Stefan Jackiw, Violin, and Kevin Ahfat, Piano
New Orleans Friends of Music, Wednesday, November 18, 2026

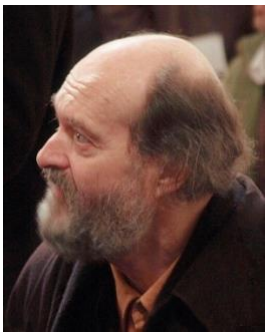
PROGRAM

Fratres	Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)
Sonata in D Major (HWV 371) Affetuoso Allegro	George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)
Violin Sonata #2 in D Major (Op. 94a) Moderato Presto Andante Allegro con brio	Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)
Intermission	
Violin Sonata in E-flat Major (Op. 18) Allegro ma non troppo Improvisation: Andante cantabile Finale: Andante; Allegro	Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

PROGRAM NOTES
by Marc Loudon

Board member Marc Loudon provides these program notes that are published on the *Friends of Music* web site at least one week prior to performance. These notes are more extensive than those in the program, which are limited by space. The YouTube performances cited in these notes are in some cases preceded and/or interrupted by commercial messages. Listeners can sometimes avoid these by clicking on the "Skip" link in the ad. You can also subscribe to YouTube Premium to avoid the ads completely.

Fratres, written in 1977, is one of the most performed works of Estonian composer **Arvo Pärt.** His work was unofficially censured following his 1968 work *Credo*, which was banned by the Soviets because of its religious theme. For the next eight years he composed very little, focusing instead on the study of medieval and Renaissance music to find his new musical language. Pärt reemerged as a composer in 1976 with music in his new *tintinnabuli* compositional style and technique. The name *Fratres* derives from Pärt's interest in Gregorian chant sung by a monastic brotherhood, and by the fact that it can be performed by a "brotherhood" of different instrumental combinations.



The term *tintinnabuli* (from the Latin word *tintinnabulum,* little bell) refers to the overtones produced by the ringing of little bells. In *Fratres,* we hear three main voices: a drone in the bass of the piano; a simple, stepwise melody in the midrange of the piano; and the bell-like embellishment of the melody using notes from the chords of the melody. It
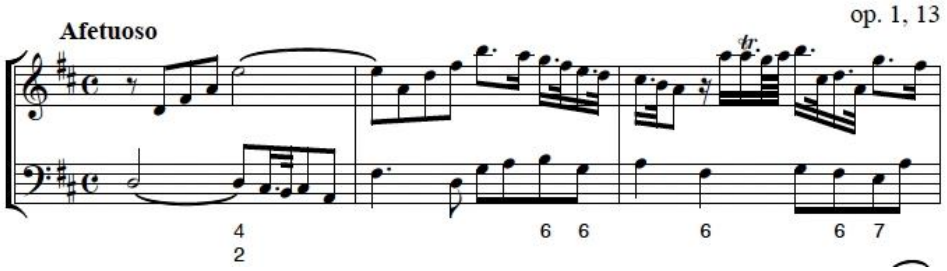
has been described as a "mesmerizing set of variations on a six-bar theme combining frantic activity and sublime stillness." The violin introduces us to the tones of the bells with a long series of rapid arpeggios (broken chords), after which we hear the piano establishing the drone using the lowest note of the instrument and the fifth above. There follow six measures consisting of two three-measure units in, respectively, **7/4, 9/4,** and **11/4** in which the piano plays the simple melody over the drone and the violin provides a tintinnabulanical variation. The violin's variation uses only notes found in the chords of the theme, as if we are hearing overtones from the striking of a bell. This pattern—drone and six-measure elaboration—is repeated several times with the violin providing a different variation with each repetition.

The following recording of *Fratres* features violinist Gidon Kremer and pianist Keith Jarrett.

Fratres by Arvo Pärt

George Frideric Handel is best known to most concertgoers for his oratorios, such as *Messiah* and *Solomon.* However, Handel left us with a significant body of instrumental music— concerti grossi, organ concertos, and, as tonight's program illustrates, his violin sonatas. Handel allegedly wrote most of his six violin sonatas in the 1720–1730 period, but the "Great D Major" sonata (as this one is sometimes called) was written around 1750, and is one of his last—if not, his very last—chamber works. Handel's authorship of some of the violin sonatas has been questioned, but his authorship of the D-major sonata is unquestioned because of the existence of an authentic 1750 manuscript that survives today. Although history typically portrays Handel as an organist and orchestra/chorus/opera director, he was an accomplished violinist; so, it is not surprising that he wrote violin sonatas.

In Handel's day—and in modern authentic baroque performances—the violin sonata would be performed by the violin soloist, a cello (or viola da gamba) player, and a harpsichordist. The cellist plays the bass line and the harpsichordist fills in the chordal and rhythmic structure using a numerical code called *figured bass.* Here is how the first line of the sonata looks in Handel's notation:



The top line is played by the soloist and the lower line by the cellist. The harpsichordist also plays the bass line and fills in the chords, which are prescribed by the numbers below the lower line. Where there are no numbers, the chords are "obvious" to the experienced player. (The bass line and the chords are known as *basso continuo.*) The harpsichordist is free to improvise as long as he or she uses the designated chords. This role is not unlike that of a modern jazz pianist who provides rhythmic improvisation within a harmonic framework specified on a jazz "lead sheet." Another aspect of baroque performance is the use of little or no vibrato by the string players. Tonight's performance, of course, utilizes a modern piano and modern violin; the pianist is responsible for the bass line and the harmony, and the pianist's part is written out (or "realized") by an editor. It is a testament to Handel's genius and universal appeal that his music transports

well to modern instruments and performance practice, but the sound is very different from what Handel heard.

The D-major sonata consists of four movements, and we hear tonight the first two of these. The first movement is marked *Affetuoso* (affectionately). A remarkable aspect of this movement is that in the opening notes, the expected top D of a D-major chord is replaced by an E; in the very next measure, the notes of the same chord (in a second inversion) also end with the ninth rather than the octave. (See the example above.) The *Allegro* movement is a jolly two-part fugue between the violinist and the bass line at the interval of a lower twelfth.

Handel was a great recycler of tunes, in many cases, his own. The *Allegro* of the sonata is the basis of the double fugue in the opening second-act chorus of Handel's oratorio *Solomon.* (See the performance excerpts below.) Because these were composed at about the same time, it is not totally clear which came first.

Here is a performance of the Handel D-major sonata by Chamber Music of Lincoln Center with a harpsichordist and cellist providing the basso continuo. The violinist and cellist are playing modern instruments with modern performance practice.

Violin/Harpsichord/Cello Performance of the D-Major Sonata

Here is a modern performance of the sonata with Maxim Vengerov, violin, and Patrice Lare, piano.

Violin/Piano Performance of the D-Major Sonata

Here is a performance of the double fugue in the opening chorus of the second act of *Solomon,* in which Handel uses the same idea used in the second movement of the D-Major sonata. The performance is by the great Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists directed by John Eliot Gardiner.

Opening Chorus of *Solomon* Second Act

Sergei Prokofiev initially composed the **Sonata in D Major** in 1942 under the harsh World War II conditions that forced the composer to flee temporarily from Moscow to Alma-Ata (Almaty) and Molotov (today Perm). Completion of a new work, which Prokofiev described as "a sonata in a gentle, flowing, classical style," was originally planned for December 1942, but not until the following summer was he able to complete the work—a D-major flute sonata. After Prokofiev returned to Moscow at the end of 1943, he began to rework the solo flute part for violin at the suggestion of, and in collaboration with, the legendary violinist David Oistrakh. This sonata version (labeled Opus 94a) was premiered in Moscow on 17 June 1944. (The flute version, Op. 94, had already had its premiere on 7 December 1943).

The expansive melody which opens the first movement (*Moderato*) gives us a sense of this shimmering classicism. The second movement (*Scherzo: Presto*) is filled with wild scales and bitingly sarcastic dialogue between both instruments, alternating with a plaintive and exotic slower section which evokes Russian folk music. The third movement (*Andante*) pulls us into a dreamy impressionistic soundscape. A melody that begins with a Mozartean grace wanders harmonically into distant spaces. The final movement (*Allegro con brio*) explodes with bold jubilance. One of the most magical qualities of this movement is not only the range of contrasting "places" we visit, but how we get back to the original theme of the movement, which finally appears with renewed vigor.

The following link leads to a 2018 performance of the Prokofiev Violin Sonata No. 2 by Francesca Dego and Francesca Leonard.

Prokofiev Violin Sonata No. 2

Richard Strauss, although known today mainly for his operas and tone poems, was an accomplished violinist and pianist, as the virtuosity required to play the **Violin Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major** illustrates. Strauss was only 23 years old when he composed this sonata in 1887, but he had already completed two symphonies, two concertos, two piano trios, a piano quartet, a string quartet, a cello sonata, and dozens of songs. The performance of this sonata demands high technical prowess from both players; it is unquestionably a technical *tour de force.*

During his early years, Strauss took Schumann and Mendelssohn as his models. This sonata falls at the end of this period, at a time when Strauss was starting to come under the influence of the new tonalities of Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner. The noble fanfare that introduces the first movement sets the tone of both this movement and forecasts the opening of *Der Heldenleben,* the massive tone-poem (also in E-flat major) that Strauss composed only one year later. After this initial flourish, we hear the main theme—a romantic, almost heroic, melody. The second movement starts with a nocturne-like theme. Some have hypothesized that this theme is a love song inspired by soprano Pauline de Ahna, whom Strauss had just met, with whom he performed in recitals, and who was to become his wife. The tranquility of this theme is interrupted by turbulent outbursts, the first of which is marked *appassionato*—with passion. The final movement again brings back heroic fanfares. As the *Allegro* section of this movement opens, listen for the sequence of chords in the piano that forecasts the fanfare that opera lovers recognize as the stirring orchestral accompaniment for the presentation of the silver rose in Strauss's beloved opera *Der Rosenkavalier,* which was composed 23 years later. The same sequence in the piano occurs 12 bars from the end.

The following link leads to a performance of the sonata by violinist Stefan Jackiw and pianist Jun Cho.

Strauss Violin Sonata No. 2 by Stefan Jackiw and Jun Cho