

Demarre McGill, flute; Anthony McGill, clarinet; & Aizuri Quartet

January 19, 2022 @ 7:30pm
American Philosophical Society

Program includes:

Theme and Variations, Op. 80

Amy Beach

Born: September 5, 1867 in Henniker, NH

Died: December 27, 1944 in New York, NY

Composed: 1916

PCMS premiere

Duration: 20 minutes

The Theme and Variations for Flute and String Quartet, which Beach wrote on commission from the San Francisco Chamber Music Society, is a glowing example of her gifts and her appeal. It is an ambitious work, distinguished by Beach's contrapuntal prowess and her wonderful ear for harmonic color. The first of many delightful surprises comes early. After the strings introduce the lyrical Romantic theme, the flute ushers in the first variation with an exotic-sounding, Debussy-like solo. There are rewards in each of the variations. The playful syncopated second is contrapuntally adroit, the waltz-like third harmonically adventurous, the fleet fourth propelled by rapid triplets. The cello introduces the rich and expressive fifth variation, which features a return of the fourth variation's triplets and of the flute's opening solo. All the strands are tied together in the last variation, which begins with a cheerful fugue and closes, satisfyingly, with the original theme and the flute's exotic song.

Song in Mistranslation

Lembit Beecher

Born: November 23, 1980 in Santa Cruz, CA

Composed: 2011

PCMS premiere

Duration: 6 minutes

The roots of Song in Mistranslation lie in a recording of an Estonian folksong called Käte käskimine (Bidding Hands to do Work), sung in a southeastern Estonian

dialect called Setu. Years after hearing the recording, Beecher began writing music clearly but distantly influenced by the Setu song. "I like to think that years of the music sitting in the back of my brain filtered out the deep and essential elements of the music that I could connect to. But I also realize that the music I wrote would not be identified by a Setu singer as having anything to do with her music. This sense of a cultural one-way street is something that I think immigrant families such as mine often face."

Clarinet Quintet in F-Sharp Minor, Op. 10

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Born: August 15, 1875 in Holborn, UK

Died: September 1, 1912 in Croydon, UK

Composed: 1895

PCMS premiere

Duration: 27 minutes

Shortly after Brahms premiered his final chamber work, his Clarinet Quintet, Coleridge-Taylor promptly composed his own Clarinet Quintet and presented it to his teacher Charles Villiers Stanford, who took it with him on an 1897 trip to Berlin. There Stanford shared it with Brahms's friend Joseph Joachim (the violinist), who played it privately with colleagues and spoke of it enthusiastically. Brahms's autumnal Romanticism may cast a slight touch on this work, but stronger influence is derived from Dvořák. In Coleridge-Taylor's Clarinet Quintet, we spy Dvořákian melodic turns of a folkish bent—the opening themes of the first, second, and fourth movements, for example—and harmonies that can veer modal. We often think of Dvořák as an inspiration for African-American composers at the turn of the twentieth century, but here we are reminded of his similar influence on a remarkable Anglo-African composer.