THE PRESIDENT'S OWN

Colonel Michael J. Colburn, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, May 18, 2014 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
James Ross, guest conducting

My End Is My Beginning

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

Symphony No. 34 in C, K. 338

Allegro vivace
Andante
Allegro vivace

Samuel Barber (1910–81)
text by James Agee

Knoxville: Summer of 1915, Opus 24 (1947)

Bridgette Gan, soprano

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
arranged by James Ross

String Quartet No. 16 in F, Opus 135

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Grave, ma non troppo tratto

The United States Marine Band will perform Sunday, May 25 at 8:00 P.M. at the Filene Center at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. The program will include works by Gershwin, Tchaikovsky, and Sousa and will be followed by a fireworks display.

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PLEASE NOTE: The use of recording devices and flash photography is prohibited during the concert.

PROGRAM NOTES

My End Is My Beginning

How different might life look from the point of view of a German composer at the end of his life, an Austrian composer in the middle of his, and an American child beginning his? What do Beethoven's final compositional thoughts have to do with the thoughts of a boy lying on the grass in Knoxville, Tennessee? Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915, *based on a text by James Agee, says at its climax: "By some chance, here (we) are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away those receive me, who quietly treat me as one familiar and beloved . . . but will not ever tell me who I am." Beethoven's last string quartet includes a scherzo of raucously playful humor followed by some of the most simple and sublime notes ever conceived that asks and answers a question with its notes: "Must it be so?" and the reply is that "It must be so!"*

What do beauty and joy and caring mean in a world that we must one day leave behind? Do we go out smiling? Perhaps each in their way, Mozart, Beethoven, and Barber are addressing the same eternal question.

-James Ross

Symphony No. 34 in C, K. 338

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91)

The year 1780 marked a significant turning point in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's career. As the concertmaster of the Salzburg Court Orchestra, he was responsible for leading the orchestra, composing, playing keyboard for all necessities, and regularly serving as soloist. Mozart was only twenty-four at the time, but had spent nearly ten years as a professional in his hometown and was desperate to escape. His recent travels had confirmed to him that his career was stagnating in Salzburg. The provincial culture and lack of opportunity were mismatched to his considerable ambition and ego, and he longed for a chance to write operas and sophisticated symphonies for the more cosmopolitan audiences in places such as Vienna and Paris. To make matters worse, he was in the employ of the Archbishop Colloredo, a heavy-handed and pompous man who showed little appreciation for Mozart's talent and no sympathy for his desire to explore employment outside of the Court. Despite the resistance from the Archbishop, Mozart began to make some headway outside of Salzburg and was commissioned to write his opera *Idomeneo* for the Court Theater in Munich. This was a major step forward for the young composer, but just as he began to commit his creative powers to this new and exciting project, he was tasked to write yet *another* symphony for the Salzburg Court.

The style and form of the symphonies demanded by the Archbishop and his audiences in Salzburg were falling out of vogue throughout the rest of Europe. Only Mozart could have worked within the constraints of these expectations for tired old forms and abundant musical clichés and created something fresh and charming in spite of them. Symphony No. 34 is in the characteristically festive key of C major and begins with the kind of cheerful opening fanfare that Austrians would have expected in such a symphony. While the Italian overture-inspired themes of the first movement are in and of themselves conventional, Mozart brilliantly develops the material in ways that bring a level of sophistication well beyond the basic musical elements. Fascinating variations in tonality and phrase structure are woven into the fabric at every turn, taking the listener on a journey that is at once familiar and delightfully surprising.

The lovely second movement is scored for strings alone with a bassoon doubling the cello and bass parts. The tempo is labeled "Andante di molto" with the added instruction for the leading first violins "più tosto allegretto," or "Allegretto, rather." Perhaps Mozart felt as though his Andantes were too often played on the slow side and required a more prescriptive approach.

By this time, the Classical symphony was experiencing somewhat of a renovation, including the insertion of an additional movement into the common template of the three-movement form. The inclusion of a minuet was quickly becoming the new expectation outside of Salzburg, and it appears as though Mozart attempted to include one in this symphony. A fragment of a minuet survives on the reverse of the manuscript page of the first movement, but the rest had been torn out of the score for unknown reasons. Most of Mozart's mature symphonies include a minuet (save for

Symphony No. 38, *Prague*), but some purists still resisted their inclusion, and it is possible that the conservative sensibilities of the first audiences for the Salzburg symphony played a part in the lost minuet's fate.

In lieu of a courtly dance, Mozart turns to a rollicking Italian folk dance for the finale, which plays like a comic scene from an opera. Composed in the tempo of an energetic tarantella, its playful themes spill forth with breathless anticipation and good cheer.

Symphony No. 34 became Mozart's musical farewell to his hometown. On the heels of its première, an inevitable falling out with the Archbishop led to his move to Munich and then Vienna. His hard-won escape from Salzburg served as an official departure from his youth and with it, the lingering influence of his father. Many remarkable new compositions would come in the ensuing years in Vienna, a decade that would unfortunately turn out to be Mozart's last.

Knoxville: Summer of 1915, **Opus 24 (1947)**

Samuel Barber (1910–81)
text by James Agee

Samuel Barber wrote his *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* on commission from the American soprano Eleanor Steber. The text was written by James Agee, who John Huston once described as "a poet, novelist, and the best motion-picture critic this country has ever had." Agee's autobiographical fragment first appeared in *The Partisan Review*, and was later incorporated into his book, *A Death in the Family*. It is a tender, nostalgic, poignant text which very simply evokes a quiet family evening in the small, peaceful town that Knoxville was in 1915, and a child who marvels at what he sees and wonders who he is. Barber dedicated *Knoxville* to his father, and the intensity of Barber's identification with Agee's reverie coincided with the impending deaths of both his father and his aunt, the noted soprano Louise Homer. The work is a mature expression of Barber's artistry in setting texts, bringing into focus his strongest creative powers as a musical poet and master of orchestral color. Agee's text, which Barber understood as poetry, was translated musically into a quasi-pastoral setting that is pictorially, as well as emotionally, expressive. Barber's musical style, like a lyric recitative with a freely varied metrical beat, mimics the swinging rhythms that haunt the songs of childhood.

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child.

It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt: a loud auto: a quiet auto: people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber. A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints foregone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose.
Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes…
Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces.
The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there . . .. They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine . . . with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my

people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

-James Agee

Bridgette Gan, soprano

Lyric soprano Bridgette Gan, who has been praised as "outstanding" (*Baltimore Examiner*) and hailed by *The Washington Post* as "capable of gorgeous singing," is quickly establishing herself as an exciting and upcoming soprano in some of the country's most renowned opera programs, stages, and competitions. Ms. Gan began the 2013-2014 season as a resident artist with Palm Beach Opera (PBO), where she sang Apparition No. 2 in *Macbeth* and Stella/Olympia (cover) in Jay Lesenger's production of *Les contes d'Hoffmann*. Gan was further featured as Morgana in PBO's "Opera in One Hour" production of *Alcina*. This summer, she will join the prestigious Santa Fe Opera apprentice program where she will cover Madame Herz in *The Impresario* and The Cook in *Le Rossignol*. Next season, Gan will return to PBO to sing Marie in *Le fille du Regiment* and will cover Musetta in *La Bohème*.

In the summer of 2013, Gan was a member of the Ash Lawn Opera Festival, where she sang and covered Musetta in *La Bohème* and Julie in *Carousel*. That season she also sang Contessa Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the Pacific Opera Project, where she was noted as "a gorgeous soprano who drove the show and excited the audience" (*Splash Magazines*, Los Angeles). She completed her first season as an apprentice artist with the esteemed Opera Theatre Saint Louis in the summer of 2012 where she covered Frasquita in *Carmen*, performed in the featured ensemble of *Sweeney Todd* and was the Old Lady in the American première of *Alice in Wonderland*. Gan made her debut with Central City Opera in the summer of 2010 as their youngest apprentice artist, performing the roles of Venus and Eurydice in *Orpheus in the Underworld*, as well as Madeline/Isabel in *The Face on the Barroom Floor*. In 2011, Bridgette returned to Central City Opera where she performed Frasquita in *Carmen*, Celie in *Signor Deluso*, and covered Therese in *Les Mamelles di Tiresias* and Lauretta in *Gianni Schicchi*.

Gan completed her masters degree in opera performance from the Maryland Opera Studio. She portrayed Konstanze in their spring 2011 production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* , where *The Washington Post* called her "a gorgeous Konstanze . . . has the kind of lovely and flexible voice that can navigate intricate coloratura one minute and deliver a subtle put-down the next." In the studio's fall 2010 production of *Florencia en el Amazonas*, she sang the title character of Florencia, also to great acclaim, noted for her "gorgeous lyric singing" (*The Washington Post*).

Gan has distinguished herself in numerous prestigious vocal competitions throughout the country. Most recently she was a prize winner in the 2013 Violetta DuPont Vocal Competition and the 2013 Giulio Gari International Vocal Competition. She has won prizes from the Gerda Lissner Foundation (2nd place, 2011), Central City Opera (Young Artist Award, 2010), the Licia Albanese-Pucinni Competion (Grant Award, 2010), Opera Index Vocal Competition (Career Award, 2009), the Philadelphia Orchestra Albert M. Greenfield Competition (2009 Grand Winner and debut with the Orchestra in 2010), the National Opera Association Voice Competition (1st place, 2009), and the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts(2007), among others.

String Quartet No. 16 in F, Opus 135

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
arranged by James Ross

Ludwig van Beethoven's final six string quartets form one of the most remarkable collections of music in the entire repertoire. The quartets were composed in a different order than numbered; the first three completed, Opus 127, 130, and 132, were written in 1825 on a commission from Prince Nicholas Galitzin, and the following year Beethoven added Opus 133 (The Grosse Fuge), 131, and 135. They represent a stunning collection of music not only because of the substantial and revolutionary ideas contained within each, but also for the astounding diversity of Beethoven's compositional voice through several works that were composed in such close proximity to one another. Given the progressive nature of the quartets and the sheer scale of many of them, most audiences had no idea what to make of the

music. They were largely dismissed during the composer's brief remaining lifetime, but today they collectively stand as one of the greatest musical achievements of the nineteenth century.

By the autumn of 1826, Beethoven's life was in disarray. His health was rapidly declining, his finances were in shambles, and he had all but driven away many of his friends and colleagues. His only consistent companionship was his twenty-year-old nephew Karl, who had come to live with Beethoven as his adopted son. The bitter court battle with Karl's mother and incessant badgering from his cantankerous uncle took its toll on the fragile young man, however, and in 1826 he attempted suicide.

Beethoven was devastated by Karl's attempt to take his life and endeavored to nurse the boy back to health. They traveled to the country home of Beethoven's brother some thirty miles outside of Vienna. He took with him sketches for a new string quartet and set about finishing the work while Karl recovered. Composing at dawn and again in the evenings, Beethoven would walk the fields for hours during the day. By October, he had completed his Quartet No. 16 in F, Opus 135, along with a replacement final movement for his earlier Quartet No. 13 B-flat, Opus 130. These works would turn out to be his last. He returned to Vienna with Karl in December and by the following March, Beethoven was dead.

Given the dire circumstances and Beethoven's state of mind surrounding its composition, one might expect his final quartet to be infused with conflict and melancholy, but surprisingly, its notes reveal the opposite. Unlike its immediate predecessor, the complex and brooding Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Opus 131, the Quartet in F is decidedly optimistic in tone and was composed within a much more traditional form and duration compared to its companions. It is no less inventive than his best work, however, as Beethoven takes the more conventional aspects of an early Romantic string quartet and infuses them with his own inimitable signature.

The opening movement is marked Allegretto rather than the more commonly seen Allegro and moves through fragments of melodies that have a conversational feel. The underlying conflict inherent in much of Beethoven's music is conspicuously absent here, but action abounds in the Scherzo that follows, with humor-filled, syncopated gestures that border on sheer wildness at times. The third movement is marked Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo, and is cast in the variation form so often employed by the composer. As is referenced by the elaborate tempo marking, the theme stems from a song whose working title in Beethoven's sketches was given as "Süsser Ruhegesang oder Friedengesang" ("Sweet Song of Rest or Peacefulness"). Beethoven sends the melody through four carefully decorated variations. The final movement contains one of the most oft-cited peculiarities in classical music. At the outset of the movement, Beethoven writes an enigmatic riddle in the score: "Der Schwer gefasste Entschluss" ("The Difficult Resolution or Decision"). Over two subsequent three-note motives, he pens a question and an answer. The low strings solemnly intone the question: "Muss es sein?" (Must it be?). The violins quickly answer twice: "Es muss sein! Es muss sein!" (It must be! It must be!). What follows is a clever musical dialogue pondering the vague question before a final triumphant declaration that "it" indeed must be so. Beethoven took the genesis of the question to his grave. Given that the Quartet in F came at the very end of his life, scholars have pontificated about its true meaning, with theories running the gamut from transcendental to trivial. Was Beethoven contemplating the inevitability of death or the inevitability of paying a disputed laundry bill?

James Ross, guest conductor

James Ross is the director of orchestral activities at the University of Maryland, associate director of the conducting program at The Juilliard School, and orchestra director of the newly-formed National Youth Orchestra USA at Carnegie Hall.

His musical activities cover three fields: conducting, French horn playing, and teaching. Ross grew up studying horn in Boston and earned his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1981. Upon graduation, he began his conducting studies in earnest with Kurt Masur in Leipzig while simultaneously serving as solo-horn of the prestigious Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, becoming the first American member in the orchestra's 250 year history.

After two summers of study at the Tanglewood Music Center (1984-85) Ross served as interim assistant conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In June 1994 he completed a four-year tenure as music director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra. He has also served a three-year term collaborating with William Christie as the assistant conductor of the Paris-based period instrument ensemble Les Arts Florissants. He has guest conducted such diverse orchestras as the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Utah Symphony, the Orquesta Ciudad Granada, the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, the Orquesta Sinfonica of Galicia, the Neubrandenburger Philharmonie, the Binghamton Philharmonic, and the National Symphony Orchestra in side-by-side concerts with University of Maryland Symphony Orchestra.

He has worked both joyously and often with youth orchestras, among which are included the Mendelssohn Conservatory Orchestra of Leipzig, the Curtis Institute Orchestra of Philadelphia, the Orchestra of the Conservatorio

Superior of Salamanca, the McGill Symphony Orchestra in Montreal, the National Youth Orchestra of Spain, the Kansas All-State Orchestra, and the Youth Orchestra of Acarigua-Araure in Venezuela, part of the famed "El Sistema." His principal conducting teachers are Kurt Masur, Otto-Werner Mueller, Seiji Ozawa, and Leonard Bernstein.

As a horn soloist, he has performed with such orchestras as the Boston Symphony, the Boston Pops, the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, the Leipzig Radio Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhaus. When he was awarded Third Prize in the Munich International Horn Competition in 1978, he became the first American and one of the youngest competitors ever to do so. His performances and recordings as principal horn of the Gewandhaus, including Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Jessye Norman, helped him gain international recognition as an artist.

In the field of opera, he has conducted productions of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* at the Theatre du Rhin in Strasburg, *Le Nozze di Figaro* in the Theatre Champs-Elysees in Paris, and George Frideric Handel's *Rodelinda* at the Glyndebourne Festival. He has prepared concert presentations of Klas Torstensson's *The Expedition* and Igor Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* with the Stockholm Philharmonic.

As a teacher, prior to his appointment at the University of Maryland, Ross served on the faculties of Yale University, the Curtis Institute of Music, Haverford and Bryn Mawr colleges, and as a guest artist at the Toho School of Music in Tokyo, Japan. He was a founding director of the Music Masters Course in Kazusa, an international chamber music festival dedicated to the concept of artistic cross-cultural exchange which takes place annually in Chiba, Japan. In his work as artistic advisor to the Escuela de Practica Orquestal of the Orquesta Sinfonica of Galicia and conductor at the International Festival of Lucena, he played a vital role in the education of the present generation of active Spanish musicians. Ross has recently retired from his position as artistic director of the National Orchestral Institute where his leadership since 2001 has helped to foment change in the orchestral landscape of the United States.