

Friday, May 4, 2018, 8pm  
First Congregational Church

## Leif Ove Andsnes, *piano*

### PROGRAM

Carl NIELSEN (1865–1931) Chaconne, Op. 32

Jean SIBELIUS (1865–1957) Selected Works  
The Birch, Op. 75, No. 4  
Impromptu, Op. 97, No. 5  
Rondino II, Op. 68, No. 2  
Der Hirt, Op. 58, No. 4  
Romance in D-flat Major, Op. 24, No. 9

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2, *Tempest*  
Largo – Allegro  
Adagio  
Allegretto

### INTERMISSION

Franz SCHUBERT (1797–1828) Two Scherzos, D. 593  
No. 1 in B-flat Major  
No. 2 in D-flat Major

Jörg WIDMANN (b. 1973) *Idyll and Abyss (Six Schubert Reminiscences)*  
Unreal, as if from afar  
Allegretto un poco agitato  
Quarter-note = 40 (like a lullaby)  
Scherzando  
Quarter-note = 50  
Mournful, desolate

SCHUBERT Three Piano Pieces, D. 946  
No. 1 in E-flat minor:  
Allegro assai – Andante – Tempo I  
No. 2 in E-flat Major: Allegretto  
No. 3 in C Major: Allegro

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsors Gail and Daniel Rubinfeld.*

*Major support provided by The Bernard Osher Foundation.*

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### Carl Nielsen Chaconne, Op. 32

Though Carl Nielsen is primarily known for his masterful symphonies and concertos, he also produced a small but characteristic body of music for the piano. His early keyboard compositions, all written before the turn of the 20th century, comprise three trifling *morceaux* (Five Pieces [Op. 3, 1890], *Humoreske-bagateller* [Op. 22, 1897], and *Fest-praeludium* [Op. 24, 1900]) and the more substantial Symphonic Suite (Op. 19, 1894), in which he attempted to sort through the keyboard idioms of the late 19th century (especially that of Brahms) in helping to forge his individual style. He did not write again for the piano until 1916, the year he was appointed professor of theory and composition at the Copenhagen Conservatory, when he created the Chaconne (Op. 32) and Theme and Variations (Op. 40), works that confirm the mastery of form, contrapuntal skill, advanced harmonic idiom, and dramatic utterance evidenced by his epic Symphony No. 4 (*The Inextinguishable*), premiered on February 1, 1916. Three years later Nielsen wrote the formidable Suite, Op. 45 for Artur Schnabel. It is his greatest piano work, controlled by an over-arching tonal plan rivaling the architectonic marvels of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies and realized with a brilliant and uncompromising unconventionality inspired by the spirit of Beethoven's late sonatas. In 1928, Nielsen produced the Three Pieces, Op. 59, which show the influence of both French Impressionism and Schoenbergian atonality. His last piano work, created only months before his death in 1931, was the *Piano Music for Young and Old: 24 Five-Tone Little Pieces in All Keys*, Op. 53, which was written in response to the Danish Music Teaching Association's call for up-to-date music that could be used for instructional purposes.

The *chaconne* is an ancient variations form in which a short chord pattern is decorated with changing figurations and elaborations as it is continuously repeated. It had largely become extinct by the time of Johann Sebastian Bach, though his single example of the genre—the finale of the Partita No. 2 in D minor for Unaccompanied Violin (BWV 1004)—is the great-

est such work ever written. (Brahms revived the form for the finale of his Fourth Symphony of 1885.) Nielsen chose Bach's Chaconne as the inspiration and model for his eponymous work, composed in the summer of 1916. Nielsen's Chaconne consists of 20 brief variations founded upon the archaic, Dorian mode theme given at the outset. The work, characterized by what the composer's British biographer Robert Simpson called "a blend of Bach-like contrapuntal feeling with a powerful dramatic impulse," maintains its somber demeanor until the closing measures, when a luminous D-Major coda allows the Chaconne to close in a mood of tranquil beauty.

### Jean Sibelius Selected Works

Though Sibelius' symphonies, tone poems, and incidental music provide the core of his creative legacy and anchor his reputation, they are complemented in his creative output by a sizeable body of works in more intimate genres: songs, choral numbers, chamber music (mostly early, but with a fine string quartet, *Voces Intimae*, dating from 1909), many small pieces for violin and piano, organ works, and some 150 compositions for solo piano written throughout his creative life. Though most of the piano pieces are pleasing, finely crafted miniatures with such evocative titles as "Rêverie," "Danse Pastorale," "The Lonely Fir," "The Fiddler," and "Winter Scene," there are also a number of more substantial works, most notably *Kyllikki*, Op. 41 (1904, "Three Lyric Pieces" inspired by the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*); Sonata in F Major, Op. 12 (1893); Two Rondinos, Op. 68 (1911); and Three Sonatinas, Op. 67 (1912).

Sibelius composed the set of five short pieces comprising his Op. 75 in autumn 1914, a few months after he returned home following his only visit to America. He made the trip at the invitation of Carl Stoeckel, a magnanimous patron of the arts who was using his fortune to operate a summer music festival of the highest quality on the grounds of his country mansion in Norfolk, Connecticut. Sibelius conducted the incidental music to *King Kristian II*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, *Finlandia*, and *Valse Triste* on

the June 6th program, and also premiered the tone poem *The Oceanides*, written for the occasion. (“I was surrounded with everything that the luxury of the American upper classes had to offer,” Sibelius, who also received an honorary degree from Yale University before he left, recalled of his stay with the StoECKels. “I have never, before or after, lived such a wonderful life.”) Each of the Five Pieces, Op. 75 references a tree: “When the Rowan Blossoms,” “The Lonely Fir,” “The Aspen,” “The Birch,” “The Spruce.” “The Birch” is based on a folkish melody adapted from a theme in *The Oceanides*, treated first in a rustic manner, with a plain presentation and a drone-like accompaniment, and then given a rustling, almost dreamy setting.

Likewise, each of the Six Bagatelles, Op. 97, dating from 1920, has an evocative title: “Humoreske I,” “Lied” (“Song”), “Kleiner Walzer” (“Little Waltz”), “Humoristischer Marsch,” Impromptu, “Humoreske II.” The Impromptu, a wistful reverie, is lyrical and gentle.

The Two Rondinos, Op. 68 were written in November 1912, when Sibelius claimed to be in a creative lull, “a period of expectation,” he called it. (The Fourth Symphony had premiered more than a year earlier; the Fifth needed another three years of gestation.) A few months earlier, his publisher, Universal Edition in Vienna, had encouraged him to write “primarily piano music, rather than excessively large-scale [i.e., less saleable] chamber and orchestral music.” Since Sibelius and his wife, Aino (he named their home Ainola after her), were then raising five daughters (the oldest was 19 in 1912) and he was still years away from financial security, he composed Three Sonatinas (Op. 67) and Two Rondinos (Op. 68) for quick publication early the next year. The Rondino II, as suggested by its “Little Rondo” title, is based on a recurring theme given a distinctive music-box setting.

“Der Hirt” (“The Shepherd”), Op. 58, No. 4 (1912) suggests its outdoorsy title with some open-interval, Alphorn-like gestures at the outset before portraying a swain with a buoyant, dancing nature.

Sibelius composed the 10 movements of Op. 24 at various times between 1895 and 1902

and only grouped them together for their publication in 1904. The Romance in D-flat Major was written in 1900, between the First and Second Symphonies, and, like those works, assimilates 19th-century traditions into his personal idiom. The Romance, based on a melody composed in 1897 as a Christmas gift for his brother-in-law Eero Järnefelt, follows the three-part form familiar from the character pieces of Schumann and Chopin, with the lovely outer sections framing a central episode of more intense expression that climaxes with a surprising flamboyant cadenza.

**Ludwig van Beethoven**  
**Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2,**  
*Tempest*

In the summer of 1802, Beethoven’s physician ordered him to leave Vienna and take rooms in Heiligenstadt, today a friendly suburb at the northern terminus of the city’s subway system, but two centuries ago a quiet village with a view of the Danube across the river’s rich flood plain. It was three years earlier, in 1799, that Beethoven first noticed a disturbing ringing and buzzing in his ears, and he sought medical attention for the problem soon thereafter. He tried numerous cures for his malady, as well as for his chronic colic, including oil of almonds, hot and cold baths, soaking in the Danube, pills, and herbs. For a short time he even considered the modish treatment of electric shock. On the advice of his latest doctor, Beethoven left the noisy city for the quiet countryside with the assurance that the lack of stimulation would be beneficial to his hearing and his general health.

In Heiligenstadt, Beethoven virtually lived the life of a hermit, seeing only his doctor and a young student named Ferdinand Ries. In 1802 he was still a full decade from being totally deaf. The acuity of his hearing varied from day to day (sometimes governed by his interest—or lack thereof—in the surrounding conversation), but he had largely lost his ability to hear soft sounds by that time, and loud noises caused him pain. Of one of their walks in the country, Ries reported, “I called his attention to a shepherd who was piping very agreeably in the woods on a flute made of a twig of elder. For half an hour,

Beethoven could hear nothing, and though I assured him that it was the same with me (which was not the case), he became extremely quiet and morose. When he occasionally seemed to be merry, it was generally to the extreme of boisterousness; but this happens seldom." In addition to the distress over his health, Beethoven was also wounded in 1802 by the wreck of an affair of the heart. He had proposed marriage to Giulietta Guicciardi (the thought of Beethoven as a husband threatens the moorings of one's presence of mind!), but had been denied permission by the girl's father for the then perfectly valid reason that the young composer was without rank, position, or fortune. Faced with the extinction of a musician's most precious faculty, fighting a constant digestive distress, and unsuccessful in love, it is little wonder that Beethoven was sorely vexed.

On October 6, 1802, following several months of wrestling with his misfortunes, Beethoven penned the most famous letter ever written by a musician—the "Heiligenstadt Testament." Intended as a will written to his brothers (it was never sent, though he kept it in his papers to be found after his death), it is a cry of despair over his fate, perhaps a necessary and self-induced soul-cleansing in those pre-Freudian days. "O Providence—grant me at last but one day of pure joy—it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart," he lamented. But—and this is the miracle—he not only poured his energy into self-pity, he also channeled it into music. "I shall grapple with fate; it shall never pull me down," he resolved. The next five years were the most productive he ever knew. "I live only in my music," Beethoven wrote, "and I have scarcely begun one thing when I start another." The Symphonies Nos. 2–5, a dozen piano sonatas, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Triple Concerto, *Fidelio*, many songs, chamber works, and keyboard compositions were all composed between 1802 and 1806.

The Op. 31 piano sonatas that Beethoven completed during the summer of 1802 in Heiligenstadt stand at the threshold of a new creative language, the dynamic and dramatic musical speech that characterizes the creations of his so-called "second period." The D-minor

Sonata, the second of the Op. 31 set, is one of the most personal works of that crucial time. When Anton Schindler asked him in later years about the "meaning" of the sonata, he was told to "go and read Shakespeare's *Tempest*," a comment that has caused scholars to seek elaborate literary programs among the notes. Though the work bursts with strong emotion and musical drama, there is no specific program here but rather the forceful and immediate communication of ineffable states of mind and feeling. "The Sonata *means* music," wrote Friedrich Kerst, "but it means music that is an expression of one of those psychological struggles that Beethoven felt called upon more and more to delineate as he was more and more shut out from the companionship of the external world. Such struggles are in the truest sense of the word 'tempests.'"

The struggle inherent in the D-minor Sonata is joined immediately at the outset with a composite main theme that juxtaposes two starkly contrasted musical gestures: an arpeggio (on the dominant chord) that is almost motionless in its quiet stillness; and an agitated motive of swift melodic and harmonic rhythm. These two ideas are presented again in alternation before the swift motive and a secondary idea in longer rhythmic values achieve dominance during the remainder of the exposition. The slow arpeggio returns to serve as the gateway to both the development section and the recapitulation. Of the Adagio that follows, Harold Truscott noted, "There are few movements in the whole of Beethoven's piano music in which he employs so great a range of nuance, or where every note counts to such an extent." The movement, disposed in sonatina form (sonata without a development section), is introspective and almost hymnal in character, though there courses throughout it an uneasiness, a certain nameless melancholy that invests the music with an expansiveness of expression such as few others than Beethoven could have achieved. The finale, yet another sonata form, is a *moto perpetuo* obsessed with the rippling figuration that opens the movement. "[The movement] is frozen in its grief," wrote Truscott, "and such grief is either incapable of thought at all or it revolves round one thing—as this movement does."

## Franz Schubert

### Two Scherzos, D. 593

Schubert started composing for piano in 1811, when he was 14 years old. His first efforts were modest, mostly fugues and variations he wrote as exercises when he was a choirboy at the court chapel in Vienna and a student in its school. He also composed his first song there, in March 1811, “Hagar’s Klage” (D. 5, “Hagar’s Lament,” to a poem by Clemens August Schücking that was not an obvious choice for a teenage composer: “Here on a hill of hot sand/I sit, and near me/Lies my dying child,/Yearns for a drop of water,/Yearns and struggles with death,/ Cries and looks with staring eyes/At me, his distressed mother.” (His discernment in poetry matured quickly.) After Schubert left the school in 1813, he wrote a lot of minuets, *Ländler*, waltzes, and ecossaises with which he entertained his friends and accompanied their dancing. It was not until 1817, when he was 20, that he finally braved the serious genre of the piano sonata, and then the music poured out of him—he composed seven of them between March and August and still had enough ideas left over to write two independent Scherzos in November (D. 593). (Perhaps not incidentally, he was setting Goethe by then: “Gesang der Geister über den Wassern,” D. 583.) Despite their small scale and ambition, these pieces are really a microcosm of Schubert’s unique genius, infusing a traditional and fully worked out instrumental form with his incomparable sense of melody and his love of dance.

## Jörg Widmann

### *Idyll and Abyss (Six Schubert Reminiscences)*

German composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann was born in Munich in 1973 and studied clarinet with Gerd Starke at the Hochschule für Musik in Munich and with Charles Neidich at the Juilliard School in New York. After winning the Carl Maria von Weber Competition, Competition of German Music Colleges, and Bavarian State Prize for Young Artists, Widmann was appointed professor of clarinet at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg in 2001; he continues to be recognized as one of his generation’s finest clarinetists. Widmann’s parallel

interest in composition began when he started lessons with Kay Westermann in Munich at age 11, and continued with his studies with Hans Werner Henze, Wilfried Hiller, and Wolfgang Rihm; in 2009, he was also named to the Freiburg Hochschule’s composition faculty. Widmann’s residencies include those with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, German Radio Orchestra of Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern, Cleveland Orchestra, Salzburg Festival, Lucerne Festival, Cologne Philharmonic, Vienna Konzerthaus, Oxford Chamber Music Festival, Dortmund Konzerthaus, Essen Philharmonic and Heidelberg Spring Festival. Among his many distinctions as a composer are the Stoeger Prize of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Arnold Schoenberg Medal, Belmont Award for Contemporary Music of the Forberg-Schneider Foundation, Schneider-Schott Music Award, Honorary Award of the Munich Opera Festival, Paul Hindemith Prize, Ernst von Siemens Foundation Encouragement Award, Composition Award of the Berlin Philharmonic Academy, and Kaske Foundation Music Award, and election to membership in the Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin, Bavarian Academy of the Fine Arts, Free Academy of the Arts in Hamburg, and German Academy of the Dramatic Arts. Widmann’s creative output includes a large number of chamber compositions (many featuring clarinet), the 2003 opera *Das Gesicht im Spiegel (The Face in the Mirror)*, and other music-theater works, and several large-scale orchestral scores.

Widmann wrote of his *Idyll and Abyss (Six Schubert Reminiscences)* of 2009, part of a trilogy in which he also paid homage to Robert Schumann (*Eleven Humoresques*) and Johannes Brahms (*Intermezzi*), “‘On hearing Schubert’s music, tears pour out of the eyes without ever having moved the soul, so literally and real does his music enter us.’ This statement from 1928 by the influential German philosopher and musicologist Theodor Adorno captures the essential phenomenon of Schubert’s music. In my compositions in homage to Schubert, the *Lied für Orchester* (2003, rev. 2009), Octet (2004), and now these six brief piano pieces, my objective is to capture in my own personal fashion

this constantly precarious flight between heaven and hell, paradise and the very depths of anxiety, between idyll and abyss.” The *Reminiscences* range from ethereal to angry, from playful to tragic, with tone clusters in the penultimate movement that may be intended to evoke “the abyss” answered by the sense of loss in the finale, which quotes Schubert’s transcendent Sonata in B-flat Major, his last work for piano.

Pianist Shai Wosner said of *Idyll and Abyss*, “Its six short, dreamy miniatures are like fragmented sketches that use images and gestures familiar from Schubert’s musical language—echoes of distant horn calls, half of a forgotten *Ländler*. It is as if Widmann is trying to delve into the psyche of Schubert’s sound world and the contrasting elements of which it is made—the naïve, the tragic, the nostalgic, and the foreboding.”

### Schubert

#### Three Piano Pieces, D. 946

Schubert was among the first practitioners of the so-called “character piece,” the species of compact, single-movement, sharply etched piano composition designed for the burgeoning home music market of the early 19th century. There grew to be a virtual musical tidal wave of these popular miniatures in the years after Schubert’s death in 1828—the masterful examples by Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Fauré, Grieg and others occupy the heart of the piano literature—but the form was still new when he took it up around 1815 to provide keyboard entertainment at the convivial local gatherings, known as “Schubertiads,” which featured his music and performances. Beginning in 1824, during what proved to be the last years of his pitifully brief life, Schubert created a fine and characteristic series of character pieces that parallel his superb late sonatas. First among this group were the endearing *Moments Musicaux*, whose six movements occupied him between 1824 and 1827. During the last six months of 1827, he composed eight pieces that he called “Impromptu.” He did not invent the title. The term “Impromptu” had been current in Vienna since at least 1822, when the Bohemian-Austrian composer Johann Vofříšek issued a set

of brief, ternary-form works of extemporized nature under that name. Schubert was familiar with Vofříšek’s pieces, as well as with the many independent piano works by Beethoven, Field, Tomášek and others that were flooding the market in the wake of the expanding piano manufacturing trade (and falling consumer prices) of those years. Schubert sold his eight Impromptus to Haslinger in Vienna, who agreed to publish them in small lots to test their acceptance. He issued the first two numbers of the series in 1828 as Schubert’s Op. 90, Nos. 1 and 2 with some success, but the composer’s death on November 19th of that year halted the project, and the remaining pair of Op. 90 Impromptus was not published until 1857 or 1858; the four others were issued at the end of 1839 by Diabelli as Op. 142.

It seems likely that the three piano pieces Schubert wrote in May 1827 were intended as the nucleus of a third set of Impromptus, though their manuscripts bear neither title nor number. When Johannes Brahms edited them and oversaw their initial publication in 1868, he labeled them simply “Drei Klavierstücke.” Perhaps the most remarkable quality of these character pieces is the manner in which Schubert leavened their inherent pianism with his incomparable sense of melody, a situation for which Kathleen Dale proposed the following explanation: “Schubert’s continued experience of song-writing had by now so strongly developed his wonderful natural gift of apprehending the spirit of a poem and re-creating it in music, that when he turned from songs to write for piano solo, he inevitably composed works which, though specifically instrumental in character, are so truly lyrical in essence that each is a poem in sound.” *A Poem in Sound*—music that is flowing, evocative, reflective of the rhythms of the heart and the soul and of life itself. Such is the gift that Schubert left the world.

The *Drei Klavierstücke* are arranged according to a pleasing tonal plan: E-flat minor, E-flat Major, and C Major. They are in simple three-part structures (the second adds an additional intervening episode: A–B–A–C–A), and almost opulent in the warmth of their sonority and harmony. No. 1 (E-flat minor) opens and closes

with an anxious strain whose febrile quality is enhanced by layering its duplet melody upon a triplet accompaniment; the central Andante is, by way of expressive balance, quiet and meditative. No. 2 (E-flat Major) is based on a tender theme that Schubert borrowed from the chorus that opens Act III of his 1823 opera *Fierrabras*;

the movement's two contrasting episodes are unsettled and mysterious. No. 3 (C Major) exhibits a teasing rhythmic ambiguity reminiscent of a Slavic dance that is countered in its middle region by a rather stolid paragraph in block chords.

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#### ABOUT THE ARTIST



Leif Ove Andsnes (*piano*) has been called “a pianist of magisterial elegance, power, and insight” (*The New York Times*) and “one of the most gifted musicians of his generation” (*Wall Street Journal*). With his commanding technique and searching interpretations, he has won international acclaim, performing in the world’s leading concert halls and with its foremost orchestras. Also an avid chamber musician, Andsnes is the founding director of the Rosendal Chamber Music Festival in Norway, which he launched in 2016. Now in its third year, the 2018 festival focuses on music “In the Shadow of War, 1914–18.”

Throughout the 2017–18 season Andsnes is artist-in-residence with both the New York Philharmonic and Bergen Philharmonic. He also performs with orchestras across Europe and the United States including the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Vienna Symphony, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Bavarian Radio Symphony, and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Last month he reunited with Michael Tilson Thomas to perform Debussy’s *Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra* with the Oslo Philharmonic.

With a discography that explores a diverse range of repertoire recorded over the last 25 years, Andsnes’ recent releases have included *Beethoven Journey* with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and an album of Sibelius that France’s *Diapason* magazine described as “a triumph of serenity, naturalness, and charm” and *Le Monde* called “ravishing.” This year sees the release of two new recordings: a Stravinsky duo CD with Marc André Hamelin and an album of solo Chopin.

Andsnes has received Norway’s distinguished honor, the Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav, as well as the prestigious Peer Gynt Prize. In the last year he has received honorary doctorates from both New York’s Juilliard School of Music and the Bergen Conservatoire. He is also the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Instrumentalist Award and the Gilmore Artist Award. Andsnes was inducted into the *Gramophone* Hall of Fame in 2013 and, saluting his many achievements, *Vanity Fair* named him one of its ‘Best of the Best’ in 2005.

Leif Ove Andsnes was born in Karmøy, Norway in 1970, and studied at the Bergen Music Conservatory under the renowned Czech professor Jiri Hlinka. He has also received invaluable advice from the Belgian piano teacher Jacques de Tiège who, like Hlinka, has greatly influenced his style and philosophy of playing. Andsnes is currently an artistic adviser for the Prof. Jiri Hlinka Piano Academy in Bergen, where he gives an annual master class to participating students. He lives in Bergen and in June 2010 achieved one of his proudest accomplishments to date, becoming a father for the first time. His family expanded in May 2013 with the welcome arrival of twins.