



ARTIST
SERIES

BÉLA FLECK
and
BROOKLYN RIDER

Jan. 20, 2018

CU ★ PRESENTS

Béla Fleck

banjo

and

Brooklyn Rider

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

Colin Jacobsen, violin

Nicholas Cords, viola

Michael Nicolas, cello

Program

Program to be announced from the stage.

Includes one intermission.

Program to Include:

Night Flight Over Water (2012)

Tumbledown Creek

Hunter's Moon

The Escape

Béla Fleck

(b. 1958)

The Landing

Béla Fleck

Griff

Béla Fleck

Next

Béla Fleck

Brooklesca

Colin Jacobsen

(b. 1978)

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Program Notes

Night Flight Over Water

Béla Fleck

Perhaps this piece is about an escape after having being found out, and ejected from high society? Maybe the banjo player even stole something on the way out, so there is a hot pursuit? At any rate, I had survived the premiere of “The Imposter” and found a record label that was interested in putting it out. The concerto was 36 minutes long. What would inhabit the rest of the CD? I had some discussions with various friends, including Alexander Buhr from Universal Music, violinist Hilary Hahn and my manager, David Bendett. Of all my proposed ideas, which included composing solo banjo sonatas, percussion pieces and duets with classical players, the one that had the most resonance to me was the idea of writing for banjo and string quartet. I knew this was a great untapped combination from the years of listening to my cellist stepfather Joe Paladino playing chamber music, and also from a piece Edgar and I wrote together back in the early 1980s for the Blair String Quartet.

Now I needed to figure out whom I was writing this piece for. I asked around about the string quartet Brooklyn Rider, whom I was told about by Neil Benson, my new classical agent at Opus 3. The reaction was very positive from everyone I asked—these guys are really good at new music and have a youthful sensibility that would make a lot of sense on a piece that likely would have many influences from outside of classical music. I listened to their music and really enjoyed and respected their work. They were intrigued by the idea too—so it was on! I started out writing “Night Flight Over Water” by composing a dozen or so sketches. I took these up north and Brooklyn Rider and I read through them together. The idea was that the ones that really worked out for this combination were the ones I would use to build the piece. Unfortunately, these guys were so good that they made everything I had come up with sound amazing, so it was very hard to figure out what not to use. The good part is that now I knew that I could write virtually anything, and they would be able to make it come alive.

So I dug in and wrote the piece. At this point the Flecktones were on hiatus and I was touring Europe with the Malian songbird Oumou Sangare, playing jazz festivals and touring with pianist Marcus Roberts. I had a couple of periods to isolate and write. One was in Amsterdam before the Oumou tour started, and the other was in Copenhagen. I did find myself enjoying writing on my computer with headphones, in restaurants, coffee joints and parks. Something

about watching people and maybe being a little distracted by the movement and humanity seemed to unlock my unconscious mind. We workshopped the piece in August of 2012 in Stillwater, Minnesota. Workshopping it in this case meant doing several days of work rehearsing the piece followed by an informal performance. At the end of this, I was able to study what we had done, make some final adjustments and be ready for the recording in Pittsboro, North Carolina, in November of 2012. Emil Kang at Carolina Performing Arts helped us to connect with Michael and Amy Tieman at Manifold Studios, and we did an informal performance there before we began the recording process. This really helped us to feel the arc of the music and give it a live feel in the studio.

—Béla Fleck

This piece was commissioned by Clowes Memorial Hall of Butler University in honor of their 50th anniversary.

Griff

Béla Fleck

Brooklyn Rider and I have a sweet relationship. I wrote a piece for them to go with “The Imposter” and we ended up doing a lot of touring together and becoming family. So when I was deciding what to pair with “Juno Concerto,” I thought about the music I had written to play with them that was unrecorded. There was a piece called “Griff,” which was a working title because the piece was based on a G riff. The title stuck. “Griff” was a through-composed piece, also mostly written when Juno and Abby were asleep in the early days. Brooklyn Rider and I were going on tour, and we needed more material to fill out the show. I wrote in an unhurried, almost improvised fashion at times, trying to do better at expanding one idea, rather than relying on several melodies to sustain interest in a composition. It turned into a strong live performance vehicle for the group, as did another piece I co-created back in 1984 with my great friend and mentor Edgar Meyer. We were commissioned by the Metro Arts Council to create a quintet I could play with the Blair String Quartet at a large outdoor event in Nashville called Summer Lights. We called it Quintet for Banjo and Strings. This four-movement work was later performed on the “Lonesome Pine Special,” on the same episode where the Flecktones made their debut. It was Edgar’s and my first composing collaboration and my first classical-oriented endeavor. But somehow it never got recorded.

—Béla Fleck



Photo by Erin Baiano

Biographies

Béla Fleck

Just in case you aren't familiar with Béla Fleck, there are some who say he's the world's premier banjo player. Others claim that Béla has virtually reinvented the image and the sound of the banjo through a remarkable performing and recording career that has taken him all over the musical map and on a range of solo projects and collaborations. If you are familiar with Béla, you know that he just loves to play the banjo and put it into unique settings.

The 15-time Grammy Award winner has been nominated in more categories than any other artist in Grammy history and remains a powerfully creative force globally in bluegrass, jazz, classical, pop, rock and world beat. Most recently, Béla and Abigail Washburn took home the 2016 Grammy for best folk album. In 2009, Béla produced the award-winning documentary and recordings "Throw Down Your Heart," in which he journeyed across Africa to research the origins of the banjo. In 2011, Fleck premiered "The Imposter" with the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, an unprecedented banjo concerto, followed by the companion documentary "How to Write a Banjo Concerto." In 2016, Béla unveiled his second concerto "Juno" with the Canton Symphony Orchestra.

Any world-class musician born with the names Béla (for Bartók), Anton (for Dvořák) and Leoš (for Janáček) would seem destined to play classical music. Fleck made the classical connection with "Perpetual Motion," his critically acclaimed 2001 Sony Classical recording that went on to win a pair of Grammys, including best classical crossover album, in the 44th annual Grammy Awards. Collaborating with Fleck on "Perpetual Motion" was his long time friend and colleague Edgar Meyer, a bassist and acclaimed composer whose virtuosity defies labels. Béla and Edgar co-wrote and performed a double concerto for banjo, bass and the Nashville Symphony, which debuted in November 2003. They also co-wrote a triple concerto for banjo, bass and tabla with world-renowned tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain titled "The Melody of Rhythm."

These days, Fleck bounces between various intriguing touring situations: He performs his concerto worldwide with symphonies, collaborates in a duo with Chick Corea and is in a trio with Zakir Hussain and Edgar Meyer. He performs in concert with the Brooklyn Rider string quartet, in banjo duet with his wife Abigail Washburn, in banjo and mandolin duet with Chris Thile, and goes back to bluegrass with his old friends Sam Bush, Jerry Douglas, Stuart Duncan, Bryan Sutton and others. He collaborates with African artists such as Oumou Sangare and Toumani Diabate, in a jazz setting with The Marcus Roberts Trio, and in his own band Béla Fleck and the Flecktones, who continue to perform together 25 years after the group's inception.

Brooklyn Rider

“They are four classical musicians performing with the energy of young rock stars jamming on their guitars, a Beethoven-goes-indie foray into making classical music accessible but also celebrating why it was good in the first place.”

—Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Hailed as “the future of chamber music” (Strings), the veteran string quartet Brooklyn Rider presents eclectic repertoire and gripping performances that continue to draw rave reviews from classical, world music and rock critics alike. NPR credits Brooklyn Rider with “recreating the 300-year-old form of string quartet as a vital and creative 21st-century ensemble.”

To start the 2017–18 season, Brooklyn Rider released “Spontaneous Symbols” in October on Johnny Gandelsman’s In a Circle Records label. The album features new quartet music by Tyondai Braxton, Evan Ziporyn, Paula Matthusen, Kyle Sanna and Brooklyn Rider violinist Colin Jacobsen. To mark the release, the group toured the northeast, with stops in New York and Boston, performing music from the new album. Works from that recording by Braxton, Ziporyn and Jacobsen were also featured in live performance for “Some of a Thousand Words,” the ensemble’s recent collaboration with choreographer Brian Brooks and former New York City Ballet prima ballerina Wendy Whelan. An intimate series of duets and solos in which the quartet’s live onstage music is a dynamic and central creative component, “Some of a Thousand Words” was featured at the 2016 Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival before a U.S. tour the following spring, including a week-long run at New York’s Joyce Theater. This season, the quartet reunites with Whelan and Brooks for a second North American tour. They also team up with incomparable banjoist Béla Fleck — with whom they appeared on two different albums, 2017’s “Juno Concerto” and 2013’s “The Imposter” — for concerts in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Colorado and Montana. Also in the spring, Brooklyn Rider partners with two instrumentalists who are at the forefront of their respective genres, jazz saxophonist Joshua Redman and Irish fiddle master Martin Hayes. The tours with Redman and Hayes are the product of multi-season collaborations that will continue beyond the spring and will include new recordings with both artists. Balancing these collaborations is a full schedule of quartet performances across the U.S., as well as in the U.K., Sweden and Germany.

During the 2016–17 season, Brooklyn Rider released an album titled “so many things” on Naïve Records with Swedish mezzo soprano Anne Sofie von Otter, comprising music by Colin Jacobsen, Caroline Shaw, John Adams, Nico Muhly, Björk, Sting, Kate Bush and Elvis Costello, among others. The group toured material from the album and more with von Otter in the U.S. and Europe, including stops at Carnegie Hall and the Opernhaus Zürich. Additionally, Brooklyn Rider performed Philip Glass’ String Quartet No. 7, furthering a relationship with the iconic American composer which began with 2011’s much-praised “Brooklyn Rider Plays Philip Glass” and will continue with the upcoming album release of Glass’ recent quartets on the composer’s Orange Mountain Music label.

In 2015, the group celebrated its 10th anniversary with the groundbreaking multi-disciplinary project “Brooklyn Rider Almanac,” for which it recorded and toured 15 specially commissioned works, each inspired by a different artistic muse. Other recording projects include the quartet’s eclectic debut recording in 2008, “Passport,” followed by “Dominant Curve” in 2010, “Seven Steps” in 2012 and “A Walking Fire” in 2013. In 2016, they released “The Fiction Issue” with singer-songwriter Gabriel Kahane, with the title track a Kahane composition that was premiered in 2012 at Carnegie Hall by Kahane, Brooklyn Rider and Shara Worden. A long-standing relationship between Brooklyn Rider and Iranian kamancheh player Kayhan Kalhor resulted in the much-praised 2008 recording “Silent City.”

brooklynrider.com

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Lila Downs

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