ARTISTS

Gabriel Kahane, piano and vocals

Brooklyn Rider
Johnny Gandelsman, violin
Colin Jacobsen, violin
Nicholas Cords, viola
Eric Jacobsen, cello

PROGRAM

Selections from The Brooklyn Rider Almanac

Gabriel Kahane: Bradbury Studies
Songs from The Ambassador
Selections from Come On All You Ghosts

Franz Schubert: String Quartet No. 13 in A Minor, D. 804 (Rosamunde) (1824)

Allegro ma non troppo
Andante
Minuetto: Allegretto – Trio
Allegro moderato

Additional selections will be announced from the stage.
The program will include one intermission.

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms, and unwrap all lozenges prior to the performance. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.
THE BROOKLYN RIDER ALMANAC

Over a century ago, the cross-disciplinary relationship between the German composer Arnold Schoenberg and the Russian-born artist Wassily Kandinsky greatly affected both of their creative psyches. The string quartet played a supporting role in their first encounter, and we look to their symbiotic friendship as a springboard for The Brooklyn Rider Almanac, a commissioning project and the title of our latest album.

Schoenberg’s Second String Quartet, the composer’s first full dip into the opaque waters of atonality, was a musical lightning rod that sharply divided audiences and critics alike. Following the riotous première in Vienna in 1908, the work received its Munich debut some three years later. In the audience for that performance sat Kandinsky. Transformed by Schoenberg’s music, Kandinsky took a further step towards abstraction in his style with his landmark painting Impression III, a visual synthesis of that very concert. A friendship ensued between these visionaries, and Schoenberg soon became associated with a group of artists surrounding Kandinsky known as Der Blaue Reiter (our very namesake). In 1912, this group published Der Blaue Reiter Almanach, a highly eclectic collection of artwork, essays, and music which served as an artistic testament to their era while also offering a vision for the future.

The unquenchable drive for artistic exploration and the open embrace of the collective spirit displayed by Der Blaue Reiter are similarly hallmarks of today’s artistic zeitgeist, and The Brooklyn Rider Almanac attempts to honor the present. Using music as our project’s touchstone, we asked a select group of composers to create short works for us inspired by a creative muse from relatively recent memory. Not only did the composers readily accept the challenge, but the varied sources of inspiration—from David Byrne to Keith Haring to William Faulkner—were consistently a surprise and a delight to us.

Additionally, this project afforded us the opportunity to seek fresh perspectives on string quartet writing. On the surface, these composers come mostly from the other side of the classical fence: the worlds of jazz, rock, and folk. But more significantly, they represent some of our favorite musical thinkers, and we were deeply confident they would have much to offer our medium. Our newly assembled cadre is inclusive of old friends and certain “musical crushes”—those we have long wished to approach but lacked proper courage or circumstance. Recalling the eclecticism of Der Blaue Reiter Almanach, we have embraced the varied results and feel that our boundaries have been expanded in the process.

We are reminded at every turn of this project that music is a deeply immersive art form, something that cannot be understood divorced from its broader cultural context. By magnifying the creative force of inspiration, we hope that you will endeavor (as we do) to hear the music as only the tip of an iceberg.

—Gabriel Kahane

GABRIEL KAHANE (B. 1981)
BRADBURY STUDIES

Across the musical ages, it has just as often been the case that composers look outside of the sphere of music for creative inspiration. Gabriel Kahane’s most recent album, The Ambassador, looks at Los Angeles as the muse for his project. Referencing 10 specific building addresses with a range of characters and scenarios spanning from the 1940s to the present, the album is a loving ode to the City of Angels.

—Nicholas Cords

Bradbury Studies is a loving deconstruction of the song “Bradbury (304 Broadway)” from my 2014 album, The Ambassador. The “Bradbury” of both titles refers to the iconic and sui generis fin-de-siècle building in downtown L.A., which is prominently featured in the 1982 cult classic Blade Runner, a film whose plot, setting, and characters provided great inspiration for the original song. In the string quartet adaptation, shards of motivic material from the song are scattered widely and wildly as the tune struggles to announce itself amidst the chaos. While the sound world is quite varied, drawing on extended string techniques and other contemporary vocabulary, the spirit of the work comes straight from Schubert and Mahler: that is to say, it attempts to continue the tradition, evoked so frequently by those two composers, of a fluid exchange of ideas between instrumental and vocal works.

Likewise, Bradbury Studies derives its materials from an extant song. In the piece, after several false starts and abandoned pathways, the plaintive melody and original song finally burst through the texture in their original form, albeit with the first violin taking the place of the voice, before a coda of new material intrudes to bring the work to its conclusion.

—Gabriel Kahane

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR, D. 804 (ROSAMUNDE) (1824)

Given Franz Schubert’s undeniable stature in the pantheon of musical luminaries, it is a challenging exercise more than 200 years later to imagine him as greatly underappreciated within his own lifetime. Much of his work was unpublished upon his death, much of it spread out in the hands of his small social circle in Vienna. He was known in his day as a composer of mere Hausmusik—part songs, lieder, and various pieces for piano. Almost none of his large-scale works was known by the Viennese public, much less outside of Vienna. Schubert himself was not a virtuoso performer; he wrote no concerti, so his cause was not advanced by the popular virtuosos of the era. Italy was all the rage. The incomparable and devilish violinist Paganini was enormously popular, as was the music of Rossini.

And so it was left mostly to Schubert and his intimate circle of friends to organize evenings of informal performances composed mostly of lieder and part songs with the ink still
drying, referred to as *Schubertiaden*. It took later figures such as Robert Schumann, who was an extremely prescient observer of the musical landscape, to elevate Schubert’s status for a wider audience. Schumann’s description from an 1840 essay on Schubert’s Ninth Symphony for the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik could just as easily apply to tonight’s selection, the *Rosamunde* Quartet: “And this heavenly length, like a fat novel in four volumes by Jean Paul—never-ending, and if only that the reader may go on creating in the same vein afterwards. How refreshing is their sense of inexhaustible wealth where with others one always fears the ending, troubled by the presentiment of ultimate disappointment.”

Schubert’s *Rosamunde* Quartet (1824) marks an important transition in Schubert’s music for string quartet from *Hausmusik*-infused works (composed mainly with his family quartet in mind) to works of grand, dramatic scope (the famed *Death and the Maiden* Quartet appeared in the same year). Reluctantly buoyed by the musicianship of the Ignaz Schuppanzigh Quartet and a desire to increase his public scope, Schubert composed this quartet after an extended struggle with venereal disease. His dark state of mind could be summed up in this excerpt from a letter to a friend: “I feel myself to be the most unfortunate, the most miserable being in the world.”

In this quartet, Schubert often draws from the world of his own songs to help convey a complex field of emotions. The figuration in the second violin at the beginning of the first movement is reminiscent of Schubert’s song *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (*Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel*), calling to mind a similar sentiment expressed in the song: “My peace is gone, my heart is heavy. I’ll find it never, never again,” while the third movement draws from Schubert’s *Die Götter Griechenlands* (*The Greek Gods*), in which Friedrich Schiller’s text asks: “Fair world, where art thou, come again glorious age of nature.” The work gains its unofficial nickname from the *Andante* movement’s theme, taken from the composer’s incidental music to the Helmina von Chézy play *Rosamunde*. While this music conveys a serene pastoral, it is perhaps also a reference to yet another disappointment. By all accounts, the production was a colossal failure! The sense of the ultimate disappointment which grips the *Rosamunde* Quartet is finally broken by the work’s rousing Hungarian-inspired finale, bringing this novel-length song without words to a conclusion.

—*Nicholas Cords*

**GABRIEL KAHAINE**

Hailed by *Rolling Stone* as “one of the year’s very best albums,” Gabriel Kahane’s major-label debut, *The Ambassador*, is a meditation on the underbelly of Los Angeles seen through the lens of 10 street addresses. Last season, Kahane appeared at BAM’s Harvey Theater in the critically acclaimed New York premiere of the stage production of *The Ambassador*, directed by Tony Award–winner John Tiffany. The production was also presented by the Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA, as well as by Carolina Performing Arts at UNC Chapel Hill, where Kahane is involved in a multiyear academic and artistic residency.

The 2015–2016 season finds the pianist, singer-songwriter, and composer involved in a number of touring projects with friends and collaborators old and new. In addition to making solo appearances with the North Carolina and Colorado Symphonies, as well as with Boston-based string orchestra A Far Cry, Kahane will appear on separate tours with the string quartet Brooklyn Rider and with pianist/composer Timo Andres, the latter tour culminating in a duo recital at Carnegie Hall as part of that institution’s 125th anniversary season. In March, Kahane makes his European solo debut in a concert at the recently opened Paris Philharmonie.

Gabriel Kahane has been commissioned by, among others, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Kronos Quartet, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, with whom, as Orpheus’ first composer-in-residence, he toured in the spring of 2013, performing *Gabriel’s Guide to the 48 States*, an hour-long cycle on texts from the WPA American Guide Series.

Kahane’s recent studio credits, aside from his work as a leader, include a track on last year’s *Beck Song Reader*, appearances on Blake Mills’ *Heigh Ho* alongside Fiona Apple and Jon Brion, and several projects with Sufjan Stevens, as well as performances and recordings with Chris Thile of Punch Brothers, for whom he opened on tour throughout the United States in 2015.

An avid theater artist, Kahane wrote the musical *February House*, with book by playwright Seth Bockley, which received its world premiere in productions at the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven and New York’s Public Theater in 2012; an original cast album was released on StorySound Records. Upcoming theater projects include commissions from the Public Theater in New York and Signature Theater in Arlington, Virginia, as well as a collaboration with Pulitzer Prize–winning playwright Annie Baker.

A graduate of Brown University and a two-time MacDowell Colony Fellow, Gabriel Kahane lives in Brooklyn, New York.

**BROOKLYN RIDER**

Hailed as “the future of chamber music” (*Strings*), the game-changing string quartet Brooklyn Rider presents eclectic repertoire and gripping performances that continue...
to draw rave reviews from classical, world, and rock critics alike. NPR credits Brooklyn Rider with “recreating the 300-year-old form of string quartet as a vital and creative 21st-century ensemble”; the Los Angeles Times dubs the group “one of the wonders of contemporary music”; and Vice likens its members to “motocross daredevils who never screw up a stunt.” Equally at home in clubs and concert halls, the quartet has played venues as varied as Carnegie’s Zankel Hall, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, Le Poisson Rouge, Japan’s Todai-ji, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn’s Littlefield, the Library of Congress, the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, and South by Southwest. Through visionary programming and global collaborations, it has a “down-to-earth demeanor...[that] demystifies contemporary classical music and that invites everyone into the tent” (Time Out New York).

Last season the group celebrated its 10th anniversary with the groundbreaking multidisciplinary project The Brooklyn Rider Almanac, for which it recorded and toured 15 specially commissioned works, each inspired by a different artistic muse. In the 2015–16 season, the players continue to perform these works in concert and will pair them with standard classics of the repertoire, including Schubert’s String Quartet No. 13 in A Minor, Rosamunde.

The group will also continue to explore collaborations, including with singer-songwriter Gabriel Kahane, whose new album will be released in February. The recording features Kahane’s The Fiction Issue, a work first performed in 2012 that was commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by Carnegie Hall. The players will tour with Kahane in February 2016, in addition to undertaking their own seven-city tour of Sweden, Denmark, and Germany the following month. Closer to home, the group will be ensemble-in-residence at National Sawdust, a new performance space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, with the residency entailing four performances across the season.

Brooklyn Rider often appears under the umbrella of outside initiatives started by its members. In 2003, violinist Johnny Gandelsman created In A Circle, a series of New York performance events exploring connections between music and the visual arts. He launched In A Circle Records in 2008 with the release of Brooklyn Rider’s eclectic debut recording, Passport, followed by Dominant Curve in 2010 and Seven Steps in 2012; the first two albums made NPR’s year-end roundups, while the third was named an NPR Listener Favorite. In 2013, In A Circle released violist Nicholas Cords’ solo recording Recursions. Colin and Eric Jacobsen are cofounders of the acclaimed New York–based orchestral collective the Knights, and all four quartet members have taken part in Yo-Yo Ma’s Silk Road Ensemble, performing worldwide and recording three albums for Sony Classical. A long-standing relationship between Brooklyn Rider and another Silk Road Project member, Iranian kamancheh player Kayhan Kalhor, resulted in the critically acclaimed 2008 recording Silent City. Other recent recording projects include 2013’s A Walking Fire on Mercury Classics and The Impostor with Béla Fleck on Deutsche Grammophon/Mercury Classics, plus 2011’s much-praised Brooklyn Rider Plays Philip Glass on the composer’s Orange Mountain Music label.

A public radio favorite, Brooklyn Rider has been featured on NPR’s Tiny Desk Concerts, On Point, All Songs Considered, Deceptive Cadence, and All Things Considered; WNYC’s Soundcheck; and American Public Media’s Performance Today; as well as on NY1 television in New York City. The ensemble’s recordings are played across North America on stations ranging in focus from classical to world, jazz, pop, and new music.

“... the future of classical music” — Strings

Last year, alongside its ambitious and well-received The Brooklyn Rider Almanac, the quartet had a residency at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, crowned by the world premiere of Veils and Vespers by Pulitzer Prize winner John Luther Adams. It also performed the New York premiere of Chalk and Soot, a collaboration between quartet violinist Colin Jacobsen and choreographer John Heginbotham, at Lincoln Center’s White Light Festival and toured with banjo legend Béla Fleck. The players also celebrated the 10th-anniversary season of the Stillwater Music Festival, a weeklong Minnesota chamber festival they founded in 2006 as a place to unveil new repertoire and collaborations.

Other recent highlights include the group’s Wigmore Hall debut in 2014, showcasing repertoire from the album A Walking Fire, which it also toured across the United States and northern Europe. The players collaborated with soprano Dawn Upshaw and performed at the Ojai Music Festival, the U.S. Open tennis tournament, the Cologne Philharmonie, Rome’s American Academy, Sweden’s Malmö Festival, the Lincoln Center Festival, Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center, and Texas’ South by Southwest, where the quartet was the only classical group with an official invitation to play.