



Sheffield
Chamber
Players

Bringing Chamber Music Home

2021—2022 Season

From the Artistic Directors



Dear friends,

Gathering together to explore the shared humanity of great music has never felt more precious or more important. We are all changed and there is so much to process as we continue to navigate uncharted waters. When it came to planning this season, we wanted to share music that nourishes our optimism and sense of hope, but also music that reflects the wide range of emotions and experiences we've lived through. From the deep well of chamber music repertoire, we've drawn four unique programs to express this wide emotional landscape, and are adding our own drop to the proverbial bucket.

We bookend the season with sublime quintets by Mozart, his remarkable E-flat major viola quintet to start, and his beloved clarinet quintet to close the season. Both works are elegant, beautifully proportioned, and stunningly beautiful, but they also showcase Mozart's unique ability to imbue meaning and enormous emotional range within music that on first listen can sound simply pretty. We pair each of these Mozart gems with works by SCP favorite Kenji Bunch, who, like Mozart, creates beautiful, toe tapping music that is also deeply layered and complex.

For our second program, we give you our annual Beethoven/Shostakovich pairing, with the 10th string quartets of these two musical giants. These two composers changed the string quartet genre, and it's impossible to overstate their significance. To experience these works live is to embark on a great journey, and as with the greatest novels and films, you will inhabit a complete world and get swept into a human story that is at once relatable and totally remarkable.

To start off the new year, we share our very first commission, launching us into a five year commissioning project. We can't wait to introduce you to this new work by the brilliant Kevin Day, one of today's most exciting young composers. The program also includes a gorgeous quasi-Impressionist work by Germaine Tailleferre, and the sumptuous Schumann string quartet No. 2.

The season closes with music we were set to perform for you in 2020, when life as we knew it stopped cold. The program marks our long delayed collaboration with the incredible clarinetist and composer Evan Ziporyn, who joins us on bass clarinet for his playful quintet Be-In, as well as on the sublime Mozart Clarinet Quintet, with its heart stoppingly beautiful slow movement.

As you can see, the eclectic programming you've come to expect is present throughout the season, with beloved gems from the traditional chamber music repertoire alongside works that are almost certainly new to you. As always, we've chosen music we love that we hope will speak to you as well. The conversations we open "on stage", from the varied experiences of composers spanning centuries, really find their meaning when you join in. We can't wait to hear your thoughts.

Cheers,
Megumi, Sasha, Alex, and Leo

From the Executive Director



Dear friends,

We are thrilled to bring you a 2021—22 season full of incredible music, new partnerships, and exciting growth for Sheffield. Perhaps you're looking forward to our commissioning project, which promises to expand the chamber music repertoire through vibrant collaborations with diverse musical voices including Kenji Bunch, Kevin Day, Osvaldo Golijov, and Jessie Montgomery (Google them, you won't be disappointed). Or maybe you'll be joining us for our first partnership with Historic New England, long in the works and coming to fruition this season at the Eustis Estate in Milton. Right now, you may even be sitting in your living room, or in the home of a friend, eagerly anticipating an evening with the players.

However you encounter Sheffield, we are so grateful for your support and presence in our community, and we hope our work brings you moments of joy and healing, along with the deep connections forged through shared musical experience. And please, let us know what you think after today's concert, tell your friends how Sheffield makes you feel, and help us continue to expand our community and share this unique musical experience with as many people as possible.

With Gratitude,
Christina



group photos by Hannah Shields Photography



String Circle

Sinfonias 3, 4 & 5

Leonora Duarte
(1610—1678)

String Circle

- I. Lowdown
- II. Shuffle Step
- III. Ballad
- IV. Porch Picking
- V. Overdrive

Kenji Bunch
(b. 1973)

String Quintet No. 6 in E-flat Major K.614

- I. Larghetto - Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto. Allegretto - Trio
- IV. Allegro

W.A. Mozart
(1756—1791)

Guest Artist
Stephanie Fong, viola

String Circle is a program about some of the many things that can happen when we gather together. We all need ways to enjoy, to process, to make sense of the world and our lives; and we often map things out by being together, engaging in activities—whether eating and drinking together, or sharing a spiritual practice, concert, or jam session. Now in 2021, we have collectively been through many things, without the time to process them in community as they happened. This program feels like a chance to have a shared experience; bringing together all the different things we are carrying individually, and letting something we do communally impact that mixture inside of us.

Leonora Duarte was born into a Flemish family of Jewish conversos who fled to Antwerp from Portugal and Spain and converted to Catholicism. Her Sinfonias, composed sometime between 1625-50, were written for viol consort, and were played by her and her 4 siblings in their home, at lauded musical events attended by the artistic and diplomatic stars of their time, including Vermeer and the singer Anna de la Barre. (Leonora's brother Diego was the owner of a Vermeer, and people have speculated that Leonora may have been the subject of some of his paintings.) When the Sinfonias were being written, baroque music was shifting to a more melody-and-accompaniment form, but Leonora continued writing in the more equally-voiced contrapuntal style that was well suited to the viol instrument and likely also to her ensemble of opinionated siblings. As Alex Ross notes about these Sinfonias, "You could also compare them to Vermeer's paintings, small in scale and infinite in depth." Her music celebrates the beauty that comes from a community drawn together by art and listening to all the voices in its midst.

The opening of *String Circle*, Kenji Bunch's viola quintet, conjures up mysterious and beckoning Smoky Mountain vistas. This is the Appalachian fiddling movement of the piece, which, like most of Kenji's music, draws on many different American Folk traditions. The slow movement, *Ballad*, sets the song *Wayfaring Stranger* (of unknown origin, but once found etched into the notorious Civil War era Libby Prison) with a simple, yet heart-wrenching ascending line started by the violas. After the sorrow of the *Ballad*, a gentle return to community is a welcome relief in *Porch Picking*, plucked throughout by the whole quintet, and reminiscent of a casual and friendly jam session when anyone can drop by. In the final movement, an homage to Bartók's 4th quartet can be heard as folk music elements are joined together with intrepid skill in a complex, rhythmic, and visceral finale.

The final chamber music work Mozart wrote was this viola quintet in E-flat Major (1791). Written in the same year as his *Magic Flute* opera, you can hear many similar elements: hunting calls, intertwining bird calls, and of course the E-flat tonal center. Like his last quartets, there is a very virtuosic cello part, the first time in history the cello had been asked to do such crazy things! The third movement *Musette* brings in the droning sounds of the bagpipe instrument of the same name, which had its roots in the country, but became a very dressed-up favorite of the French court dances.

~ Megumi Stohs Lewis



10

- String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major, Op. 74 Ludwig van Beethoven
I. Poco adagio - Allegro (1770—1827)
II. Adagio ma non troppo
III. Presto - Più presto quasi prestissimo
IV. Allegretto con variazioni
- String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major, Op. 118 Dmitri Shostakovich
I. Andante (1906—1975)
II. Allegretto furioso
III. Adagio
IV. Allegretto—Andante

It's tempting to trace a neat line through the events of a composer's life and chart a path that seems to have been inevitable. With the benefit of our modern day perspective we peer back through centuries and marvel at the majestic arc the music of Beethoven or Shostakovich seems to fall into. Tracing this arc is, after all, what our 15-year exploration of their quartets is all about. I often wonder how different our experience of this music could be if we had no knowledge of what's around the bend.

In the 7th year of our journey, we find ourselves at a fascinating and very similar spot in the paths of these geniuses. Both were at the zenith of their creative power and by then had firmly established their voices. As Beethoven sat down to write his 10th quartet in 1809, he had already tasted plenty of success with his first six symphonies, and had just landed a lavish contract from three of the most powerful Viennese aristocrats, who joined forces to lure him back to Vienna. In 1964 Shostakovich was even further ahead in his career, having completed thirteen symphonies and a vast majority of his most important works by the time his 10th quartet landed on paper.

Remarkably, both seem to have approached their respective 10th quartet as a celebration of the compositional style they had championed to date. It is as if each man took a bit of time to ponder all the innovations of his previous quartets, assessed everything he deemed best about his past labors, and created a quintessential masterpiece assimilating the greatest accomplishments of the preceding works. In both cases the result is a truly glorious quartet full of vitality, yet in each we detect a certain strain of expression, especially apparent in the middle movements.

The scherzo movements in both are stormy, which is not new to either composer, but the level of turbulence is cranked up way past what a string quartet would normally be expected to handle. Beethoven's aim seems to be at the intensity of his 5th symphony, no less, and in Shostakovich's version the tension builds so much towards the end of the movement that the usual intricacy of his part writing is dropped in favor of brash, exasperated gestures. The slow movements of each quartet are otherworldly and complex, yet remarkable in their ability to hold the earth-bound and the spiritual in balance. Shostakovich recreates the form and spirit of the mournful passacaglia of his 8th symphony, while Beethoven's blend of simplicity and lyricism clearly foreshadows every slow movement to come in his "late period".

As we marvel at these creations, we can't resist glimpsing a sharp curve in the path just ahead for each composer. Unbeknownst to them, this was the last time either would write a quartet in a standard, balanced form. We now know that Beethoven's quartets are about to take a dive off a high cliff of experimentation, revolutionizing the genre yet again, while Shostakovich's music will feel increasingly more stratospheric, preoccupied with mortality as his own health declines. The two quartets we are exploring this year might foreshadow these developments, but for the most part they bask in the solstice of the "middle period," enjoying the balanced architecture and stability of form both Beethoven and Shostakovich employed to contain the enormous intensity of their message.

~ Alexander Vavilov



A Brand New Day

String Quartet

I. Modéré

II. Intermède

III. Finale. Vif

Germaine Tailleferre

(1892—1983)

String Quartet No. 2 in F major, Op. 41 No. 2

I. Allegro vivace

II. Andante quasi variazioni

III. Scherzo. Presto - Trio

IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace

Robert Schumann

(1810—1856)

String Quartet (*World Premiere*)

Kevin Day

(b. 1996)

The world premiere of a new string quartet by the enormously talented Kevin Day marks the official beginning of our exciting five year commissioning project. Kevin has emerged as one of today's most exciting young voices, with recent performances and commissions by the Boston, Houston, New Jersey, and Indianapolis Symphonies, members of the New York Philharmonic, and acclaimed soloists and chamber groups. Supporting the creation of these new works further enriches the incredible chamber music tradition and expands it to better reflect the world we live in today. It is a great honor to spotlight Kevin's unique voice and perspective, and to share it with you first.

But what do you pair with a piece that doesn't yet exist? Kevin's vibrant, lyrical voice inspired us to choose two works that demonstrate the intimacy and power of the string quartet. Germaine Tailleferre's String Quartet and Robert Schumann's String Quartet in F Major are distinctly of their time and place, yet also manage to look both forward and backward.

Born outside Paris in 1892, Germaine Tailleferre was a gifted pianist and composer best known as the sole woman in *Les Six*, a circle of friends and composers encouraged by Jean Cocteau to create a new, avant-garde style of French music to correspond with cubist and surrealist artists like Picasso and André Breton. Her affiliation with the influential artists of *Les Six* illustrates Tailleferre's reputation and excellence, but while she had a long career, she faced many challenges and hardships throughout her life. The optimism of the early years when, for a brief time, she was regarded as an equal to her male peers, quickly passed.

Tailleferre's String Quartet was written in 1919, at the end of the Spanish Flu pandemic and WWI, and expresses a sense of hope after this turbulent time, as well as hints of its horrors... Her voice is expressive and confident, and this work is a beautiful example of her style. The first movement opens with a poetic, almost perfumey texture. To me it evokes the Impressionist ideal of capturing the light of a specific moment, rather than developing and manipulating material. The surprising end of the first movement hints at the playful lilt of the second, and Tailleferre utilizes the colors of the ensemble with great ease and fluency. The third movement takes a sharp turn from the first two — this mercurial tarantella evokes a chaotic sense of darkness and struggle, even a militaristic feel at times. Together, the three short movements serve as a snapshot of a fascinating musical mind at a troubled time.

Robert Schumann's second string quartet reflects his deep study of the string quartets of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, but he too puts his own stamp on the genre, including the temperamental vacillations between sunlight and darkness that permeate so much of his writing. At first glance, this quartet seems lyrical, but underneath that veneer is a sense of unrest. Written in 1842, during Schumann's "year of chamber music," this quartet leans poetic, eschewing some of the formal conventions associated with the string quartet genre, particularly the extensive development of thematic material found in Beethoven's string quartets. Tenderness and quiet longing permeate the work, seemingly a love letter to his beloved Clara. As is so often the case with Schumann, the incredible beauty of this music belies his deep suffering—he was struggling with his physical and mental health as he wrote these gorgeous notes, turning to counterpoint exercises and quartet study to fight his descents into deep depression.

~ Sasha Callahan



A Mirror of Starlight

Diddley Bow

Kenji Bunch
(b. 1973)

Four Marys

Julia Wolfe
(b. 1958)

Be-In for String Quartet and Bass Clarinet in B-flat

Evan Ziporyn
(b.1959)

Clarinet Quintet in A-major, K581

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756—1791)

- I. Allegro
- II. Larghetto
- III. Menuetto
- IV. Allegretto

Guest Artist
Evan Ziporyn, clarinet

Our first piece, *Diddley Bow*, was a seed planted in the fertile soils of the American South. What exactly is a 'diddley bow'? It's a simple one string folk guitar, usually a homemade cigar-box type construction, played with a glass bottle as a slide. As humble as its constituent parts, this instrument is the foundation of what we think of as the crying blues guitar sound - think Stevie Ray Vaughn or B.B. King. In the hands of Kenji Bunch, the sound of the diddley bow blooms into a perfect little gem of a violin duo, in the mold of Bela Bartók's famous forty duets (based on the music of Bartók's own Eastern European roots). To wit, this duo is one installment of a larger project to create an American companion to the famous Bartók set.

Julia Wolfe's *Four Marys* is another work which owes its genesis to an American folk instrument. In her own words: *Four Marys was inspired by my love for the mountain dulcimer, a 3-stringed lap instrument from Appalachia. It is the one string instrument I play. The material is derived from gestures that are characteristic of dulcimer playing – the crying quality of the sliding melody string, the mesmerizing strumming of the drone strings. It is as if I have put a magnifying glass on these sounds to look at them up close and big. The title Four Marys is the name of a Scottish folk tune that I heard Jean Richie sing and play on the mountain dulcimer.* — Julia Wolfe

Be-In, by featured composer and performer Evan Ziporyn, is another work inspired by uniquely American traditions and sounds, this time blending the hippie movement of the 1960's with references to the influential American minimalist work, *In C*, by Terry Riley. The result is groovy, with fun swirls of color and a dark, throbbing grittiness.

Whereas the composers on the first part of our program lift our everyday experiences up from the earth, Mozart seems to use the language of heaven to sing the blues. The late 1780's was for him a time of both incredible difficulty and inspiration. He had already ceased to make public concert appearances, which combined with economic strain of the Austro-Turkish on the patron class, caused great hardship. Add to that what seems to have been an acute depression, and it boggles the mind what he was able to produce, including his opera *Così fan tutte*, his final three symphonies, and this incredible Clarinet Quintet.

The work opens with a transcendent lyricism that puts in motion the character of the whole work. Set in the key of A Major, the strings ring with a warmth that rides on air. The movement is peppered with passages of incredible virtuosity throughout the ensemble, and finally closes with joyous outburst. The middle movements (the second slow and the third a minuet), continue the balance of beautiful moving lines and energetic verve. The Minuet is notable in that it is constructed with an extra trio section - meaning it follows an ABACA form instead of the usual ABA. In the final movement, Mozart passes up the traditional Rondo form for something a little more terrestrial, a theme and set of variations. Some composers looked down on variation sets as simple, perhaps even academic efforts, and here the simplicity might ring partly true. Our theme is brightly chirpy, and in uncharacteristically regular phrase lengths, yet what Mozart draws from it is anything but square. He unfolds a tale of clever twists and turns, one which ultimately races to a seemingly inevitable happy ending.

~ Leo Eguchi



Violinist **Sasha Callahan** has established a vibrant and diverse career as a recitalist, chamber and orchestral musician. She has toured extensively throughout North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia, and is a founding member of Sheffield Chamber Players and the Willamette Valley Chamber Music Festival. Chamber music has been one of Sasha's great loves since she played her first string quartets with her sister Eve and their grandparents. She's particularly interested in projects that bring audiences and performers closer

together to forge connection and community. The Willamette Valley Chamber Music Festival, Sheffield Chamber Players, and the educational string trio All Ears were each formed with this in mind. Sasha is passionate about exploring new music alongside masterpieces of the past, and has worked closely with many composers including Osvaldo Golijov, Joan Tower, Gabriela Lena Frank, Evan Ziporyn, Jessie Montgomery, Kenji Bunch, Lukas Foss, and Gunther Schuller. She can be heard as a member of the Portland (Maine) Symphony, Rhode Island Philharmonic, and New Hampshire Music Festival, as well as with the Boston Pops, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Boston Lyric Opera, Odyssey Opera, and the Boston Ballet Orchestra. Sasha has performed on multiple Grammy nominated and award winning albums, as well as a recent album of string quartets by Gabriela Lena Frank called *Her Own Wings*. She recently served as a faculty mentor to emerging composers at the innovative Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music in California. A native of Portland, Oregon, Sasha received her BM degree in violin performance from Rice University and MM from Boston University. Principal teachers include Lucia Lin, Sergiu Luca, Denes Zsigmondy, and Carol Sindell. She currently resides in Boston with her husband Leo Eguchi, daughter Freya, and a rather sedentary cat named Max.



Boston-based cellist **Leo Eguchi** has been described as "copiously skilled and confident" (New York Times) with performances that were "ravishing" (New Bedford Standard-Times) and "played with passion and vitality" (Boston Music Intellegencer). A native of Michigan, Leo has performed extensively across North America, Europe and Asia. He enjoys an active and multi-faceted performance schedule—Leo can be heard in myriad chamber music settings, including the Willamette Valley Chamber Music Festival (an innovative summer festival in

Oregon Wine Country, which pairs wine and chamber music) and Sheffield Chamber Players; in larger ensembles as principal cellist of the New Bedford Symphony, a member of the Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, the New Hampshire Music Festival and the Portland Symphony; and in frequent appearances with the Boston Pops and Boston Ballet.

A strong advocate of new music, Leo has premiered dozens of pieces by, and worked closely with, many notable composers including William Bolcom, Bright Sheng, George Crumb, Lukas Foss, Joan Tower, Ken Ueno, Yehudi Wyner, Marti Epstein, Nathaniel Stookey, Gabriela Lena Frank, Evan Ziporyn, Ketty Nez, Michael Daugherty, and Kati Agócs. Recent performing highlights include several Grammy nominated recording releases from PARMA Recordings on Navona Records, several concerto appearances, an artist residency and solo performances in Kabul, Afghanistan, and opportunities to share the non-classical stage with the likes of Pete Townshend, Melissa Etheridge, Demi Lovato, Brian Wilson, Kelly Clarkson, C-3PO, Peter Gabriel, Billy Idol, Jennifer Hudson, Nick Jonas, Josh Groban, and Audra McDonald, to name a few. Degrees include BM (Cello Performance) and BS (Physics) cum laude from the University of Michigan, and MM (cello performance) from Boston University, where he received the String Department Award for Excellence.

Leo, along with violinist wife Sasha Callahan and cat-obsessed daughter Freya, live in Boston and spend their non-musical free time appreciating the outdoors, food and wine. Leo has tasted enough obscure wine grapes to earn a Doppel membership in The Wine Century Club.



Raised in Portland, Oregon, **Megumi Stohs Lewis** started playing the violin at age three, but grew up with a dream of studying agricultural science. The summer she turned sixteen, she attended the Olympic Music Festival, held on a beautiful farm in Washington State, and realized that music and the countryside were a perfect combination. Since then, Megumi has soloed with orchestras throughout the US and Japan, and has toured with ensembles throughout Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. Now residing in Boston, she is a co-founder of

A Far Cry Chamber Orchestra; has been a guest with Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, the Radius Ensemble, the Boston Pops, the South Coast Chamber Players and the North Country Chamber Players; and plays regularly with the Aurea Ensemble. Starting in 2008, Megumi picked up the baroque violin and quickly fell for the gut strings and a variety of period bows. This love has led to performances with Boston Baroque, Les Bostonades, and the formation of Antico Moderno, a period instrument ensemble actively commissioning contemporary works. She also loves to fiddle and play rock and has regularly toured with Britain's Jethro Tull. Megumi's primary influences include her teachers Lucy Chapman at the New England Conservatory and Camilla Wicks and Ian Swensen at the San Francisco Conservatory. Especially in chamber music and period performance, Roger Tapping, Phoebe Carrai, Manfredo Kraemer, and Mark Sokol have been significant mentors. Megumi is on the violin, viola, and chamber music faculty at Gordon College in Wenham, MA. She is currently satisfying her longing for agriculture through heirloom vegetable gardening.



Alexander Vavilov's love for chamber music developed during his teens, when his social and musical worlds intertwined as he crammed a few friends into his apartment in Kiev, Ukraine, to read Shostakovich quartets. These sessions, which became a regular occurrence, and his habit of deciphering chamber scores at the piano in the absence of access to recordings, led him to forge his path as a violist and a passionate chamber musician all the way across the Atlantic. Once on U.S. soil, Alexander honed his skills under the tutelage of Patricia

McCarty and, later, Kim Kashkashian, earning various awards and distinctions along the way, such as the 1st prize in ASTA with MSOA competition for string players, a finalist at ASTA national solo competition, and a finalist at the Atlantic Symphony Orchestra concerto competition. His chamber music world never far behind, Alex expanded it vigorously at Tanglewood, Sarasota, Meadowmount and Bowdoin festivals among others. With chamber music tutelage by such renowned figures as James Buswell, Bonnie Hampton, Kim Kashkashian, Patricia McCarty, Rhonda Rider, Joseph Silverstein, Mark Sokol and Roger Tapping, Alexander's voice as a violist and an ensemble player started to get noticed as he won guest artist awards resulting in chamber music performances alongside luminaries such as James Buswell, Ronald Leonard, Barbara Westphal and the Borromeo Quartet.

Today Alexander's schedule is happily filled with dozens of chamber music performances as a founding member of Sheffield Chamber Players and a core member of Ensemble/Parallax. Creating intense musical experiences in the intimacy of a home with the former, and performing cutting-edge contemporary chamber music with the latter, Alexander has additionally performed with a variety of chamber groups in the Boston area and was invited to perform chamber music with faculty at the 150th anniversary of the Boston Conservatory gala at Symphony Hall. The sound of his viola has often filled the spaces of Symphony Hall, Carnegie Hall, Jordan Hall and others, and can also be heard on the Carl Fischer and BMOP/sound recording labels. As an orchestra musician, Alexander regularly performs with Odyssey Opera, Portland Symphony, BMOP and Boston Pops, and was a principal violist of Atlantic Symphony for 8 years. He is also on faculty at the Winchester Community Music School. Alexander performs on a 2012 Thomas Bertrand viola and a H.R. Pfretzschner bow. Residing in Lynn with his wife Olga Talroze and his quirky orange tabby Julie, Alexander's wide scope of non-musical interests include inline skating, sourdough bread making and mushroom foraging.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following individuals and organizations for their generosity during the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. Thank you for helping us bring music home!

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