



*presents*

**Aaron Rosengaus, *viola***  
**Jennifer Lee, *piano***

**Friday, October 23, 2020 at 8 PM**  
Old First Church  
1751 Sacramento St. at Van Ness Ave.  
San Francisco, CA 94109  
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## PROGRAM

Frank Bridge (1879–1941)

**Two Pieces** (1908)

*Pensiero*

*Allegro appassionato*

Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979)

**Morpheus** (1917)

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

**Sonata for Viola and Piano** (1922)

*Molto moderato - Allegro*

*Allegro energico e non troppo presto*

*Molto lento*

## INTERMISSION

Rebecca Clarke

**Passacaglia on an Old English Tune** (1941)

Julius Harrison (1885–1963)

**Sonata in C minor** (1945)

*Allegro energico*

*Andante e cantabile sempre*

*Allegro vivace*

## ABOUT THE MUSIC

### **Frank Bridge** *Two Pieces for Viola and Piano*

"Frank Bridge was a prominent musical figure in England during the early twentieth century, and was a violist himself, though the only completed works for viola and piano are these two pieces. Bridge is most known as the composition instructor to Benjamin Britten, the leading British composer of the mid-twentieth century. It is also likely that as Rebecca Clarke's friend and colleague, he gave her compositional instruction. Though published in 1908, the two pieces here, *Pensiero* and *Allegro appassionato*, were written in 1905 and 1907, respectively. Much like Clarke's *Two Pieces*, the movements are sharply contrasted in color and mood. The *Pensiero* is somber and elegiac, reflective in nature, exploring the darker register of the viola. Bridge's use of cross rhythms also creates furtive feeling between the viola and piano, slowly gathering energy. In the center section, the viola moves upward in a plaintive line that climaxes and immediately returns to the low register. The *Allegro appassionato* is similar to the *Pensiero*, as they are both in ternary form, but has a very different temperament. Where the first movement is dark and brooding, the second is bright and exuberant. While the viola soars above in the high register, the piano line runs up and down the keyboard in quick arpeggiated lines, giving the music a sense of fullness. While the outside sections are bright and joyful, the inner section is a little more contemplative, though without losing any of the high spirits. The piece ends with the viola holding a high tonic and the piano quickly rushing through the final arpeggios to land on the final chord." (note by Kristina E. Willey)

**Rebecca Clarke** *Morpheus* and *Passacaglia on an Old English Tune*

"Born to a musical family in Harrow, England, in 1886, Clarke was taught the violin at an early age, and then sent for further study at the Royal Academy of Music, in London. In 1908, she went to the Royal College of Music as one of Sir Charles Stanford's first female composition students. Stanford urged her to shift over to the viola because then she would be "right in the middle of the sound, and can tell how it's all done." Two years later, after she quarreled with her father and had to leave the College, she began to support herself as a violist. She became a much-sought-after supply player in orchestras and ensembles around London, and played chamber music with many of the greatest artists of the early twentieth century, including Schnabel, Casals, Thibaud, Suggia, Rubinstein, Grainger, Hess, Monteux, and Szell. She stood nearly six feet tall in her prime and, as one witness put it, "she strode on stage like a goddess." Rubinstein called her "the glorious Rebecca Clarke." She was one of the first women to be made regular members of a professional orchestra in London, in 1913, when Sir Henry Wood hired her for his Queen's Hall Orchestra. She performed throughout Great Britain, Europe, and the United States, and made a round-the-world tour, as a self-styled "viola player and composer."

During her first American tour, she wrote one of the greatest extended works for viola, her *Sonata* of 1919, which she entered in an anonymous competition sponsored by the renowned American patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. The judges deadlocked over two submissions: one, they said, was the work of a philosopher, the other that of a poet. Mrs. Coolidge cast the deciding vote in favor of the philosopher, and when the seal was broken the winning piece turned out to be Ernest Bloch's

*Suite*. But the judges were so taken with the other piece that they insisted on bending the rules and revealing its composer as well, and, as Mrs. Coolidge told Clarke later that afternoon, “You should have seen their faces when they saw it was by a woman.”

Almost overnight, Clarke became an international sensation, and she made the most of it, barnstorming the *Sonata* so assiduously, on both sides of the Atlantic, that Lionel Tertis raced to perform it, and J. & W. Chester published it two years later. As time went by, Clarke racked up a solid list of publications with Chester, Winthrop Rogers (later part of Boosey & Hawkes), Oxford University Press, and G. Schirmer. Her compositional output was small—about eighty pieces, if you exclude those she wrote as an untutored amateur—but it comprised some of the most brilliant and powerful songs and chamber works of the twentieth century. The *Sonata* became a cornerstone of the viola literature, the *Piano Trio* of 1921 was widely played and nowadays is considered a masterpiece, and by 1925 Clarke’s reputation was so firmly established that she could sell out London’s Wigmore Hall with a concert made up entirely of her own compositions, and then repeat most of the program in a live broadcast from the studios of the BBC.

In time, Clarke earned substantial entries in all of the standard musical and musicological references, many of which carried lists of her works, published and unpublished. But the Clarke women are extraordinarily long-lived, and time exacted its price. Clarke’s career was disrupted by World War II, and her essentially tonal compositions, which began to seem “old hat,” as she put it, after the postwar triumph of academic serialism, gradually drifted out of the limelight and went out of print. But Clarke’s music was so wonderful, and her personality so

attractive, that both were ideally positioned for a revival in the 1970s, when tonality again became thinkable, when a resurgent feminist movement began to stir up new interest in women composers, and when Clarke finally gave in to pleas from some of the younger members of her family and allowed her music to be organized and catalogued. By the time Clarke died, in 1979, she had enjoyed several major New York performances—her first in nearly thirty years—and an extended ninetieth-birthday broadcast. The following year saw the release of the first in what was to become a spate of commercial recordings, and by 1987, Clarke was being acknowledged, not only as “one of the very best [composers] of her time,” but as “almost certainly the best composer of any period to have also been a woman” (Malcolm MacDonald, review of *Rebecca Clarke: Music for Viola*, Northeastern NR215, Gramophone 64/765, February 1987).” (note by Christopher Johnson)

### **Sir Arnold Bax *Viola Sonata***

"It has become a cliché of musical history that the celebrated British viola-player Lionel Tertis generated much of the modern British solo viola repertoire when he encouraged young composers, notably those associated with London's Royal Academy of Music, to write works for him in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Up till then the viola was very much the Cinderella of the orchestra, and there were few recognized soloists. All of Bax's viola works were written with Tertis in mind. While a student at the Academy Arnold Bax came under the influence of Tertis, who taught viola there, and Bax and his contemporaries responded to Tertis's enthusiasm and the quality of his playing – and the big tone he drew from a very large instrument. And in the last analysis, a performance is a performance when all is said and done.

Although Arnold Edward Trevor Bax was born in south London, he spent his most impressionable teenage years in a rambling Victorian mansion surrounded by well-tended gardens in Hampstead. Bax remarked it was 'the next best thing to living in the country' and here he enjoyed all the delights of the country with the musical opportunities of nearby London. Although his father was of a nonconformist religious persuasion, he was well-off, and Bax always had a private income which meant that he never had to take a paid position to earn his living. In his twenties, particularly, this gave him an enviable freedom to travel and to devote himself to music and to composition.

Although Bax has been best known for his orchestral music, especially his tone poems and seven romantic symphonies, he also composed a large corpus of highly individual chamber music. His sonatas include four for the piano, five for violin and examples for cello, clarinet but most noticeably for viola, one of his greatest and most characteristic works, written at the highpoint of his career.

It was while he was a student at the Royal Academy of Music from 1900 to 1905, that he found himself part of a circle of brilliant pianist-composers. Of these York Bowen and Benjamin Dale established big reputations while young but are now not so well remembered as Bax. All were commanding pianists, and Bowen appeared before the public at a young age. Bax also had a reputation at the Academy as a fine pianist, but although he appeared in his own music, particularly when he was young, he did not try to establish a career as a pianist, indeed he shied away from it, though a recording survives of him playing his viola sonata with its dedicatee Lionel Tertis in 1929.



While a student Bax also conceived a lifelong enthusiasm for Ireland and things Irish. He first visited the far west in 1902. After having read W. B. Yeats's early poem *The Wanderings of Oisín* he wrote: 'The Celt within me stood revealed'. Soon he discovered the Donegal village of Glencolumcille on the wild Atlantic coast. Under this Irish influence he later wrote poetry, short stories and four plays, for which he adopted the pseudonym *Dermot O'Byrne*. Even as early as 1904, in his *Concert Piece For Viola and Piano* he noted in his program note for the first performance: 'It will be observed that a Celtic element predominates, free use being made of the flattened seventh, the falling intervals of the pentatonic scale and other features peculiar to Irish folk music'.

Bax wrote his *Concert Piece* in the spring of 1904 specifically for Tertis, who gave the first performance with Bax at the piano at London's Aeolian Hall on 6 December 1904, during a Patron's Fund Concert. The Patron's Fund had then been only recently established by Sir Ernest Palmer to promote performances by young British composers. Bax's music was seen as revolutionary, one critic writing of its 'spirit almost of rebellion and violence throughout its fervid pages'. While it is difficult now to appreciate its revolutionary traits, it is remarkable for its effectiveness and for the elements of Bax's later style already present.

After the First World War, Bax, by then becoming recognized as one of the leading British composers of the younger generation, came under the influence of Tertis again, writing for him a *Concerto* (soon renamed *Phantasy*) in 1920, and in 1921 working on the *Sonata for Viola and Piano*. The first movement is dated 9 December 1921 and all three movements were completed a month later. It was first performed by Tertis and

Bax, again at the Aeolian Hall on 17 November 1922, and was almost immediately regarded by most commentators as one of Bax's most important works, an assessment that has lasted to today.

During the First World War Bax's youthful world in Ireland had been ended by the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916, when friends were killed or executed. There followed a number of memorial works from his pen, as well as poetry that in 1918 was so vivid that it was banned by the British censor in Ireland. The Irish Civil War, the Troubles, followed and Bax was tormented by it all. It is possible that the *Viola Sonata* may have been one of his last tributes to the escapist Celtic wonderland of his youth and its sad fate. He had to confront reality.

The sonata is in three movements, a fast, diabolical scherzo flanked by more reflective outer movements, a form later adopted by many British composers not least Walton in his *Viola Concerto*, only seven years later. Although the work is not cyclic in the true sense of the word, the opening idea reappears at the end of the last movement. The music reveals a genuine poetic vision, and achieves a quiet but intense beauty by comparatively simple means. Of particular importance are a rising figure heard at the outset, and leaps of an octave and of a fifth. The opening, with its high tinkling piano offsetting the somber hue of the lower register of the viola, immediately transforms us into Bax's personal world as the music slowly emerges from this tentative opening to the superbly glowing climax. While not overtly 'Celtic' in manner, and with no subjective program admitted by Bax, here we are surely hearing his final absorption of his various influences into a remarkable personal style and a universal expression.

In Ireland Bax had witnessed local folk-dancing in the countryside and the spirit of the *ceilidh* at its most uninhibited is present in many of his scores. This fierce scherzo has much of the character of a wild Irish dance, Bax demonstrating he had known the real thing. At the end after a beautiful rhapsodic central interlude, the poignant last movement closes with what the critic Robin Hull called 'a truly diabolic coda founded upon the first subject ... gradually working up to a terrific climax whose dramatic tension is probably unsurpassed anywhere in Bax's music'." (note by Lewis Foreman)

### **Julius Harrison *Viola Sonata in C minor***

"Harrison hailed from Stourport in Worcestershire and quickly took piano, organ and violin lessons. Already at age 16, he was appointed organist and choirmaster at Areley Kings Church, and at age 17 he conducted the Worcester Music Society in a performance of his own *Ballade for Strings*. Harrison introduced himself to a wider audience with his 1908 cantata *Cleopatra*, a work that had garnered first prize at the Norwich Music Festival. Although some reviews recognized Harrison's talent, the work was criticized for an "overelaborate orchestration" and described as "a series of pictures of unbridled passion devoid of all that ordinary people call beauty." Once Harrison arrived in London, his conducting career began in earnest. Engaged at Covent Garden, he was assistant conductor to Arthur Nikisch, and later to Felix Weingartner in Paris. Appointments with the Beecham Opera Company, the Scottish Orchestra and the Bradford Permanent Orchestra quickly followed, and by 1922 Harrison was conductor for the British National Opera Company. The music of Richard Wagner became his specialty, and he was appointed director of opera and professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music. He returned to conducting in 1930, and after a slew of

appointments from around the country, he accepted a post with the BBC Northern Orchestra in Manchester. Slowly his hearing began to deteriorate, and in 1947 Harrison conducted his final concert at the Elgar Festival in Malvern. He retired in Harpenden in Hertfordshire, and devoted his final years to composition. Influenced by Brahms and Vaughan Williams, he wrote a series of substantial compositions, among them *Bredon Hill* (1942), the *Viola Sonata* (1945) a *Mass in C* (1947) and a *Requiem*, which took him the greater part of a decade to finish. Geoffrey Self, Harrison's biographer, describes the *Requiem* as "conservative and contrapuntally complex, influenced by Bach and Verdi respectively, with a mastery of texture and a massive yet balanced structure." Harrison also published some writings about music, foremost a 1939 book on *Brahms and his Four Symphonies*, and also contributed chapters on the Symphonies by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Dvořák. Regrettably, much of Harrison's oeuvre — a large number of vocal and choral as well as orchestral works, alongside compositions for chamber ensemble, piano and organ — remain unrecorded." (note by George Predota)

### **ABOUT THE PERFORMERS**

**Jennifer Lee** holds a Bachelor of Music from Rice University and Master of Music in Piano Performance with an emphasis in chamber music from Indiana University. She studied with pedagogues, Robert Roux, Shigeo Neriki, and William Wellborn. Neriki, a Grammy-nominated pianist for the renowned Israeli violinist Irvy Gitlis and cellist János Starker, had a profound influence on her career in collaborative piano. As an orchestral keyboardist and chamber musician, she performed in the Kent/Blossom Music Festival with the Cleveland Orchestra at the Blossom Music Center, Aspen Music Festival, Bloomington Camerata Orchestra, and at

Festival Napa Valley with the Blackburn Academy Orchestra. At the Valley of the Moon Music Festival, she performed chamber music works on two evolutions of the fortepiano, an early predecessor of the modern piano. She also performed at Flower Piano at Golden Gate Park and the Noontime Concert Series at St. Mary's Cathedral.

A native to San Francisco, she won a number of awards in the Bay Area, including the Fremont Symphony Young Artists Concerto Competition, Ross McKee Competition, Burlingame Music Competition, and CAPMT Bartok State Competition. A strong advocate of music education in the Bay Area, she is Faculty at the Crowden School in Berkeley and manages a thriving teaching studio in San Francisco and the Peninsula. She is a member of the Music Teachers Association of California and Music National Teachers Association.

**Aaron Rosengaus** is a Bay Area native and currently lives in San Francisco. He has been a Fellow at the Mendocino and Silicon Valley Music Festivals, and has performed as a soloist with San Francisco State University Symphony Orchestra. Aaron studied Viola at the Boston Conservatory under the tutelage of Patricia McCarty, and at San Francisco State University with Paul Yarbrough and Zakarias Grafilo of the Alexander String Quartet. A sought after chamber musician, Aaron has performed with world renown artists such as Josef Spacek, Kensho Watanabe, and Michelle Kwon. Aaron has also performed in masterclasses for James Ehnes, Steven Tenenbom, Toby Appel, the Julliard String Quartet, and American String Quartet.

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**Sunday, October 25 at 4 pm**

**The music of Kimio Eto**

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**Friday, November 13 at 8 pm**

**Circadian String Quartet: *Images*—Monika Gruber & David**

**Ryther**, *violins*; **Omid Assadi**, *viola*; **David Wishnia**, *cello*

Debussy's *String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10* plus arrangements from his *Préludes* for string quartet made by David Ryther.

**Sunday, November 15 at 2 pm**

**Old First Concerts 50th Anniversary Gala!**

Celebrate our 50th anniversary with us as we showcase an incredible line-up of some of our favorite musicians live from our space and in pre-recorded performances made especially for today!

**Friday, November 20 at 8 pm**

**Ensemble for These Times—*Old Becomes New***

**Nanette McGuinness**, *soprano*; **Anne Lerner**, *cello*

*& season guest Margaret Halbig piano*

*with special guest appearance by Dalit Warshaw, piano*

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