

# Musica Viva!



Toward the Light—Marilyn Banner

Sunday, September 18, 2016  
7:30 PM

7502 Flower Avenue  
Takoma Park

<http://www.dcmusicaviva.org>

# PROGRAM

**Johannes Brahms**

(May 7, 1833 - April 3, 1897)

**Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Opus 26** (1861)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Poco Adagio
- III. Scherzo: Poco allegro
- IV. Finale: Allegro

**Aaron Copland**

(November 14, 1900 - December 2, 1990)

**Piano Quartet** (1950)

- I. Adagio serio
- II. Allegro giusto
- III. Non troppo lento

**Sally McLain, violin; Nana Vaughan, viola;  
Steven Honigberg, cello; Carl Banner, Piano**

## PROGRAM NOTES

**Brahms, Piano Quartet #2**— Finished compositions did not come easily for Brahms, and he made numerous attempts to satisfy himself with a chamber piece before he allowed the publication of his Piano Trio, Op. 8 in 1854. (He destroyed at least three earlier efforts in that form.) The following year, he turned to writing quartets for piano, violin, viola and cello, a genre whose only precedents were the two by Mozart and a single specimen by Schumann. Work on the quartets did not go smoothly, however, and he laid one (in C minor, eventually Op. 60) aside for almost twenty years, and tinkered with the other two for the next half-dozen years in Hamburg and at his part-time post as music director for the court Lippe-Detmold, midway between Frankfurt and Hamburg.



Brahms was based principally in Hamburg during those years, usually staying with his parents, but in 1860, when he was 27 years old and eager to find the quiet and privacy to work on his compositions,

he rented spacious rooms ("a quite charming flat with a garden," he said) in the suburb of Hamm from one Frau Dr. Elisabeth Rössing, a neighbor of two members of the local women's choir he was then directing. Hamm was to be his home for the next two years, and there he completed the Variations on a Theme of Schumann for Piano Duet (Op. 23), the Handel Variations (Op. 24) and the Piano Quartets in G minor (Op. 25) and A major (Op. 26). Brahms dedicated the A major Quartet to his hospitable landlady.

"The first movement of the Op. 26 Quartet is so lyrical," according to Ivor Keys in his study of Brahms' chamber music, "that there are very few bars without hummable melodic content." The main theme, initiated by the piano alone, provides the two motives from which the movement is largely spun: a gently insistent triplet figuration whose top notes alternate between two adjacent neighboring tones; and a smoothly flowing eighth-note phrase that springs out of a brief pause. The strings join together to echo the piano's phrases, establishing the dichotomy of keyboard balanced against the string group that obtains throughout much of the work. The expressive intensity of the transition, heightened by unison string writing, quiets for the formal second theme, an expansive piano melody grown from the earlier flowing phrase (whose accompaniment is derived from the main subject's triplet figures). A chromatically descending motive and a strain with dotted rhythms (again often accompanied by triplets) provide the exposition's closing material. All of the principal themes figure in the harmonically adventurous development section. The events of the exposition are recounted, with appropriate adjustments as to key, in the recapitulation.

The Adagio is one of Brahms' most luxuriantly beautiful inspirations, an homage in both its transcendent Romantic spirit and specific elements of its technique to his mentor and champion, Robert Schumann, who died in 1856, just before Brahms began sketching this work. An arching melody (incorporating, like the first movement, both duple and triple rhythmic divisions) serves as the principal theme and formal reference point of this chamber-music

nocturne, in which two intervening episodes, each introduced by sweeping arpeggios from the piano, provide structural balance and emotional contrast. The third movement is an ample and amiable affair, more gentle in demeanor than the designation Scherzo commonly suggests; the central minor-mode trio is built of sterner stuff. The vigorous finale is a spacious sonata form with a slight Gypsy tint whose abundance of themes Brahms juxtaposed and wove together with consummate mastery of mood and structure.

From a Kennedy Center Program

**Copland, Piano Quartet**—Like most of the great 20th century composers, Copland eventually chose the dominant modern technique of “serialism” as a method of composing. The Piano Quartet of 1950 is a crystal clear example of the approach, almost a perfect introduction to this curious “method of composing with 12 tones” originating with the Austrian composer Arnold Schönberg. What makes this a marvelous work is the combination of this conscious technical choice and Copland’s steadfast ability to make sounds “musical.” More than a mere intellectual exercise, the patterns speak to the heart as well as the mind.



With an explicit intention of avoiding the common scale patterns of our familiar major and minor keys and the implied “clichés” of ingrained phrases and cadences, serialism selects a synthetic scale with all 12 possible tones arranged in a new, specific order. This creates a sort of “melody” or “theme” that is used throughout the music as a fundamental reference generating a whole new “vocabulary” of music. The first movement is essentially a slow fugue on this primary scale creating a piece of music that echoes the meticulous, moody meditations of late Beethoven and Bach. The music lies in the dramatic narrative of the fugue’s sectional development. It is modern, yet surprisingly classical and even Baroque in a sure kind of neoclassicism. What makes his serialism almost seem “tonal” is that his series begins with a descending whole tone scale evoking both the old church modes and Debussy at the same time.

The middle movement is a lively scherzo influenced by jazz rhythms, in Copland’s words. Copland the “modernist” is at his spikey

best here. It dances with a kinetic motion to a kind of “rag” or “ragged” time summoning the sharp pointillism of Stravinsky and Shostakovich as well as Copland’s brilliant music for ballet. The descending whole-tone series plays a vivid dramatic role, checking the motion and recalling the germinal theme of the trio like a slow déjà vu of church bells.

The finale is a gift for the listener who has patiently remained attentive. Here Copland the atmospheric populist shines vividly with gentle, burnished homophony like a mythical American hymn. Just as Bach and Beethoven did by abbreviating themes with signature motives, the first three notes of Copland’s series feature as a brief “head motive” recognizably singing “Three Blind Mice.” Serialism, like all music, is a kind of child’s play, invoking the elemental sincerely and satirically, if not hauntingly. Cleverly deployed, a modern method accommodates the popular. Copland concludes with an evaporating coda in a special moment of color and mood, circling back to the inward pace of the start and its elemental music, now, a coded catechism.

From Wikipedia

## The Artists

**Sally McLain, violin**, has participated in the Tanglewood Music Center, Bach Aria Festival and Institute, and New York String Orchestra Seminar. She recorded the complete quartets of David Diamond and Quincy Porter with the Potomac String Quartet for Albany Records and is a founding member of the Left Bank Quartet. She has been concertmaster with the Cathedral Choral Society, Washington Concert Opera, and Wolf Trap Opera, among others. She received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees with High Distinction from Indiana University.



**Nana Vaughan, viola,** received her bachelors and masters degrees at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Currently the Assistant Principal Violist with the Reading Symphony, she has performed professionally with many orchestras including the Baltimore Symphony, Washington National Opera/ Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, American Pops Orchestra, Delaware Symphony, Charleston (SC) Symphony, and Richmond (VA) Symphony. She has also performed chamber music extensively as a violist with the Fishers (IN) Chamber Players, at UMBC where she is an adjunct professor, and as founder of the Carrollton String Quartet, for which she was manager and violist for twenty years.



**Steven Honigberg, cello,** is a graduate of the Juilliard School of Music where he studied with Leonard Rose and Channing Robbins. Hired under the leadership of Mstislav Rostropovich, he is currently a member of the National Symphony Orchestra. He has given recent recitals in Washington DC at the Dumbarton Concert Series, at the Phillips Collection, at the National Gallery of Art, and recitals in New York and throughout the United States. From 1990-2009, Honigberg was principal cellist, chamber music director of the Edgar M. Bronfman series in Sun Valley, Idaho where he was featured as soloist with the summer symphony. He has appeared most recently in Washington, in 2015, as soloist with the National Symphony Orchestra in two performances at the Kennedy Center of Krzysztof Penderecki's Triple Cello Concerto with the NSO's Music Director Christoph Eschenbach. Mr. Honigberg was the Director of the Chamber Music series at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC for eight years where he premiered a number of new works by American composers. He has recorded extensively with the Potomac String Quartet, and is also a member of the Smithsonian Chamber Society and the Phillips Camerata.



**Carl Banner, Piano.** Founder and co-director, with artist Marilyn Banner, of Washington Musica Viva. A musician since childhood, Banner studied with Harold Zabrack, Leon Fleisher and Leonard Shure among others, and performed as soloist with the St. Louis Symphony in 1962. He continued to perform regularly while earning a PhD in cell biology from Harvard University in 1982. He retired from his administrative position at NIH in 2004 in order to devote full time to music. With Musica Viva he has performed at the Embassies of the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria, Lithuania, Denmark, Israel, and the European Union, as well as at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, the Czech Center and the Donnell Library in New York, and Brooklyn Conservatory.



**Marilyn Banner.** Marilyn is the artist whose music-related paintings grace the cover of these programs each month. She is a rising star among the artists who work in the "Encaustic medium" in the DC area. Spend a little time during intermission browsing her works on display in the music room, then see more on her web site at [marilynbanner.com](http://marilynbanner.com). Marilyn has participated in many individual as well as juried shows of her work, in the DC area and in New York. Also, her work is featured in the recently published **Encaustic Art in the 21st Century** by Anne Lee and Ashley Rooney and her painting "Take Your Pick," graces the cover of a recent book by musicologist Larisa Loginova.



In addition to providing the visual diversion at her Flower Avenue studio, Marilyn also finds time to preside over the Board of Directors of Musica Viva, as well as participate in the annual Takoma Park Art Walk.

**Washington Musica Viva** produces high quality, unpretentious public performances of a broad range of classical, jazz-based, and contemporary chamber music. WMV began as a monthly multi-disciplinary performance series in the Kensington studio of visual artist Marilyn Banner. Now in our 15th season, WMV has produced more than 200 programs, including performances at the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, the Czech Center in NY, the Embassy of the Czech Republic, the Embassy of Austria, Busboys and Poets, Twins Jazz Club, and the Brooklyn Conservatory. WMV is directed by pianist Carl Banner. Participants include professional musicians from Washington, Baltimore, New York, and elsewhere.

Washington Musica Viva, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all contributions are fully tax-deductible. WMV can be reached at 301-891-6844 or **[dcmusicaviva@verizon.net](mailto:dcmusicaviva@verizon.net)**. Our mailing address is WMV, 7502 Flower Ave, Takoma Park, MD 20912.

Program notes and composer pictures from Wikipedia

Program design by Hugh Haskell  
Suggestions for improvement welcome at [haskellh@verizon.net](mailto:haskellh@verizon.net)