Monday Evening, April 29, 2024, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard Orchestra John Adams, Conductor The Dolphins String Quartet

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) Overture to Fidelio, Op. 72 (1814)

JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947) **Absolute Jest** (2012) THE DOLPHINS, *String Quartet* Luke Henderson, *Violin* Isaac Park, *Violin* James Preucil, *Viola* Ian Maloney, *Cello*

Intermission

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918) Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (1894)

DEBUSSY Ibéria from Images (1908)

Par les rues et par les chemins (In the Streets and Byways) Les parfums de la nuit (The Fragrances of the Night) Le matin d'un jour de fête (The Morning of a Festival Day)

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including an intermission

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About the Program

By Georgeanne Banker

Before the distinction of land and sea and before light shone upon the earth, there was chaos. Then, as Ovid tells us in his *Metamorphoses*, something changed. An obscure power bestowed order to all things and brought life to this world, and all was illuminated. Entropy surrendered to architecture; discord became harmony. Infinite sounds became tones, organized in precious permutations that sang the songs of all humankind.

But every so often, seismic forces shift sonic topographies and transform the natural order of things. "What's that?" Ernest Guiraud cried to his young student, Claude Debussy, who was seated at the piano. "Incomplete chords, floating," Debussy retorted. "*II faut noyer le ton*. One can travel where one wishes and leave by any door. Greater nuances." Guiraud paused, "I'm not saying that what you do isn't beautiful, but it's theoretically absurd." Debussy simply replied, "There is no theory, you have merely to listen. Pleasure is the law."

Overture to Fidelio

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Born: December 1770, in Bonn, Germany Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna

A century earlier, Ludwig van Beethoven was busy reimagining his own harmonic universe. Shortly after composing his tectonic Third Symphony, which effectively shifted the identity of the symphonic genre, Beethoven got to work on his only complete opera, *Fidelio*. With a libretto derived from Jean-Nicolas Bouilly's 1798 play *Léonore, ou L'amour conjugal*, the opera follows its titular heroine, disguised as a man named Fidelio, on her quest to rescue her husband Florestan from the depths of a Spanish prison. Beethoven began composing *Fidelio* in 1804, and amid public critiques and his own insatiable search for perfection, would himself feel imprisoned by it over the following decade. "The affair of the opera is the most troublesome in the world, and there is scarcely one part of it which quite satisfies me now," Beethoven wrote to Georg Friedrich Treitschke, who edited its libretto in 1814. "But what a difference between this and giving oneself up to freely flowing thought and inspiration!"

The opera's themes suited the uneasy sociopolitical landscape of Beethoven's Europe. The first iteration of the opera premiered in 1805 to a hall of French soldiers in occupied Vienna. After years of revisions (and after composing Symphonies 4 through 8), *Fidelio* in its final form was revived in May 1814, just weeks after Napoleon Bonaparte was shipped off to Elba.

In his quest to revise the opera, Beethoven prepared no fewer than four distinct overtures for it. The first three, each precariously moored to C Major, are known as his *Leonore* overtures (taking the title Beethoven had originally intended for his opera), and the last, a pyrotechnic display in E Major, is now known as the Overture to *Fidelio*.

"Full delight lies in E Major," Christian Schubart wrote in his 1806 treatise on aesthetics. The overture begins dazzlingly in this key, as figurations in the horns and winds evoke something between the martial and pastoral—love in the time of war. While the overture is anchored by tonic-dominant magnetism, in a final, glorious moment of disruption both tonic and dominant are played simultaneously, generating an electrifying cluster that launches the overture to its fortissimo finish.

Absolute Jest

JOHN ADAMS Born: February 15, 1947, in Worcester, Massachusetts

Musicologist Maynard Solomon names a few of Beethoven's works—his Ninth Symphony, *Grosse Fuge*, and *Hammerklavier* Sonata—as creation simulators, those whose radical harmonies, counterpoints, and motifs propose "a splintered chaos" from which "a coherent universe" emerges. John Adams muses on phrases from each of these Beethoven works in his 2012 scherzo, *Absolute Jest*. Spinning sounds like an analog DJ, Adams mashes up and remixes his best-loved Beethoven tracks, creating a monumental soundscape that is still very distinctly his own.

"[Absolute Jest's] creation was for me a thrilling lesson in counterpoint, in thematic transformation and formal design," Adams writes. "The 'jest' of the title should be understood in terms of its Latin meaning, 'gesta': doings, deeds, exploits. I like to think of 'jest' as indicating an exercising of one's wit by means of imagination and invention."

Composed in six movements, *Absolute Jest* is scored for a solo string quartet and large orchestra with harp and piano tuned in meantone temperament. Evoking the concerto grosso, the contrasts of the concertino-ripieno binary are heightened by the "high-strung intensity" of Adams' string quartet as it leads, inspires, and converses with the orchestra.

The work opens with a movement simply titled Beginning, mirroring the bated breaths of the first bars of Beethoven's Ninth. "The rolling 6/8 patterns recall the same Ninth Symphony scherzo but also summon up other references—of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, of the Eighth Symphony, and other archetypal Beethoven motives that come and go like cameo appearances on a stage," Adams writes. From the composer's note, "The high-spirited triple-time scherzo to the F-major Opus 135 (Beethoven's final work in that medium) enters about a third of the way through *Absolute Jest* and becomes the dominant motivic material for the remainder of the piece, interrupted only by a brief slow section that interweaves fragments of the *Grosse Fuge* with the opening fugue theme of the C-minor quartet. A final furious coda features the solo string quartet charging ahead at full speed over an extended orchestral pedal based on the famous *Waldstein* Sonata harmonic progressions."

The final Prestissimo, running straight out of the preceding Vivacissimo, distills motifs from Beethoven's String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135, to their elemental state, rallying the orchestral forces in a sort of maximal minimalism that brings *Absolute Jest* to a close. The piece ends with an enigmatic trio of sounds from the piano, cowbell, and harp, like the echoes of both past and future.

Prelude a l'après-midi d'une faune

CLAUDE DEBUSSY Born: August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France Died: March 25, 1918, in Paris

"Is it not our duty ... to try and find the symphonic formulae best suited to the audacious discoveries of our modern times, so committed as they are to progress?" Claude Debussy wrote in 1913. "The century of airplanes has a right to a music of its own."

A son of Belle Époque, they say Debussy's voice mirrored the downy brushstrokes of the Impressionists and foretold the Fauvists' audacious hues; it echoed the golden words of the Symbolists and waxed epicurean like the Decadents, it was as organic as Art Nouveau.

Debussy was born in late summer 1862 to the proprietors of a porcelain shop in

the western suburbs of Paris. He received his first piano lessons while his family was seeking refuge from the Franco-Prussian War and entered the Conservatoire de Paris shortly after his 10th birthday. As a young adult, he pushed against the grain. He rejected Wagnerian ideals and embraced the Russian romantics; he became a regular at poet Stephane Mallarmé's Tuesday evening salons; and he was awakened to the infinite sounds of the world at the Exposition Universelle in 1889.

The following year, Mallarmé approached Debussy with the idea of setting his poem *L'après-midi d'un faune* to music. After several revisions, Mallarmé's *faune*—a Symbolist musing on the myth of Pan and Syrinx as told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—was published as an eclogue in 1876, complete with four pastoral line drawings by Édouard Manet. While a staged version was not meant to be, Debussy instead crafted what was to become one of his most enduring, enigmatic works of art.

Prelude a l'après-midi d'une faune begins with an iconic flute solo, its chromatic whispers framed by an augmented fourth. Plush orchestral tuttis yield to silence, like lulls between sweet gales of summer, and as the faun awakens, a pair of horns sounds another distant tritone. Though notated first in E Major, Prelude eludes tonicization and instead floats freely from one idea to the next, making ample use of whole tone scales and beautifully dissonant intervals. A central, soaring melody flows from the flute, oboe, English horn, and clarinets, grouped like pan pipes with a reedy aulos. The tune is mirrored by the strings, underscored by the trochaic pulse of the winds and brass. The opening idiom soon returns, and then, with two bleary, pizzicato blinks, the faun drifts to sleep. Through Debussy's Prelude, Syrinx was transformed, and as Pierre Boulez said, "modern music was awakened."

Ibéria from *Images* CLAUDE DEBUSSY

After some calculated doctoring of his résumé, a teenage Debussy landed a teaching gig with Nadezhda von Meck, the longtime patron of Tchaikovsky. During his years as their tutor, Debussy traveled with the von Mecks through Europe and Russia, absorbing local sounds and composing his first piano works. While influenced by contemporaries including Isaac Albéniz, it is perhaps a single day Debussy spent with the von Mecks in Spain that inspired his orchestral triptych *Ibéria*.

While Debussy's actual time in Spain was brief, his musical impressions of it endured. Nested in the middle of his three-movement *Images*, which premiered in 1912, *Ibéria* is set in three programmatic parts: Par les rues et par les chemins (Along the Streets and Byways); Les parfums de la nuit (The Fragrances of the Night); and Le matin d'un jour de fête (The Morning of a Festival Day). Debussy's abstraction of Spain is communicated by a large orchestra including auxiliary winds; an ample battery of percussion with castanets as well as military and Basque drums; and strings that often play in divisi.

lbéria begins with an orchestral explosion of color outlined by a striking ninth interval. The clarinets quickly present the movement's central theme amid triplet rustling from castanets, winds, and brass. The bustling energy of the street quells for a moment as a solo viola and oboe evoke the alboka—a single-reeded Basque wind instrument floating in polyrhythm against the bass.

The second part betrays Debussy's talent for awakening all five senses through the medium of sound. Chords rise and fall in harmonic parallel, like hints of lavender on the evening breeze, and from the lower strings pizzicato rhythmic figures come and go like the pattering paws of a passing cat. As the stars fade, tremolo strings and chimes hint at daybreak and the movement elides into morning.

lbéria's kinetic finale is full of optimism and perhaps nostalgia for that day he spent there when he was barely 20 years old. The final part includes solo interjections from the violin and altissimo clarinets, and, in a section labeled Mouvement de la Marche, a "quasi guitara" passage where Debussy has the violins and violas hold their instruments in their arms, like a guitar.

"However, as far as *Ibéria* is concerned, Claude Debussy expressly said, at the time of its first performance, that he had not intended to make Spanish music, but rather to translate into music the impressions that Spain awakened in him," composer Manuel de Falla recalled. "Let us hasten to add that this was achieved in a magnificent manner. The echoes of the villages, including a kind of sevillana-the work's theme-seem to float in a clear atmosphere of sparkling light; the intoxicating magic of Andalusian nights, the joy of a festive people marching and dancing to the joyous chords of a banda of guitarras and bandurrias ... all this swirls in the air, approaching and receding, and our imagination, constantly on the alert, remains dazzled by the strong virtues of an intensely expressive and richly nuanced music."

Georgeanne Banker holds a Master of Music degree in Historical Performance from Juilliard.

Meet the Artists



John Adams

As composer, conductor, and creative thinker, John Adams occupies a unique position in the world of music, with works such as Harmonielehre, Shaker Loops, The Dharma at Big Sur, and his Violin Concerto among the most performed of all contemporary classical music. Born and raised in New England, Adams learned clarinet from his father and began composing at age 10, with early orchestral performances as a teenager. Celebrating his 70th birthday in 2017, Adams hosted festivals across Europe and the U.S. In 2019, he received Spain's BBVA Frontiers of Knowledge award and Holland's Erasmus Prize. In 2021, he was appointed an honorary academician by the General Assembly of the Academicians of Santa Cecilia, received the Glashütte Original MusicFestivalAward from the Dresden Music Festival in recognition of his lifetime achievement, and the Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University for his commitment to American composers. Adams holds honorary doctorates from prestigious universities and has written an autobiography, Hallelujah Junction. Since 2009, he has served as creative chair of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. As a conductor, Adams has led the world's major orchestras, programming his own works with a wide variety of repertoire ranging from Beethoven, Mozart, and Debussy to Sibelius, Ives, Carter, Glass, and Ellington. His recent conducting engagements include the Cleveland Orchestra, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Iceland Symphony, and the Czech Philharmonic.



The Dolphins

The Dolphins intrepidly seek the confluence of excellence and accessibility. The aim of the string guartet's members-violinists Luke Henderson (Agnes Varis Scholarship) and Isaac Park; violist James Preucil; and cellist lan Maloney (Philip and Barbara Kaplan Scholarship)—is to make chamber music relevant to as many people as possible, preserving and propelling the art form. Comprising Juilliard School students and based in New York, the Dolphins have performed, taught, and collaborated nationwide. Members have won top prizes at major national and international competitions, including the Fischoff and Coltman chamber music competitions, and have performed across America and Europe. The Dolphins have been featured at Alice Tully Hall performing the Juilliard premiere of Weinberg's String Quartet No. 4 and Villa-Lobos' String Quartet No. 5 as well as world premieres of several contemporary works. The Dolphins work closely with living composers, recently performing John Corigliano's String Quartet and Andy Akiho's LigNEouS. In 2023, the Dolphins presented their first collective composition, The Dolphin Miniatures. This summer, the Dolphins will perform at the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival in Michigan, St. Lawrence Quartet Seminar at Stanford University, and Music From Angel Fire in New Mexico. The Dolphins have studied with Corigliano, Joseph Lin, Joel Krosnick, Laurie Smukler, Natasha Brofsky, Molly Carr, Nick Mann, Fred Sherry, Paul Neubauer, and the Juilliard String Quartet. The Dolphins helped launch the Music for the Future educational campaign for Project: Music Heals Us, bringing Juilliard composition curriculums to correctional facilities in California. The Dolphins are proud Juilliard Gluck Community Service Fellows and perform outreach concerts throughout New York City. They have served as teaching artists for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Meet the Music as well as New York Philharmonic's Young People's Concerts. This year, the Dolphins will visit multiple universities and conservatories as guest artists to perform and work with students on quartets and improvisation.

Juilliard Orchestra

Juilliard's largest and most visible student performing ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra is known for delivering polished and passionate performances of works spanning the repertoire. Comprising more than 375 students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs, the orchestra appears throughout the season in concerts on the stages of Juilliard's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is a strong partner to Juilliard's other divisions, appearing in opera, dance, and drama productions as well as presenting an annual concert of world premieres by Juilliard student composers. This season, an impressive roster of world-renowned conductors leads the Juilliard Orchestra, including Marin Alsop, Joseph Colaneri, JoAnn Falletta, Ken-David Masur, Tito Muñoz, Nimrod David Pfeffer, Donald Runnicles, Jörg Widmann, and Thomas Wilkins as well as faculty conductors David Robertson, the director of conducting studies and distinguished visiting faculty, and Jeffrey Milarsky. Among the virtual projects students from the orchestra participated in during the 2020 lockdown was Bolero Juilliard, which became a viral sensation. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In 2019, the orchestra traveled to London, performing alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra, Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music group AXIOM.

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Juilliard Orchestra

John Adams, Conductor

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Anju Aoto ²

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