters, the music gains momentum, shifting into a relentless, driving rhythm that propels the piece forward. The meaning is

clear—like in Liszt's Mephisto Waltz, a calm gathering of the people has now transformed into a dance party. The piano provides a steady foundation, while the violin spins out a dazzling array of rapid passages, syncopated rhythms, and soaring melodic lines. The harmonic language of this section is unmistakably Ravelian, finally incorporating the lush chromaticism that French impressionism is so closely associated with. While the work feels Hungarian in vibe, its world is high art modernism, and Ravel does not pretend otherwise. It is fresh, indicative of the high art potential of common music that composers of the time found so electrifying.

From the Celebrity Series of Boston archives...

Celebrity Series of Boston presented Midori in her Boston debut in March 1992. She made her Symphony Hall recital debut, presented by Celebrity Series, in November 1993. In February 1999, she was joined by pianist Robert McDonald, violist Nobuko Imai, and cellist Peter Wiley for a program of chamber music in Jordan Hall. Recitals with piano followed in January 2001 and November 2012, when she was joined by Özgür Aydin for the first time in Boston. This weekend's programs mark her sixth Celebrity Series engagement.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Midori

Midori is a visionary artist, activist, and educator who explores and builds connections between music and the human experience. In the four decades since her debut with the New York Philharmonic at age 11, the "simply magical" (*Houston Chronicle*) violinist has performed with many of the world's most prestigious orchestras and has collaborated with world-renowned musicians including Leonard Bernstein, Yo-Yo Ma, and many others.

This season, she tours a recital program, with pianist Özgür Aydin, at the Edinburgh Festival; the 92nd Street Y, New York; the Celebrity Series of Boston; San Francisco Performances; and the Colburn Celebrity Series. Other highlights of Midori's 2024/25 season include appearances with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Louisville Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, and Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

Outside the U.S., she performs with the Vienna Philharmonic under Andris Nelsons in Vienna and on tour in Japan and Korea (Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto); she appears twice in the spring of 2025 at the Berlin Philharmonic

Hall, with the German National Youth Orchestra in May, performing Glanert's Second Violin Concerto, and with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (DSO) in June, performing Dvořák's Violin Concerto. She also joins the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande under Jonathan Nott, performing Sibelius' Violin Concerto on a tour of Spain, and has concert appearances in Geneva, Köln, and Nürnberg, as well as Mumbai, Istanbul, Izmir, and Colombo.

Deeply committed to furthering humanitarian and educational goals, Midori has founded several non-profit organizations; the New York City-based Midori & Friends and Japan-based MUSIC SHARING have both been active for more than three decades. For the Orchestra Residencies Program (ORP), which supports youth orchestras, Midori commissioned a new work from composer Derek Bermel, *Spring Cadenzas,* that was premiered virtually during the COVID lockdown and continues to be performed; this season, she is working on creating a video recording of the work to be accompanied by a tutorial. ORP also worked recently with the Afghan Youth Orchestra, which relocated to Portugal in order to continue operating. Midori's Partners in Performance (PiP) helps to bring chamber music to smaller communities in the U.S. In recognition of her work as an artist and humanitarian, she serves as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, and was named a Kennedy Center Honoree in 2021.

Born in Osaka in 1971, she began her violin studies with her mother, Setsu Goto, at an early age. In 1982, conductor Zubin Mehta invited the then 11-year-old Midori to perform with the New York Philharmonic in the orchestra's annual New Year's Eve concert, where the foundation was laid for her subsequent career. Midori is the Dorothy Richard Starling Chair in Violin Studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and Artistic Director of Ravinia Steans Music Institute's Piano & Strings program. She is the recipient of honorary doctorates from Smith College, Yale University, Longy School of Music, and Shenandoah University, and of the 2023 Brandeis Creative Arts Award from Brandeis University.

She plays the 1734 Guarnerius del Gesù 'ex-Huberman' and uses four bows—two by Dominique Peccatte, one by François Peccatte, and one by Paul Siefried.

Özgür Aydin piano

Turkish-American pianist Özgür Aydin made his major concerto debut in 1997 in a performance of Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the same year, he won the renowned ARD International Music Competition in Munich and the Nippon Music Award in Tokyo – recognition that has since served as the basis for an active and diverse international performing career. He is also a laureate of the Cleveland International Piano Competition.

Mr. Aydin has appeared as soloist with numerous orchestras in Germany and Turkey, as well as with the BBC Concert Orchestra London, the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, Slovak State Philharmonic, and Canada's Calgary Philharmonic. Frequently invited to summer music festivals, he has appeared at Salzburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, Ravinia, and Edinburgh. He is a guest at many prestigious venues including New York's Carnegie Hall, London's Wigmore Hall, Munich's Herkulessaal, and Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

Mr. Aydin has made recordings of solo piano works by Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff. His performances of the complete cycles of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas and 5 concertos as well as Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier have been highly praised by the critics.

As also a dedicated chamber musician, he enjoys recurrent collaborations with violinists Midori and Kolja Blacher, cellist Clemens Hagen, and members of the Berlin Philharmonic. A new recording with Midori consisting of works by Bloch, Janáček, and Shostakovich is released on Onyx Classiscs.

Born in Colorado to Turkish parents, Mr. Aydin began his music studies at the Ankara Conservatory in Turkey. He subsequently studied with Peter Katin at the Royal College of Music in London and with Prof. Kammerling at the Hanover Music Academy. He has also received valuable instruction from artists such as Tatiana Nikolaeva, Andras Schiff, and Ferenc Rados.

Mr. Aydin lives in Berlin and teaches at the University of the Arts.