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# The Merling Trio, 11/9

College of Fine Arts

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# Faculty Artist Series

2002–03 Season  
153rd Concert

Saturday 9 November 2002  
Dalton Center Recital Hall  
8:15 p.m.

## THE MERLING TRIO

**Renata Artman Knific, Violin**

**Bruce Uchimura, Cello**

**Susan Wiersma Uchimura, Piano**

*assisted by*

**Scott St. John, Viola**

Franz Joseph Haydn  
1732–1809

*Piano Trio in C Minor* Hob. XV:13  
Andante  
Allegro spiritoso

Anton Arensky  
1861–1906

*Trio in D Minor* Opus 32  
Allegro moderato  
Scherzo: Allegro molto; Meno mosso  
Elegia: Adagio  
Finale: Allegro non troppo

intermission

Johannes Brahms  
1833–1897

*Piano Quartet Number 3 in C Minor* Opus 60  
Allegro non troppo  
Scherzo: Allegro  
Andante  
Finale: Allegro comodo  
with Scott St. John

Scott St. John's residency is made possible through the collaboration of the University Symphony Orchestra and Western Michigan University's Donald P. Bullock Music Performance Institute.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Haydn, *Piano Trio in C Minor*

Haydn's C minor trio is one of three he composed during 1788–89. He titled them as written for clavichord "accompanied" by violin and cello, indicating that the strings still played their traditionally subservient role to the keyboard. But Haydn did experiment by varying the numbers and sequences of movements and using unusual harmonic progressions. Often he gave the violin more independence, and his keyboard style took advantage of recent improvements in the sonority of those instruments.

Hans Christoph Wobers writes that when Haydn delivered this trio to his publisher on March 29, 1789, he wrote a letter saying that he had "indulged his publisher's taste" by including a variation movement, which were always popular and sold well. This movement is the first of the two in the trio. It opens with the folk-like theme in the major key, stated first by the piano. The second movement, in C major and marked *Allegro spiritoso*, is in a more-or-less traditional sonata form with multiple themes that form the basis for the musical content and are repeated in the closing section.

### Arensky, *Trio in D Minor*

Born in Novgorod in 1861, Anton Arensky was closely associated with some of the most famous names in Russian music of his time. He studied with Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and as a professor of counterpoint and harmony at the Moscow Conservatory, he counted Rachmaninoff and Scriabin among his students. He died of tuberculosis in 1906.

Arensky's style of composition shows many influences, but it most resembles Tchaikovsky in its fluency and use of strong, lyrical melodies. He composed three operas and two symphonies as well as a respectable catalog of piano, vocal, and chamber music works, but he is known today for only a handful of them.

This piano trio, dating from 1894, is the best known of Arensky's large-scale works. The first movement shows the importance of melody to his style, as it is based on three distinct themes that are richly developed and are heard again with little alteration in the recapitulation. The first part of the scherzo is dominated by a virtuosic piano part; in the second section, a waltz, the strings are highlighted. A lyrical cello melody introduces the *Elegia*, which features both strings muted. The rhythmic finale recalls the principal themes of the first movement and the *Elegia*.

### Brahms, *Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor*

Brahms' C minor piano quartet has an unusual and somewhat mysterious history. It was actually the first of the three piano quartets he composed, having its beginnings in 1855 as a three-movement work in C-sharp minor. Brahms' piano quartets all date from the mid-1850s, a time when he became closely involved with his friends and mentors Robert and Clara Schumann. Despondent over Robert's severe mental illness (which led to his death in 1856) and his own intense yet unexpressed infatuation with Clara, Brahms filed the quartet away. In 1874 he took it up again, and as near as can be told from the evidence, transposed the key to C minor, revised or rewrote the original outer movements and perhaps the Adagio (slow) movement, and added a scherzo.

Less a mystery is the reason for the sense of tragedy and sadness that pervades the quartet. "You can also put on the title-page a picture of a head with a pistol in front of it," Brahms wrote to his publisher, "now you may get an idea of the music!" Clearly this alludes to circumstances with the Schumanns and helps to explain the rather fragmentary character of the music, particularly in the first movement, with its disparate tonal and melodic elements. The following *Scherzo*, in contrast, is marked by a masterful control. The richly expressive *Andante* is judged to be one of Brahms' finest and most beautiful slow movements. In the finale, sections of singing melodies in the strings, accompanied by rapid figures in the piano, contrast with hymn-like chordal sections.

**THE MERLING TRIO** was founded in 1988, and quickly established itself as a premiere ensemble. A truly international trio, it brings together musicians from Polish, Japanese, and Dutch backgrounds. The Merling Trio has been hailed as a brilliantly distinguished group endowed with remarkable gifts of communication, magnificent precision, and an impeccable blend of sound. The trio made its New York debut in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in 1993, and was named a finalist for the Naumburg Foundation Chamber Music Award in 1994. They have coached with Bonnie Hampton, Ruth Laredo, Martin Canin, Joyce Robbins, Joel Krosnik, and Anne Epperson.

The Merling Trio has given numerous recitals throughout Canada and the United States. Members of the trio have performed with orchestras such as the English Chamber Orchestra, the Honolulu Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, and the South Carolina Philharmonic, under the baton of such notable conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Simon Rattle, and Christoph Eschenbach. Recent trio performances include concerts at New York's Merkin Hall and at Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as three performances of the Beethoven Triple Concerto with the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Symphony.

Several contemporary composers have written works for the Merling Trio, and in 1993, they commissioned and premiered C. Curtis-Smith's *Second Piano Trio*. In February 1998, the trio returned to Carnegie Hall for a sold-out performance of a new work by New York composer Terry Winter-Owens, commissioned by the Merling Trio with a Commissioning Grant from the American Composers Forum. During the current season, the trio will premiere a new work by jazz great Frank Proto for piano trio with jazz bass at St. John's Smith Square in London, England. Performances by the Merling Trio have been broadcast widely on television and radio, including WNYC and Peachstate Public Radio. Their first CD, entitled *The Merling Trio performs works of C. Curtis-Smith*, was released in 1995 by Albany Records, in collaboration with conductor Dennis Russell Davies. About the CD, *Fanfare* wrote, "The composer could not ask for better interpreters." The trio's latest CD, including works by Haydn, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann, and Liszt, was released by Pamplin Records in 2001.

In residence at the School of Music at Western Michigan University, members of the trio are also faculty members at the prestigious ENCORE School for Strings, and at the Lancut Festival in Poland. Festival appearances include the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Pensacola Summer Music Festival, the Skaneateles Festival, the Saugatuck Chamber Music Festival, and the Fontana Festival of Art and Music. Recent educational activities include performances and master classes for the California Music Teachers Association and the Music Teachers National Association.

The Cleveland *Plain Dealer* said, "The players shaped a grand interpretation, fluent in rhythm and rich in romantic feeling." The *Grand Rapids Press* has said, "The trio...delivered a standard of playing that is on par with some of the best known violin-cello-piano teams, captivating the audience through the immediacy and extraordinary sensitivity of its playing."

**SCOTT ST. JOHN** captures the attention of the musical world through his riveting and virtuosic performances on violin, viola, and electric/MIDI violin. This charismatic artist has been praised for his “electric” performances and recitals “brimming with extroverted spirit,” still, his exciting talents always serve the music. As the *Pittsburgh Press* has noted, “he is a musician of impeccable taste and natural instincts. He lets the music do the talking.”

St. John begins his 2002–03 season with Orchestra London and the violin concerto by one of his favorite composers, Dvořák. Passionate about twentieth century music, St. John’s season features Berg’s Violin Concerto with the Calgary Philharmonic, Britten’s Violin Concerto with the Toledo Symphony and conductor Peter Oundjian, as well as performances throughout North America of Korngold’s Violin Concerto and Bartók’s Viola Concerto. Recitals and chamber concerts stretch from Vancouver and additional Pacific Northwest venues to New York’s Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. His varied programs include works on both violin and viola and embrace works ranging from Beethoven, Brahms, and Schubert to Martinů, Milhaud, and Enescu.

The 2001–02 season included several triumphant re-engagements that featured Mozart, Bartók, and Korngold violin concertos with Montreal, Grand Rapids and Winnipeg symphonies. Brilliant performances of the Barber Violin Concerto as well as a commissioned double concerto paired with the Brahms Double rounded out St. John’s season.

In past seasons, St. John appeared on violin and viola with Keith Lockhart and the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra and was immediately invited to make his debut with Lockhart and the Boston Pops. Subsequent performances with Lockhart include the American premiere of Peter Maxwell Davies’ *A Spell for Green Corn*, a work they performed together again last season with the Utah Symphony. Audiences of the Cleveland, Philadelphia, and National Arts Centre (Ottawa) orchestras, and those of the Cincinnati, Toronto, and Vancouver symphonies, among others, have also shared in St. John’s obvious joy in performing.

Abroad, St. John has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Orchestra, Flemish Radio Orchestra, Lisbon’s Gulbenkian Orchestra, the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra, New Zealand Chamber Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic in London and the Hamburg Sinfonia. He made his debut in Japan, performing with the late Alexander Schneider, and in recitals in Osaka and Hiroshima. He recently returned to Japan for gala performances in Tokyo’s Casals Hall.

Winner of the 1989 Young Concert Artists Award, St. John made his New York City recital debut to critical acclaim in the 1991 Young Concert Artists Series at the 92nd Street Y. Playing violin, viola and MIDI violin, he made his Washington, DC recital debut in the 1993 Series at the Kennedy Center. In recent seasons, Scott has performed in recital on Ravinia’s Rising Stars Series, at Spivey Hall (Georgia), as well as at Boston’s Gardner Museum, Pepperdine University (California), the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, DC’s Freer Gallery, the La Jolla Chamber Music Society, the Tilles Center (New York), and Ruth Eckerd Hall (Florida). His recital for the University of Wyoming, part of a statewide tour, was featured on NPR’s “Performance Today.”

An avid chamber musician, St. John frequently performs with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (New York), Da Camera of Houston, on nationwide Musicians from Marlboro tours, and at the Seattle, Spoleto, and Vancouver music festivals. European festival engagements include France’s Evian Music Festival and the Spoleto Festival in Italy. From 1994–97 Scott was Founder and Artistic Director of Millennium, a contemporary music ensemble for top young chamber musicians. In 1998, his “Chamber Music Company” launched a new series that included world premieres and multi-media collaborations in New York City’s Merkin Hall. Deeply committed to education and outreach, St. John employs his exceptional communication skills to connect with and inspire students and adults alike. Further evidence of his teaching gifts lies in his recent appointment to a prestigious performance/faculty position at the University of Toronto.

Born in London, Ontario, St. John began his violin studies at age three with Richard Lawrence and subsequently worked with Gerard Jarry in Paris and David Cerone of the Cleveland Institute of Music. He studied viola with Ralph Aldrich of the University of Western Ontario and Robert Vernon, principal viola of the Cleveland Orchestra. In 1990, St. John graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied violin with Jascha Brodsky and Arnold Steinhardt, and chamber music with Felix Galimir. In addition to Young Concert Artists, his many awards include the 1994 Virginia D. Moore Award for Most Promising Young Canadian Artist, Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award, First Prize in the 1987 Alexander Schneider Violin and Viola Competition and a top prize in the 1992 Munich International Violin Competition.