



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, February 13, 2022 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Major Ryan J. Nowlin, conducting

Unlikely Pairings

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor, Opus 102

Allegro
Andante
Vivace non troppo

GySgt Sheng-Tsung Wang, violin soloist
SSgt Charlaire Prescott, cello soloist

INTERMISSION

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Symphony No. 60 in C, *Il distratto*

Adagio
Andante
Menuetto
Presto
Adagio di lamentation
Finale: Prestissimo

Anna Clyne (b. 1980)

Sound and Fury (2019)

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PROGRAM NOTES

Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor, Opus 102

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg to a musical family often beset by financial difficulties. He began his musical studies at age seven and developed a love of learning from a young age. A virtuoso pianist and conductor, Brahms counted among his contemporaries such influential figures as Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Richard Wagner.

Although Brahms inhabited what is now labeled as the Romantic period, he was very much a disciple of Classical tradition, with its “abstract” musical genres, such as sonatas and symphonies, and its emphasis on form. On the other side of this very public divide were a group of progressive composers led by Wagner and Liszt who, as the true “Romantics,” devised new genres, often merging extramusical ideas from literature and the visual arts into their compositions. Yet, even within the confines of Classical form, Brahms’ highly original method of developing musical material was nothing short of radical for the time.

The Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor, first performed in Cologne in 1887, was the last orchestral work Brahms wrote. The piece and its surrounding collaboration arose from personal complications in the composer’s life. Brahms had become estranged from his lifelong friend and collaborator, violinist Joseph Joachim, following Joachim’s bitter divorce. When cellist Robert Hausmann—another close colleague and member of Joachim’s quartet — asked Brahms to write a cello concerto, the composer decided instead to write a concerto for cello *and* violin, presenting the piece to Joachim as an offering of reconciliation. The gesture was successful, and Joachim and Hausmann presented the work’s première.

Critical reception of the “double concerto” was mixed. Reviewers complained that the work was too austere and not showy enough for the soloists. Perhaps ears of the time were unaccustomed to hearing a concerto that showcased the power of the orchestra along with the soloists. Though the solo lines are often embedded into the orchestral fabric, Brahms’ handling of the two solo parts is wonderfully varied. Sometimes the soloists are equals, other times a primary instrument speaks while the other comments, and at times they play in tandem, almost creating the sound of a single stringed instrument with an enormous range.

The concerto’s first movement opens with a weighty three-note motive that generates much of the musical material that follows. Its heroic, stalwart character gives way to a dreamy, sighing second theme, first stated by the solo cello. The second movement, linked subtly to the first by the similar melodic intervals in its opening, is sonorous and warm. The soloists present the main theme’s long, singing line together in octaves. Later in the movement, the musical texture transforms, with the soloists rhapsodizing on top of the orchestra’s hymn-like backdrop. The third and final movement is a spirited rondo. Although the main theme gives a nod to gypsy folk styles, the movement never loses its Brahmsian gravitas. It concludes triumphantly in the key of A major.

Gunnery Sergeant Sheng-Tsung Wang, violin soloist

Gunnery Sergeant Sheng-Tsung Wang joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Chamber Orchestra in June 2007. He was appointed associate concertmaster and principal second violin in April 2019. Gunnery Sgt. Wang began his musical instruction at age eight after immigrating to the United States from Taiwan. Upon graduating in 1993 from Centennial High School in Ellicott City, Maryland, he earned bachelor’s (1997) and master’s (1999) degrees in violin performance from the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where he studied with Victor Danchenko. He earned his doctor of musical arts degree in 2007 at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he studied with Gerald Fischbach. His notable instructors include Eugene Drucker of the Emerson String Quartet, Elaine Mishkind, and the late Mark Ulrich. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” Gunnery Sgt. Wang founded the Gemini Piano Trio and has been heard as part of the Arts Club of Washington concert series and on National Public Radio. He has performed at the following festivals: the Quartet Program at the State University of New York in Fredonia; Yellow Barn Music Festival in Putney, Vermont; La Jolla SummerFest in California; and Taos School of Music in New Mexico. In addition, he has taught at the Peabody Preparatory in Baltimore; Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland; and the Levine School of Music in Washington, D.C.

Staff Sergeant Charlaine Prescott, cello soloist

Staff Sergeant Charlaine Prescott joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Chamber Orchestra in December 2013 and was appointed principal cellist in April 2018. Staff Sgt. Prescott began her musical training on piano at age six and cello at age ten. After graduating in 2005 from West Potomac High School in Alexandria, she attended Northwestern University (NU) in Evanston, Illinois, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in cello performance in 2009. In 2011 she completed a master’s degree in classical cello from the Manhattan School of Music (MSM) in New York. She studied with Alan Stepansky at MSM, Hans Jørgen Jensen of NU, and Rachel Young of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” Staff Sgt. Prescott was a Tanglewood Fellowship recipient in 2010 from the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts, and received the Karl Zeise Memorial Cello Award for the 2010 Tanglewood season. She was the S & R Foundation’s 2011 Washington Award and Grand Prize winner. She also was principal cello with the Chamber Orchestra of San Antonio and taught privately.

Symphony No. 60 in C, *Il distratto*

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Joseph Haydn spent nearly thirty years of his career as a composer at Esterházy, the court of one of the wealthiest and most important noble families in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A humming artistic environment inside the court brought forth a weekly schedule of ballet, theater, chamber music, and orchestral performances. Haydn was responsible for composing music for the festivities. While prolificacy was part of the job description—the composer wrote more than one hundred symphonies—Haydn relished the relative security of his position, using it as an

opportunity to experiment: “I could, as head of an orchestra, make experiments, observe what enhanced an effect, and what weakened it, thus improving, adding to, cutting away, and running risks. I was set apart from the world, there was nobody in my vicinity to confuse and annoy me in my course, and so I had to be original.”

Haydn’s Symphony No. 60 was not originally conceived as a symphony. The musical material originated as an overture and incidental music for a French theatrical comedy by Jean-François Regnard, performed in German translation at the Esterházy court. The play, *Le Distrait* (*The Absent-minded Man*)—or *Il distratto*, the Italian title that later became the symphony’s nickname—frames a main character, Leandre, whose farcical absent-mindedness lands him in all kinds of trouble. When he wakes up in the morning, he dresses his servant instead of himself. After leaving a party, he climbs into the wrong coach, enters another house, and goes to sleep in the wrong bed. In the final act, he nearly forgets to attend his own wedding. The play’s pervasive humor was not at all lost on Haydn, who incorporated the plot’s absurdities and Leandre’s temperament into the music.

The symphony’s first movement, which probably served as the overture to the play, is grand in character and conveys a kind of musical “forgetfulness” in the violin line, which periodically gets lost in thought (mirroring the play’s hero), only to be interrupted by an intruding chord. The second movement is multifaceted in its moods, and the third movement is a minuet with a stormy, folk-like middle section, while the fourth movement is vivacious and rollicking, much like a finale. However, rather than stop with four movements as a traditional symphony would, Haydn included a wistful, lamenting fifth movement and a showdown of a sixth movement, where he instructs the violins to tune their lowest string in the middle of the action—because, as he’d like the audience to believe, they forgot to do so. With Haydn’s humor at its finest on display, the incidental music to *Le Distrait* was received enthusiastically by its first audiences, and its subsequent reincarnation as the Symphony No. 60 proved that the so-called “Father of the Symphony” didn’t make convention the rule.

***Sound and Fury* (2019)**

Anna Clyne (b. 1980)

Born in London, Anna Clyne has been described in a *New York Times* profile as a “composer of uncommon gifts and unusual methods.” Clyne is a 2015 Grammy nominee and has received commissions from such leading ensembles and institutions as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Cabrillo Festival in Santa Cruz, and Carnegie Hall. Her works have been championed by some of the world’s finest conductors and performers, Marin Alsop, Ricardo Muti, Leonard Slatkin, Jennifer Koh, and Yo-Yo Ma among them. Clyne served as the composer-in-residence of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 2010 to 2015, and held subsequent residencies with the Baltimore and Berkeley Symphony Orchestras. She is currently serving a three-year residency as associate composer with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, a collaboration that has produced a series of new works, including *Sound and Fury*.

Clyne drew on two works of art as inspiration for *Sound and Fury*: Joseph Haydn’s Symphony No. 60, *Il distratto* and William Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth*. Clyne described her initial creative process as follows: “To begin, I listened to *Il distratto* many times and on a single sheet of paper, I wrote down the key elements that caught my ear, which ranged from rhythmic

gestures to melodic ideas, harmonic progressions, and even a musical joke.... I chose between one and four elements from each of the six movements and developed them through my own lens— layering, stretching, fragmenting and looping. Whilst experienced as one complete movement, *Sound and Fury* is also structured in six sub-sections that follow the same trajectory of *Il distratto*.”

Sound and Fury is also a narrative on the human condition, its emotional weight derived from the bleak final soliloquy in *Macbeth*. Clyne transmits Shakespeare’s rhythmic use of language into her own mode of rhythmic layering, sometimes using fragments from Haydn’s sound world. She stated: “My intention with *Sound and Fury* is to take the listener on a journey that is both invigorating—with ferocious string gestures that are flung around the orchestra with skittish outbursts—and serene and reflective—with haunting melodies that emerge and recede.”