Celebrity Series of Boston

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Wednesday | March 5, 2025 | 8pm
Symphony Hall

Leonidas Kavakos violin
Daniil Trifonov piano

Ludwig van Beethoven	Sonata No. 4 in A minor for violin and piano, Op. 23 Presto Andante scherzoso, più Allegretto Allegro molto
Francis Poulenc	Sonata for violin and piano, FP 119 Allegro con fuoco Intermezzo Presto tragico
	INTERMISSION
Johannes Brahms	Sonata No. 1 in G Major for violin and piano, Op. 78 Vivace, ma non troppo Adagio Allegro molto moderato
Béla Bartók	Rhapsody No. 1 for violin and piano, Sz. 87 Lassú. Moderato Friss. Allegretto moderato

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

Leonidas Kavakos and Daniil Trifonov appear by arrangement with Opus 3 Artists

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata No. 4 in A minor for violin and piano, Op. 23

Beethoven wrote this sonata and the F-major Sonata No. 5, Op. 24, more or less simultaneously during 1800 and 1801. He originally intended that they be paired as Op. 23, nos. 1 and 2, but when the publisher's engraver made the mistake of preparing some of the printing plates for them in different formats, the simplest way to deal with the problem was to make them into separate publications, Opp. 23 and 24. Beethoven dedicated them to Count Moritz von Fries, a wealthy Chamberlain at the Imperial Court, a banker, art collector, and music-lover who had probably commissioned them. Fries commissioned the C-major String Quintet, Op. 29, at about the same time, and it is dedicated to him. Beethoven became caught in an enormous tangle of lawsuits as a result of some liberties that Fries took with the publication rights, but by 1816, all was forgiven and the composer dedicated his Symphony No. 7 to the Count.

At a chamber music evening at Count Fries' house in the spring of 1800, when Beethoven was beginning these sonatas, Daniel Steibelt (1765-1823), a composer trying to compete with Beethoven, decided to challenge Beethoven's reputation as the best pianist in Vienna. One evening, just a week after hearing the variations in Beethoven's Clarinet Trio at Fries', Steibelt improvised on the same tune in a manner that was obviously intended to impress the company with the superiority of his skills. It soon became evident to everyone that his "improvisations" were not extemporaneously conceived. He had carefully prepared. Beethoven was furious. Beethoven picked up the cello part of a Steibelt quintet that was on the evening's program, put it on the piano's music rack upside down, picked out a tune from it with one finger, and then improvised with such power and imagination that Steibelt left the room before Beethoven had finished. Steibelt's reputation in Vienna was permanently damaged, and his next concert was a failure, but he did later succeed in one area where Beethoven had had a minor failure. Czar Alexander I, who never paid Beethoven for the dedication of the three violin sonatas, Op. 30, made Steibelt music director of his court in St. Petersburg in 1810.

The Sonata in A minor, Op. 23, is a great advance over its predecessors in several ways. Beethoven was then clearly at ease with his advanced musical ideas. The music does not strain for effect. Changing moods do not interrupt its flow. The complex counterpoint in parts of the unusual *Presto* first movement, which must have been so difficult to write, is easy and agreeable to the listening ear. This movement has been said to foreshadow the more famous "Kreutzer" sonata in its experimental nature. It is a quickly paced movement with so compact an exposition of its basic ideas that when Beethoven begins to develop these ideas, wholly new but related themes spill out of his imagination. Next comes an extraordinary middle movement, *Andante scherzoso*, *più allegretto*, a bright movement in a major tonality, that combines the contrasting functions of both slow movement and scherzo with the dramatic structure of the usual first-movement sonata-form. Returning to the minor home key again in the finale, *Allegro molto*, Beethoven presents the listeners with a free rondo with even more of the kind of counterpoint that enriched the first movement.

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.

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's 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.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
Rhapsody No. 1 for violin and piano, Sz. 87

The Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók, devoted a large part of his life to the systematic study of the folk music of Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. His particular interest was in identifying the special characteristics of the music of each region specifically; until his time, the music of the itinerant Roma people had been grouped together loosely as generically Hungarian, but Bartók made a distinction between Roma music and the music of the Hungarian peasant.

Liszt influenced many of Bartók's compositions, especially the several works to which Bartók gave the title Rhapsody, but Liszt had based his famous Hungarian Rhapsodies principally on the music of the Roma, while Bartók chose to focus on that of the Hungarian peasant. Bartók assimilated the folk musical language so thoroughly that it is often impossible to tell where the folk music in his works ends and his original composition begins.

Although as a teenager Bartók was a conservative both musically and politically, when he reached his twenties, he began not only to want to express his individuality but also to give voice to his native Hungarian background. In 1905, Bartók began the systematic collection and study of Hungarian folk music in collaboration with the composer, Zoltán Kodály; this work not only became a major focus of interest for him but one that he would continue throughout his career. Together the two composers collected and examined the music of the Roma and peasants in a large area from Slovakia to Romania.

The authentic music that they heard was a revelation to both young composers, and they recorded much of it. As a result, Bartók reassessed his approach to composing, subsequently describing the style of the first Rhapsody, which he composed for piano, in 1904, almost a quarter of century before he created this one for violin and piano, as 'pseudo-folk music' because he, at the time, had been under what he later decided was the mistaken impression that he was following in the tradition of the distinctive music of Hungary. Bartók, nevertheless, continued to perform the very first Rhapsody he composed, his Op. 1, in both its solo piano and orchestral versions.

The Rhapsody No. 1 for violin and piano, written in 1928, has more historic origins. Beginning in the mid-1700s, the Austro-Hungarian armies recruited soldiers by staging musical entertainments in village taverns. Professional dancers in fancy uniforms impressed the local lads, giving them copious drinks, and demonstrating what they were "advertising" as the feeling of the life in the army, in dance competitions. Originating at that time, the Verbunkos (derived from German, meaning to advertise or recruit), is a Hungarian dance, whose music was initially used very frequently in the induction of recruits into the Austro-Hungarian army. Its music was meant to illustrate how a soldier's work would be made up of endless satisfaction and enjoyment.

Bartók wrote two rhapsodies for violin and piano that are based principally on folk dance tunes in the Verbunkos tradition from Hungary and Rumanian Transylvania, which had been part of Hungary before the First World War. Rhapsody No. 1 consists of two movements, following the traditional Verbunkos form, a pairing of a *lassú* (slow) and a *friss* (fast) that are found in folk music throughout the region. The *lassu* typically involves a dotted rhythm, and the section gradually accelerates to a frenetic finish, the *friss*, faster music with virtuosic passages. *Lassú* and *friss* are designations that are also used for the alternating sections of *czárdás* and other Hungarian folk dances.

Rhapsody No. 1 begins with a *lassú* in a simple three-part form, *Moderato*. It starts with a melancholy tune that originally formed part of a Sunday dance for which there was a folk band accompaniment. The contrasting central section is based on a Hungarian melody that is ornamented and extended before the return of the opening subject. The music runs directly into the lively *friss*, a succession of varied dance tunes, *Allegro moderato*, which Bartók had originally heard played on the violin and on the bagpipe and flute, instruments whose sounds are imitated here. The music finally slows to recall the *lassú*, then pauses for a brilliant cadenza, and comes to a close.

Rhapsody No. 1 is dedicated to Joseph Szigeti, who performed it for the first time on October 22, 1929, in Berlin.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Leonidas Kavakos violin

Leonidas Kavakos is recognized across the world as a violinist and artist of rare quality, acclaimed for his matchless technique, his captivating artistry and his superb musicianship, and the integrity of his playing. He works regularly with the world's greatest orchestras and conductors and appears in recital at the world's premier halls and festivals. In recent years, Kavakos has built a strong profile as a conductor and has conducted such orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Vienna Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and Filarmonica della Scala.

Highlights of the 24/25 season in North America include a recital tour performing Bach's complete Sonatas and Partitas, and recitals with Daniil Trifonov. Kavakos makes his debut in Mexico with the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM; and appears as guest soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Palm Beach Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, as well as play-conducts with the New World Symphony. Elsewhere, he takes his ApollΩn Ensemble on tour to Asia with concerts in Macau, Daegu, Tokyo, and Taipei. Kavakos returns to the Filarmonica della Scala, Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, NDR Hamburg, DSO Berlin, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Danish National Symphony, Swedish Radio Symphony, and conducts the Israel Philharmonic. He continues his partnership with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma in trio concerts at major European venues, as well as performs in recital across Spain, Italy, and London. In 2025, Kavakos will be the new artistic director of the classical music festival of the Lotte Concert Hall in Seoul, Korea.

Kavakos is an exclusive recording artist with Sony Classics. Releases have included *Bach: Sei Solo*, Beethoven Violin Concerto which he conducted and played with the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, and the re-release of his 2007 recording of the complete Beethoven Sonatas with Enrico Pace, for which he was named ECHO Klassik Instrumentalist of the year. In 2022, Kavakos released *Beethoven for Three: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5* arranged for trio, with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. The second album in the series, featuring Symphony No. 6 "Pastoral," followed in November. The third installment, *Beethoven for Three: Symphony No. 4 and Op. 97 "Archduke,"* continues this exploration of Beethoven's music in trio form. There are further recordings planned in the coming years. With his chamber group the ApollΩn Ensemble, Kavakos recently released *Bach: Violin Concertos* to critical acclaim. Kavakos was named Gramophone Artist of the Year.

Born and raised in a musical family in Athens, Leonidas Kavakos curates an annual violin and chamber music masterclass in Athens, which attracts violinists and ensembles from all over the world. In 2022, he was declared a regular member of the Chair of Music in the Second Class of Letters and Fine Arts for his services to music. Kavakos plays the 'Willemotte' Stradivarius violin of 1734.

Daniil Trifonov piano

Grammy Award-winning pianist Daniil Trifonov (dan-EEL TREE-fon-ov) has made a spectacular ascent of the classical music world, as a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of awe. “He has everything and more, … tenderness and also the demonic element. I never heard anything like that,” marveled pianist Martha Argerich. With Transcendental, the Liszt collection that marked his third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, Trifonov won the Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Solo Album of 2018. Named *Gramophone*’s 2016 Artist of the Year and *Musical America*’s 2019 Artist of the Year, he was made a “Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres” by the French government in 2021. As *The Times of London* notes, he is “without question the most astounding pianist of our age.”

Trifonov undertakes season-long artistic residencies with both the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Czech Philharmonic in 2024/25. A highlight of his Chicago residency is Brahms’s Second Piano Concerto with Klaus Mäkelä, and his Czech tenure features Dvořák’s Piano Concerto with Semyon Bychkov, first at season-opening concerts in Prague and then on tour in Toronto and at New York’s Carnegie Hall. Trifonov also opens the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra’s season with Mozart’s 25th Piano Concerto under Andris Nelsons; performs Prokofiev’s Second with the San Francisco Symphony and Esa-Pekka Salonen; reprises Dvořák’s concerto for a European tour with Jakub Hrůša and the Bamberg Symphony; plays Ravel’s G-major Concerto with Hamburg’s NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra and Alan Gilbert; and joins Rafael Payare and the Montreal Symphony for concertos by Schumann and Beethoven on a major European tour. In recital, Trifonov appears twice more at Carnegie Hall, first on a solo tour that also takes in Chicago and Philadelphia, and then with violinist Leonidas Kavakos, with whom he also appears in Chicago, Boston, Kansas City, and Washington, DC. Released in October 2024, *My American Story*, the pianist’s new Deutsche Grammophon double album, pairs solo pieces with concertos by Gershwin and Mason Bates. Bates’ concerto is dedicated to Trifonov and both orchestral works were captured live with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra, who previously partnered with the pianist on his award-winning *Destination Rachmaninov* series.

It was during the 2010/11 season that Trifonov won medals at three of the music world’s most prestigious competitions, taking Third Prize in Warsaw’s Chopin Competition, First Prize in Tel Aviv’s Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix—an additional honor bestowed on the best overall competitor in any category—in Moscow’s Tchaikovsky Competition. In 2013 he was awarded the prestigious Franco Abbiati Prize for Best Instrumental Soloist by Italy’s foremost music critics.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Trifonov began his musical training at age five, and went on to attend Moscow’s Gnessin School of Music as a student of Tatiana Zelikman, before pursuing his piano studies with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has also studied composition, and continues to write for piano, chamber ensemble, and orchestra. When he premiered his own Piano Concerto, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* marveled: “Even having seen it, one cannot quite believe it. Such is the artistry of pianist-composer Daniil Trifonov.”

Celebrity Series of Boston

Calidore String Quartet

SUNDAY MARCH 23, 3PM

NEC'S JORDAN HALL

PROGRAM:

Ludwig van Beethoven	String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"
Jessie Montgomery	*Strum*
Franz Schubert	String Quartet No. 12 in C minor, D. 703 "Quartettsatz"
Erich Korngold	String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Op. 34

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