

Tuesday | April 4 | 8pm
Symphony Hall

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Joshua Bell violin
Daniil Trifonov piano

Beethoven Sonata in D Major for violin and piano, Op. 12, no. 1
Allegro con brio
Tema con variazioni. Andante con moto
Rondo. Allegro

Prokofiev Sonata No. 1 in F minor for violin and piano, Op. 80
Andante assai
Allegro brusco
Andante
Allegressimo – Andante assai

INTERMISSION

Bloch “Nigun” from *Baal Shem*

Franck Sonata in A Major for violin and piano
Allegretto ben moderato
Allegro
Recitativo – Fantasia. Ben moderato – Molto lento
Allegretto poco mosso

Today's program will run approximately two hours, including intermission.

Mr. Bell appears by arrangement with Park Avenue Artists.
Mr. Bell records exclusively for Sony Classical - a MASTERWORKS label.

Daniil Trifonov appears by arrangement with Opus 3 Artists.

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Sonata No. 1 in F minor for violin and piano, Op. 80

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven wrote ten violin sonatas, a concentrated body of work, which have become the foundation of the sonata repertoire and are extremely popular. The first nine date from the brief period between 1797 and 1803, and the last from 1812. When he wrote the first three in 1797 and 1798, Beethoven was following the custom of the time that generally confined sonatas to private performance in the home, although he and his friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh played at least one of them (we do not know which) at a public concert on March 29, 1798. At the year's end, Beethoven published the music with a dedication to his teacher of vocal writing, the Imperial Kapellmeister Antonio Salieri (1750-1825), from whom he took lessons for at least a decade.

This Beethoven sonata and others of the period are model works of the years in which he added his own accents to the classical language of Haydn and Mozart, developing the musical forms inherited from his two great predecessors into vehicles of powerful expression without precedent. Today's listener might find it hard to imagine the experience of Beethoven's contemporaries for whom this sonata presented a challenge consonant with what we might ourselves find in contemporary avant-garde music; consequently, these new sonatas were not altogether well received. An early critic describes the first three in this opus, saying they were strange and bizarre, and he found them "overladen with difficulties." After struggling through them, he said, "I felt like a man who had hoped to take a walk through a pleasant park with a friend but found the path closed by hostile barriers, and at the end returned exhausted without having had any pleasure. Nevertheless, this work must not be entirely rejected. There are those who love difficulties, and they may find delight and satisfaction in this music." [Abridged].

A generation earlier, a sonata of this type would always have been described as a sonata for harpsichord or piano "with the accompaniment of a violin," and then it was generally expected that the keyboard part would be complete in itself. Mozart had broken down this convention by writing indispensable violin parts in his sonatas. Contemporary critics of Beethoven's day were surprised to discover that his sonatas had gone one step further than Mozart but in the same direction, requiring two players of equal skill. Beethoven finally and irrevocably, but not easily, established this new balance of power; thus, these sonatas occupy an important place in the repertoire. The violin no longer offers an optional accompaniment to a solo piano sonata but serves as the piano's equal partner. (The harpsichord, which could not meet the demands of Beethoven's intended dynamic range here, would not have been an option for the performer.)

Beethoven had played the violin from the age of eight, but he was most at home with the keyboard and was the greatest pianist of his time. However, as a practical musician of his generation, he knew the violin very well and wrote fluently and idiomatically for it.

The First Sonata is overall a very bright and spirited work. It begins with an intricately written *Allegro con brio* movement, long, powerful, and expressive. The violin seems at first to be confined to its then traditional function of filling in and accompanying the piano, but before long, the listener hears the violin as a liberated partner in an exciting and new kind of collaboration where violin and piano are equal partners. The young Beethoven is rich in musical ideas, which he exposes and extends to such great length that instead of following the exposition with the usual development section, he uses the brief middle section of the movement simply to get back to the original key.

A theme and four variations make up the second movement, *Andante con moto*. The theme is protracted and complicated, Mozartian in character but also very much of Beethoven's own expression. There are moments when Beethoven seems to be stretching the limits of what was then standard harmonic practice, yet it is not clear if he did this out of artistic necessity or just to show that he could. The variations are very different from one another, in tension and texture as well as in the shifting of emphasis from violin to piano. The final variation foreshadows the exceptional rhythmic freedom and power of Beethoven's last works.

Beethoven used a Rondo, *Allegro*, the favorite classical form so often found in final movements, for the third movement. In it, the opening theme alternates with contrasting material throughout. The main subject is an Italianate melody that has the kind of character Salieri must have schooled Beethoven in, yet in this movement even more than in the preceding one, Beethoven goes beyond the musical language of his contemporaries. He attempts to create new effects, for example in his modulations, but he has done this in a way that our contemporary 21st-century ears have difficulty hearing as experimental. The 18th-century critic who found Beethoven's innovations difficult did not have anything with which to compare Beethoven's boldness, evident even in this youthful work. There is no doubt that Beethoven intended for this piece to be daring, and maybe even difficult, even though it is hard for us to hear it that way.

Sonata No. 1 in F minor for violin and piano, Op. 80 **Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)**

Prokofiev was a notable Russian composer of the first half of the 20th century who worked and lived both in Europe and America as well as in his own homeland. He was born in a remote Ukrainian village where his agronomist father was the manager of a large estate. His mother gave him his first music lessons. He studied at the Conservatory in Saint Petersburg where he became a brilliant pianist. After the Russian Revolution, Prokofiev came to America and then settled in Paris, where he was an influential figure until his return to Russia in 1933.

Late in 1938, Prokofiev began to sketch a violin sonata, but before long, some larger projects demanded his immediate attention, so he temporarily abandoned it, finishing only in 1946. First, he constructed a cantata for concert performance from the music he had composed for Sergei Eisenstein's film, *Alexander Nevsky*. Next, he wrote a five-act opera, *Semyon Kotko*, for performance in 1940. Finally, the Second World War forced him to leave his Moscow home for safety in a remote area of Russia, where he worked on the two principal compositions of his late years, the Fifth Symphony and the opera, *War and Peace*. Wherever he went, he carried the sketches for this unfinished sonata with him to work on. In 1946, he finally completed it, and on October 23, 1946, the renowned violinist, David Oistrakh, gave it its first performance. Prokofiev had, in the meantime, written another violin sonata (which is an alternate version of his Flute Sonata), but he called this one his first because he had begun it earlier.

Prokofiev remarked that he was inspired by one of Handel's violin sonatas in writing this work. He does, indeed, follow the Baroque four-movement structure of slow-fast-slow-fast. The sonata is an original, powerful, dramatic composition, whose rich thematic material is strongly Russian in character. Imaginative Soviet critics thought Russian epic-narrative poetry inspired it and they presumably heard in it such programmatic subjects as sad ancient bards, a young girl's lament, and even the sounds of war. The movements are of almost equal length, but Prokofiev said that the first served as a kind of extended introduction to the second, being a haunted prelude that ends with a whispering muted scale. Prokofiev succinctly described each of them: "The first movement, *Andante assai*, is severe in character and is a kind of extended introduction to the second movement, *Allegro brusco*. A sonata-allegro third movement, *Andante*, is slow, gentle and tender. The finale, *Allegro*, is fast and written in complicated rhythms."

The first rather short movement, *Andante assai*, begins darkly but calmly, and is organized rhythmically with a pitting of three against four, but without actual regular alternation between them. This movement Prokofiev called a "haunted prelude"; he concluded it with muted scales that he told Oistrakh should be sound "like the wind in a graveyard."

The contrasting second movement, *Allegro brusco*, sounds brusque because of its quick tempo. The critic Arthur Cohn has said of the play between instruments and textures in this movement: “The hard-soft effect shows Prokofiev’s wonderful command of musical architecture, with the 20th-century manner displayed by the tight, thin, and steely quality of the whole.”

The third movement, *Andante*, contrasts sharply with what has gone before: the violin is muted, and its effect is almost like that of a lullaby. The dynamics match the quiet character of the themes.

The Finale, *Allegro*, again relies on complicated rhythmic shifts for important effects and sounds much like a folk dance. Prokofiev uses the violin’s potential as a source to allow him to give the music a snarling and sputtering character. This movement contrasts strongly with the feeling of the movement before and yet complements the mood and tonality of the first movement. Oistrakh commented that Prokofiev directed that the rushing scale passages, marked “freddo” (cold) in this movement should have the same “wind in the graveyard” effect as in the first movement. Oistrakh mused, “After remarks of this kind, the whole spirit of the sonata assumed a deeper significance for us.” Daniel Jaffe commented that “Prokofiev’s rushing scales appear serene, as if representing a haven removed from the tormented and sometimes brutal style of the rest of the Sonata,” and hypothesizes that it is likely that this work was intended as a “covert yet loving memorial” to those who had been removed from official Stalinist records. The movement ends calmly after its look back at the end of the first movement.

Most contemporary critics feel that Prokofiev’s Russian biographer Izrail V. Nestyev articulated ideas about this movement that have no validity at all. Nestyev said, “The epic images which had filled his imagination while composing the film score [then] sought an outlet in the realm of instrumental music.” In no way did Prokofiev ever corroborate his biographer’s grandiose analysis, and it is highly unlikely that Prokofiev aimed to have any subjective, programmatic agenda for this work.

“Nigun” from *Baal Shem*
Ernest Bloch (1880-1959)

Before 1916, Ernest Bloch, Swiss by birth, had a symphony performed in Munich and an opera performed in Paris, but after 1916, he found it increasingly difficult to succeed as a composer and conductor in Europe. He emigrated to America where he spent the rest of his life. Bloch was an important figure in the musical community of the United States; he became a widely performed composer, a music educator, and an influential teacher of younger composers. During his last years in Europe, he had written a cycle of large works that were inspired by Jewish history and tradition. The most striking of these works is *Schelomo*, a Hebrew Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra. In his later years he wrote several more works of this kind, including the colorful Hebraic Suite. “Nigun” is a part of Bloch’s *Baal Shem, Three Pictures from Hassidic Life*, which he composed in 1923, the year in which he became an American citizen. Although less known than his *Schelomo*, it is one of the most expressive of Bloch’s works.

In the triptych *Baal Shem*, Bloch’s personal voice is powerfully established as being distinctively Jewish in utterance. The critic Erik Levi suggests that Bloch’s Jewishness grew from an “inner impulse, not through a conscious absorption of Hebraic folk elements.” The way Bloch himself explained it, it is clear that his music has no superimposed layer of ethnicity to it: “It is neither my purpose nor desire to attempt a reconstruction of Jewish music, nor to base my work on more or less authentic melodies. . . I am not an archaeologist; for me the most important thing is to write good and sincere music.” Writing specifically about *Baal Shem*, Bloch addressed this issue again: “What interests me, is the Jewish soul, the enigmatic, ardent, turbulent soul that I feel vibrating throughout the Bible. . . it is all this that I endeavour to hear in myself and to transcribe into my music; the venerable emotion of the race that slumbers way down in our souls.”

“Nigun” (“Improvisation”), *Adagio non troppo*, is the central movement of the three-movement *Baal Shem*. The other movements are: I. “Vidui” (“Contrition”) and III. “Simchas Torah” (“Rejoicing.”) Levi writes that “Nigun” is the most extroverted composition. “Here, Bloch attempts to recreate the feeling of ecstatic religious chanting through a highly charged and ornate melodic line that rises to a fever pitch of spiritual intensity before dying away to a gentle close. Before this comes “Vidui” in which the fervour of a sinner returning to God is evoked by cantilena writing of considerable nobility. The final section of *Baal Shem*, “Simchas Torah,” inspired by the moment when Moses handed down the torch to the children of Israel, is a lively, optimistic and exhilarating piece.” Bloch originally wrote the work for violin and piano; however, he also composed an orchestral accompaniment in 1939. Now, cellists, too, occasionally perform *Baal Shem*.

Sonata in A Major for violin and piano

César Franck (1822-1890)

César Franck was a child prodigy pianist whose father wished him to make a career as a traveling virtuoso. The elder Franck hoped his son would emulate the career of the young Mozart and that Franck senior could arrange it for him as Mozart's father so successfully had done for his son. Although the young prodigy did give many concerts in Belgium, the dream of the elder Franck was never fulfilled. By 1835, Franck had exhausted the musical possibilities of his teachers in Liège and went to Paris to find better ones. In 1836, he entered the Paris Conservatory, where he won numerous prizes in piano, organ, and composition for his fugues.

When he was professor of organ at the Conservatory, Franck's organ classes, rather than the regular composition classes, attracted the most talented students. Franck lived a quiet, modest life devoted to the organ and to his students. Becoming for a new generation of French composers a most significant mentor, he emphasized organ music based on the counterpoint of Bach and led young French musicians toward the ideal of absolute music.

It was not until late in life that Franck discovered his talent for composition; his composing did not begin in earnest until he was about fifty years old. He wrote his only symphony when he was sixty-six; he completed his String Quartet in the year before he died, when he was sixty-seven. The distinguishing characteristics of Franck's music are clarity of contrapuntal structure and fullness of harmony as well as a fine balance between diatonic and chromatic writing in his melodic themes.

He composed this sonata in 1886, when he was sixty-three, for the renowned Belgian violinist Eugène Ÿsaye (1858-1931), who played the first public performance on December 16, 1886, in Brussels and introduced it to Paris in May 1887. The composer Vincent d'Indy, who was Franck's pupil and biographer, reported that the premiere took place at the end of an afternoon concert in a room of the Brussels Museum of Modern Painting where artificial illumination was forbidden. When the first movement was over, the room had become so dark that the performers could no longer read their music, yet the audience refused to leave. Ÿsaye rapped his violin bow against the music stand for attention, shouted out, "Let's go!" and he and pianist Léontine-Marie Bordes-Pène continued on, playing from memory the remaining three movements of this new and difficult work, in the complete darkness. D'Indy wrote that their performance was one of fire and passion, an unforgettable miracle, in which music, free of any externals, wondrous and alone, controlled the night. Ÿsaye went on to become a well-known conductor and composer as well as violinist, and his performance of this sonata on his tours of Europe and America established its permanent place in the concert repertoire.

The sonata is still one of Franck's most frequently performed works. It displays the principal characteristics of his late style: the instability that comes from constantly shifting harmonies; the stabilizing counter-force of many closely interrelated melodic themes and cell-like fragments of melody that recur throughout the work, unifying the movements and giving the whole coherence. In the sonata these qualities appear in conjunction with basic forms that add structural strength to the warmth of melody. It is an example of Franck's use of cyclic form, in which themes from one movement are used, sometimes in transformations, throughout a work.

The first movement, *Allegretto ben moderato*, is close to the classical first-movement sonata form, but an abridged version of it, as it serves as a kind of prelude to the rest. Franck's innovation here is that the opening movement has a slower tempo than is frequently used for first movements, and the initial theme becomes the unifying force for the whole sonata in a cyclical fashion. The first theme also declares the mood with the color of Franck's musical aesthetics. The piano replies with the second theme, a subtle outgrowth of the first. The rest of the movement grows from these two.

The second movement, *Allegro*, a more fully developed sonata form structure, (which some critics attest is really the first movement, because they see the first movement as it stands as an introduction) begins with a fiery torrent of chromatics flowing upwards, building tension, and releasing it as the theme descends downwards again. Development and recapitulation as well as a coda follow in the usual sonata form.

The expressive third movement, *Recitativo – Fantasia*, is in two parts, beginning with a quiet recitative introducing a free fantasy in which musical ideas previously used reappear. Themes that will be taken up later are also present. Although the sonata ends with a movement in a quick tempo, Franck does not adhere to the general custom then of framing the sonata with the quickest movements and putting the slower ones within. The last movement, *Allegretto poco mosso*, is a rondo whose recurring principal subject is presented in a canonic imitation that the music historian, Arthur Cohn, called "one of the most beautiful canons in all of music." In the magnificent and resplendent canon, the violin strictly imitates the piano in passages calling for astounding technical skill. This powerful movement comes to a monumental end.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Joshua Bell violin

With a career spanning almost four decades, Grammy® Award-winning violinist Joshua Bell is one of the most celebrated violinists of his era. Having performed with virtually every major orchestra in the world, Bell continues to maintain engagements as a soloist, recitalist, chamber musician, conductor, and music director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

Bell's highlights in the 2022/23 season include leading the Academy of St Martin in the Fields on tour in South America to Sao Paulo, Bogotá, and Montevideo as well in Europe, to Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. Joshua appears in guest performances with the Berlin Philharmonic, Orchestre National de France, Sofia Philharmonic, and Franz Schubert Filharmonia, as well as a European tour with pianist Peter Dugan. This season in the U.S., Bell performs alongside the New York Philharmonic, as well as the San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Houston, Baltimore, and New Jersey symphony orchestras.

Born in Bloomington, Indiana, Bell began violin at age four, and at age twelve, began studies with Josef Gingold. At 14, Bell debuted with Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and debuted at Carnegie Hall at age 17 with the St. Louis Symphony. At age 18, Bell signed with his first label, London Decca, and received the Avery Fisher Career Grant. In the years following, Bell has been named 2010 "Instrumentalist of the Year" by *Musical America*, a 2007 "Young Global Leader" by the World Economic Forum, nominated for six Grammy® awards, and received the 2007 Avery Fisher Prize. He has also received the 2003 Indiana Governor's Arts Award and a Distinguished Alumni Service Award in 1991 from the Jacobs School of Music. In 2000, he was named an "Indiana Living Legend."

Bell has performed for three American presidents and the sitting justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. He participated in Barack Obama's Committee on the Arts and Humanities' first cultural mission to Cuba, joining Cuban and American musicians on a 2017 *Live from Lincoln Center* Emmy-nominated PBS special, *Joshua Bell: Seasons of Cuba*, celebrating renewed cultural diplomacy between Cuba and the United States.

From the Celebrity Series of Boston archives...



Joshua Bell made his Celebrity Series debut in April 1991 and marks his twelfth engagement today, appearing most recently as music director and soloist with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in February 2020. Pianist Daniil Trifonov marks his fourth Celebrity Series engagement today, starting with his Celebrity Series debut in October 2012, and appearing most recently in March 2018 in joint recital with his teacher, Sergei Babayan. Bell and Trifonov appear together in recital for the first time on the Celebrity Series.

Daniil Trifonov piano

Grammy Award-winning pianist Daniil Trifonov (dan-EEL TREE-fon-ov)—*Musical America's* 2019 Artist of the Year—is a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer, whose performances—combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth—are a perpetual source of wonder to audiences and critics alike. With *Transcendental*, the Liszt collection that marked his third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, he won the Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Solo Album of 2018.

In fall 2022, Trifonov headlined the season-opening galas of Washington's National Symphony Orchestra and, with the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York's Carnegie Hall. Over the course of the current season, he returns to that venue, first as the last stop of an extensive North American recital tour, then for the first of three high-profile collaborations with Joshua Bell, and finally with the National Symphony Orchestra. Other 2022/23 highlights include concerts with the New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony; season-long residencies with the Rotterdam Philharmonic and Radio France; tours with the Orchestre National de France and London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; a chamber collaboration with Stefan Jackiw and Alisa Weilerstein at New York's 92nd Street Y; and the release of DG's deluxe new CD & Blu-Ray edition of the best-selling, Grammy-nominated double album *Bach: The Art of Life*.

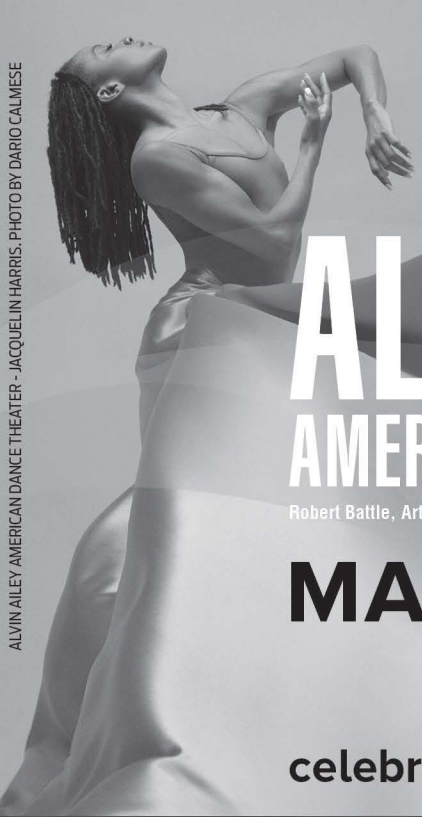
Trifonov's Deutsche Grammophon discography also includes the Grammy-nominated live recording of his Carnegie recital debut; *Chopin Evocations; Silver Age*, for which he received Opus Klassik's Instrumentalist of the Year/Piano award; and three volumes of Rachmaninoff works with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, of which two received Grammy nominations and the third won *BBC Music's* 2019 Concerto Recording of the Year. In 2016 Trifonov was named *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year and in 2021 he was made a "Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French government.

During the 2010/11 season, Trifonov won medals at three of the music world's most prestigious competitions: Third Prize in Warsaw's Chopin Competition, First Prize in Tel Aviv's Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition. He studied with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

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