Emanuel Ax
Leonidas Kavakos
Yo-Yo Ma

WHEN:
THURSDAY,
MARCH 1, 2018
7:30 PM

VENUE:
BING
CONCERT HALL
**Program**

**Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)**

**Trio No. 2 in C Major, Op. 87 (1880–2)**

- Allegro moderato
- Andante con moto
- Scherzo: Presto
- Finale: Allegro giocoso

**Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101 (1886)**

- Allegro energico
- Presto non assai
- Andante grazioso
- Allegro molto

—Intermission—

**Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8 (1853–4, rev. 1889)**

- Allegro con brio
- Scherzo: Allegro molto
- Adagio
- Finale: Allegro

_This program is generously supported by Marcia and John Goldman._

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**Artists**

Emanuel Ax  
Piano  

Leonidas Kavakos  
Violin  

Yo-Yo Ma  
Cello  

**Notes**

Brahms took his chamber music seriously and re-energized the medium for the later 19th century, raising it to the highest level of achievement. His original plan was to bookend his output with the two versions of the B major piano trio, written a quarter of a century apart—and then retire. But the expressive musicality of the Meiningen Court clarinetist propelled him to add a coda of four more glorious chamber works as the finale of his creative life. With an overall catalog of 24 widely varied chamber compositions spanning four decades, it's arguably the piano trios that best marry the medium with the message. Before Brahms, Beethoven had found his voice in the string quartet; Schubert, for the most part, found his in the string quintet and Schumann his, in the piano quintet. It’s in the piano trio that Brahms finds the most comfortable, natural vehicle for his carefully crafted compositions.

From the opening, gloriously expansive unison string melody, the *Piano Trio No. 2, in C, Op. 87* represents Brahms at the height of his creative powers. He was 49 when he completed the score in 1881. Contemporary with the trio are the B-flat Piano Concerto and the String Quintet in F, while five years ahead lay the Double Concerto for violin, cello and orchestra, whose sound world is so clearly previewed in this trio. “You have not yet had such a beautiful trio from me,” he wrote to his publisher, “and very likely have not yet published one to equal it within the last ten years.” He began the first movement in 1880, following it with the final three years later, when he was staying in one of his favorite holiday locations, Bad Ischl, high in the
Austrian Alps. The first, a powerfully driven movement, includes much writing for the two strings in unison and its two subsidiary themes animate much of the compact development. This is among the shortest of opening movements in Brahms’s chamber catalogue. A theme and five variations on a somewhat melancholy theme with a Hungarian flavor, make up the slow movement. Piano and strings complement one another throughout, almost as a duo. The scherzo third movement is hushed, even stealthy and nocturnal, with a heart-warming central trio that casts a glance back to the work’s opening theme. The finale is upbeat, its striving main theme reaching ever forward towards a triumphant conclusion. Brahms immediately sent his completed score for approval to his friend, pianist Clara Schumann. “I love every moment,” she wrote. “What wonderful development sections! How beautifully one motif, one figure peels away to reveal the next! How delightful the scherzo is.

Then the Andante, with its charming theme, which much surely sound idiomatic in the register of the double octaves, altogether free of artifice. How fresh the last movement is, and how interesting in its artistic combinations!”

Clara Schumann was equally enthusiastic about the Piano Trio No. 3, in C minor, Op. 101, written when Brahms was 53. She found it “wonderfully gripping…No previous work of Johannes has so completely carried me away,” she wrote in her diary. “What a work it is, inspired throughout in its passion, its power of thought, its gracefulness, its poetry.” The opening movement is one of Brahms’s most intense sonata form movements; even his normally mellow second theme is here ardent and forward-driving in a way that offers little release in the tension. The movement, in common with much of his later chamber music, is also one of his tauteest structures and, as in Op. 87, Brahms omits the traditional repeat of its first section (the exposition).

“Laconic” is how his close friend and frequent correspondent Elisabet von Herzogenberg described the movement. “Smaller men,” she wrote, “will hardly trust themselves to proceed so laconically without forfeiting some of what they want to say.”

The scherzo is understated, almost aphoristic, inhabiting a shadowy world of allusion and half-lights. The strings are muted throughout, and the music rarely rises above a piano. “I am happier tonight than I have been for a long time,” Clara Schumann wrote after hearing this movement. The slow movement is a brief, wistful dialogue between the two strings and the piano, with the three instruments only infrequently playing together. Originally drafted with a 7/4 time-signature, the music effortlessly slips from two to three beats to the bar and the textures of the unaccompanied string duo again offer a preview of the Double Concerto, the work Brahms was to compose the following year. The determined finale, with its unpredictable cross-rhythms, remains shrouded in the minor key until sunlight warms the coda to a triumphant conclusion.

The Piano Trio in B, Op. 8 is both the first and last work Brahms wrote in the medium of piano trio. He wrote the first version in 1853–4 and published it as his Op. 8. Then, late in life, in 1889, when a new publisher acquired rights to his chamber music compositions, Brahms took the opportunity to re-write the piece. He tightened its expansive style, simplified its structure and used its themes as the building blocks of what is essentially a new work. It is one third shorter than the original. What is striking about the process is that Brahms sustains the youthful energy of the first version. “I did not provide it with a wig,” he said in a manner calculated to confuse, “I just arranged its hair a little!” It is this revised version, written after a lifetime of composition and after almost one hundred published works, that is usually played today. Brahms jokingly referred to it as his Op. 108, rather than his Op. 8.

In the ‘new’ Op. 8, Brahms retains the lyrical opening theme. It is instantly recognizable as Brahmsian, being characteristically nutty brown in color, somewhat wistful in mood. Its expansive nature, on the scale of Beethoven’s Archduke Trio, ensures that the broad sweep of the opening movement will remain, though this is virtually all that does remain from the early version of the trio. Other Brahmsian thumbprints, like hemiola patterns and additional rhythmical shifts, add new energy and direction to the music. The deftly scurrying Scherzo pays homage to Mendelssohn. Together with its broadly lilting, waltz-like trio, it is virtually unchanged from the 1854 publication. The slow movement has a clear, three-part form. Its solemn, chorale-like opening again shows the influence of the Archduke trio but speaks in Brahms’s mature voice. The questioning B minor cello theme that opens the finale, introduces a note of disquiet and restlessness. But it immediately gives way to a brightly assertive D major second theme that introduces a valedictory tone to the movement. Although the music ends in the minor, its mood is confident and hard-won.

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EMANUEL AX
Born in modern day Lvov, Poland, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. He is a winner of the Young Concert Artist Award, Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition, Michaels Award and the Avery Fisher Prize.

In partnership with David Robertson, he begins the current season with six Mozart concerti over two weeks in St. Louis, repeating the project in Sydney in February. Following the gala opening of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s season he returns to the orchestras in Cleveland, New York, San Francisco, Boston, Houston, Ottawa, Toronto, Indianapolis, and Pittsburgh, and to Carnegie Hall for a recital to conclude the season. In Europe he can be heard in Stockholm, Vienna, Paris, London, and on tour with the Budapest Festival Orchestra. In support of the recent release of their disc of Brahms Trios for Sony, Mr. Ax will also tour across the U.S. with colleagues Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma during the winter.

Always a committed exponent of contemporary composers, with works written for him by John Adams, Christopher Rouse, Krzysztof Penderecki, Bright Sheng, and Melinda Wagner already in his repertoire, most recently he has added HK Gruber’s Piano Concerto and Samuel Adams’ “Impromptus”. A frequent and committed partner for chamber music, he has worked regularly with such artists as Young Uck Kim, Cho-Liang Lin, Mr. Ma, Edgar Meyer, Peter Serkin, Jaime Laredo, and the late Isaac Stern.

Mr. Ax resides in New York City with his wife, pianist Yoko Nozaki, with whom he has two children. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates of music from Yale and Columbia Universities.

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS
Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos is recognized as an artist of rare quality, known for his virtuosity, superb musicianship and the integrity of his playing. By age 21, Kavakos had won three major competitions: the 1985 Sibelius Competition, and the 1988 Paganini and Naumburg competitions. He was the first to record the original Sibelius Violin Concerto (1903/4), which won the 1991 Gramophone Concerto of the Year Award. Over the years Kavakos has developed close relationships with some of the most prestigious orchestras and conductors. In 2017-18, he is Artist in Residence at both the Concertgebouw and the Vienna Musikverein, and will tour North America with Yo-Yo Ma and Emanuel Ax performing Brahms and Schubert trios. Kavakos is an exclusive artist with Decca Classics. Recent recordings include Virtuoso (2016), Brahms Violin Sonatas with Yuja Wang (2014), Brahms Violin Concerto with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Riccardo Chailly (2013), and the complete Beethoven Violin Sonatas with Enrico Pace (2013). He recorded the Brahms Trios with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma, released on Sony Classical in September 2017. Kavakos is the 2017 winner of the Léonie Sonning Music Prize, and Gramophone Artist of the Year 2014. He plays the ‘Willemotte’ Stradivarius violin of 1734.

YO-YO MA
Yo-Yo Ma’s multi-faceted career is testament to his enduring belief in culture’s power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works from the cello repertoire, collaborating with communities and institutions to explore culture’s social impact, or engaging unexpected musical forms, Mr. Ma strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity.

Mr. Ma founded Silkroad to promote cross-cultural performance and collaborations at the edge where education, business, and the arts come together to transform the world. He is a member of the Silkroad Ensemble which tours annually and for whom more than 80 works have been specifically commissioned. Mr. Ma also serves as the Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s Negaunee Music Institute. His work focuses on the transformative power music can have in individuals’ lives, and on increasing the number and variety of opportunities audiences have to experience music in their communities.

Mr. Ma was born in Paris to Chinese parents who later moved the family to New York. He began to study cello at the age of four, attended the Juilliard School and in 1976 graduated from Harvard University. He has received numerous awards, among them the Avery Fisher Prize (1978), the National Medal of Arts (2001), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2010). In 2011; Mr. Ma was recognized as a Kennedy Center Honoree. Most recently, Mr. Ma has joined the Aspen Institute Board of Trustees. He has performed for eight American presidents, most recently at the invitation of President Obama on the occasion of the 56th Inaugural Ceremony.