

MOMENTA
FESTIVAL



DISTANT VOICES

Curated by Michael Haas

Thursday, September 15, 2022
Broadway Presbyterian Church

Elizabeth Brown (b. 1953): *Just Visible in the Distance* (2013)

- I. *Slowly Toward the North – Glimpse – A Halo for ADDA – Harmony, no Protagonist – Slowly Toward the North*
- II. *Through a Barren Landscape – Harmony – Respite – Aria – Harmony, no Protagonist*

Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937): *String Quartet No. 3* (2011)

- I. Prelude –
- II. Pastoral –
- III. Intermezzo –
- IV. Intermezzo –
- V. Serenade –
- VI. Intermezzo –
- VII. Postlude

Shawn Jaeger (b. 1985): *Thy Wondering Eyes* (2010)

Momenta Quartet

Emilie-Anne Gendron and Alex Shiozaki, violins
Stephanie Griffin, viola; Michael Haas, cello



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Momenta Festival VII is dedicated to the memory of Peter Pohly



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Thank you for joining us for the 2022 Momenta Festival! This annual member-curated series explores contemporary music of all aesthetic backgrounds alongside great music from the recent and distant past. The Momenta Quartet's 2022-2023 season is made possible through the generous support of the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Amphion Foundation, the Alice M. Ditson Fund, the New York State Council on the Arts, and through the generous contributions of individual donors.

Momenta: the plural of momentum—four individuals in motion towards a common goal. This is the idea behind the **Momenta Quartet**. The New York City-based quartet has engaged in residencies at Temple, Cornell, Brown, and Binghamton Universities; performed at The National Gallery and The Library of Congress; and received commission grants from CMA, and the Koussevitzky, Jerome, and Barlow Foundations. Momenta's debut album, *Similar Motion*, is available on Albany Records, and in 2022 New World Records released their album of the complete string quartets of Alvin Singleton.

Program notes by Michael Haas

One of Momenta Quartet's founding principles is working closely with living composers and giving life to their works beyond the world premiere performance. Our collaboration with composer/performer **Elizabeth Brown** goes back many years and has included performances of her music as well as sharing the stage with her for works including flute, shakuhachi, and theremin. Her music is played around the world and includes compositions for traditional Japanese instruments and collaborations with artist Lothar Osterburg. A Juilliard graduate and Guggenheim Fellowship recipient, Brown has received numerous grants, awards and commissions, and her album *Elizabeth Brown: Mirage*, which includes performances by Momenta, is available from New World Records.

Just Visible in the Distance (2013) is Brown's largest work to date for string quartet, but her chamber music compositions also include *Mirage* (2008) for flute and string quartet, *Piranesi* (2007) for theremin, string quartet and video, *Nanotudes* (2013) for string quartet, and most recently *Babel* (2019) for string quartet, soundscape, and sculpture/video. It draws inspiration from W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, in which a nameless narrator takes a walking tour of Suffolk and reflects on the people and places he encounters.

The composer writes:

Just Visible in the Distance consists of intuitively assembled small movements, each flowing into the next. Persistent musical material from some of my earlier pieces resurfaces often. The title is from W. G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*, a book I love and

have read many times. *Just Visible in the Distance* was written for, and is dedicated to, the Momenta Quartet.

Valentin Silvestrov is one of the most widely recognized living Ukrainian composers, and is considered one of the leading members of the Kyiv avant-garde dating back to the 1960s. Born in Kyiv in 1937, Silvestrov's interest in music began on his own and relatively late, at the age of fifteen. His time at university was spent studying to be a civil engineer while taking music courses at night, and later studying composition at Kyiv Conservatory with Boris Lyatoshinsky and Lev Revutsky from 1958 to 1964. He has been a freelance composer in Kyiv until fleeing to Germany in 2022, currently living in Berlin.

While his music is now widely performed it was often met with resistance and criticism in his own country, especially in the 1960s and 1970s when some of his works were banned by the Soviet government. With more international recognition and successful premieres in the West, performances of Silvestrov's music in Ukraine and Russia increased. In 1989 he was featured at Moscow's Alternativa New Music Festival and in Ekaterinburg in 1992 for a five-night festival dedicated to his music. His 60th birthday was celebrated with a festival in Kyiv, and his 80th birthday featured concerts in Ukraine and Russia as well as in the US, Japan, and Europe.

Silvestrov's **String Quartet No. 3** was premiered at Carnegie Hall by the Kronos Quartet in 2013. In this piece and in many of his recent works, his early avant-garde aesthetic has given way to a more lyrical style, considered by some to be postmodern or neoclassical. Melody is primary, often eliciting comparisons to Schubert and Mahler. "I believe that Music – even if it cannot be 'sung' – is song nevertheless; it is neither philosophy nor a world view, it is the song of the world about itself." The work draws inspiration from Ireland and the ways in which it reminds Silvestrov of Ukraine. Its seven movements flow together almost seamlessly, using simple melodic moments that exist halted in time. Silvestrov does away with the need for motivic development in the classical sense, which has been used by so many string quartet composers of the past.

Momenta first worked with Brooklyn-based composer **Shawn Jaeger** in 2019, performing his music at Brown University where he was visiting professor. Jaeger's music engages folksong, field recording, and sonic ephemera to explore placemaking and personal and cultural memory. He has been featured at Carnegie Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, the Morgan Library, (Le) Poisson Rouge, Roulette, Jordan Hall, and the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, and on the Tanglewood, MATA, FERUS, and Resonant Bodies festivals. Jaeger is the recipient of the Claire Rosen and Samuel Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists, and awards from the ASCAP and BMI foundations.

The composer writes:

Thy Wondering Eyes takes the lined-out hymnody of the Old Regular Baptists of central Appalachia as a point of departure. Old Regular hymnals contain words only, and so the tunes are transmitted orally. As a result, each member of the congregation sings the tune a little differently, resulting in a heterophonic, or fuzzy "social unison." In this piece, the quartet functions like an Old Regular Baptist congregation, "singing" six strophes of a "hymn" that I composed. This hymn undergoes various transformations—breaking apart and eventually reassembling into something new.

MOMENTA


FESTIVAL

MEXICAN INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

Curated by Stephanie Griffin

Friday, September 16, 2022
Broadway Presbyterian Church

Julián Carrillo (1875-1965): String Quartet No. 11 (1962)

- I. Allegro agitato
- II. Muy lentamente–Scherzo: Allegro
- III. Final: Allegro agitato

Carrillo: String Quartet No. 5 (1937)

- I. Recitativo–Allegretto
- II. Largo
- III. Scherzo–Lento
- IV. Final: Allegro vivo

Momenta Quartet

Emilie-Anne Gendron and Alex Shiozaki, violins
Stephanie Griffin, viola; Michael Haas, cello



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Program notes by Stephanie Griffin

September 16 is Mexican Independence Day, celebrating Mexico's independence from Spain in 1810. (It also marks the second day of National Hispanic Heritage Month here in the United States.) I have never had the pleasure of being in Mexico on September 16, but apparently it is one of the biggest celebrations of the year - with parades, street parties, amazing food (of course), mariachi bands...how about some Julián Carrillo?

Julián Carrillo (1875 - 1965) was a Mexican composer, conductor, violinist, music theorist, and microtonal music pioneer. In 1895, as a student at the National Conservatory in Mexico City, he found out using his violin that the human ear is capable of distinguishing one sixteenth fraction of a tone. After composition studies in Leipzig and Ghent, he returned to Mexico in 1905, rapidly becoming a major figure in the music establishment. Around 1924 he gradually resigned from his official functions to dedicate himself completely to composing and the elaboration of his octave division in 96 tiny steps, the *Sonido 13* ("The Thirteenth Sound.")

Momenta first encountered Julián Carrillo when the composer and musicologist Sebastian Zubieta invited us to perform a concert of his music at Americas Society on May 31, 2011.

Fast forward to September 2014 - when a call came in from an unknown number on my cell phone. It was the then-Cornell University (now Harvard!) musicologist Alejandro Madrid. He was just finishing his book *Julián Carrillo and Sonido Trece*, published by Oxford University Press in 2015. Since he considers Carrillo's thirteen quartets to be the composer's most significant body of work and the key to understanding his stylistic development, he was looking for a string quartet to collaborate with him on learning, performing and recording Julián Carrillo's complete string quartets, most of which he was transcribing from the manuscripts he had photographed at the Carrillo archives in Mexico. Of those quartets we would be giving the world premieres of numbers 5, 6, 11, 12 and 13. The other nine quartets had been recorded by a group of French musicians on Carrillo's own *Sonido Trece* label in the 1960s, but never performed since.

All paths must somehow lead to Carrillo: Alejandro had heard of Momenta through our mutual friend, the ethnomusicologist Chris Miller and when he looked us up, we were already on YouTube playing Carrillo's music.

Of course we were thrilled to be a part of this project. It's been a long and exciting process, stretching our abilities not only as performers but also as scholars and musical detectives. After multiple performances of all thirteen quartets, we are developing a sixth sense for the "Thirteenth Sound." We spend hours poring over Carrillo's manuscripts, finding new questions (and answers) each day. There's musical shorthand to decipher, pitch matrices numbering all the 11 pitches of the chromatic scale from 0 ("C") to 11 ("B"), cryptic notes in messy handwritten Spanish, bits of rewritten music literally copied and taped into the manuscripts, and all kinds of small but puzzling inconsistencies.

Carrillo's string quartets fall into three stylistic categories: his sprawling late Romantic String Quartet no. 1 from 1903; his works exploring non-tonal scales; and his microtonal quartets, numbers three and eight through thirteen. Tonight's program features his most substantial quartets from his atonal period, String Quartet no. 5 (1937,) and from his late microtonal period, String Quartet no. 11 (1962.)

On the surface it would seem like these pieces would have little in common, but Carrillo's original and highly distinctive voice transcends the differences in the pitch materials from which these two quartets are built.

On a large-scale structural level, Carrillo is very prone towards cyclical aspects in most of his string quartets, including the two works on tonight's program. This is most readily apparent in the final movement of String Quartet no. 11, which literally "scrolls through" material from the two previous movements, but in slightly different tempos and dynamics due to the nature of the juxtapositions. This feature is a bit less obvious in String Quartet no. 5, but its fourth and final movement contains direct quotations from the first and second movements, and its main thematic material (in $\frac{5}{8}$ meter) references the the opening material of the Scherzo (movement 3.)

Another of Carrillo's structural predilections is a middle movement A-B-A form, combining a slow movement with a Scherzo. In String Quartet no. 11, this happens within the scope of a single movement - the Scherzo is the B section of the second movement, which opens and closes *Muy lentamente*. In String Quartet no. 5, this happens over the course of two movements. The entire second movement is a Largo, but the third movement is a Scherzo which ends with a substantial return to the material from the slow second movement.

Perhaps Carrillo's most distinguishing characteristic is his absolute obsession with scales. He elevates scales to the subject matter of his pieces. They are not just sets of pitches from which to build melodies; they are the melodies themselves!

The main "theme" of Carrillo's String Quartet no. 5 is a scale of his own devising, with all of its possible transpositions. So great is Carrillo's imagination that he manages to spin a weighty four-movement work from this one thread, with so many colorful variations and turns of phrase that the listener is not aware that they are steeped in a monothematic work where the actual theme is simply a scale!

You will also hear this love of scales in String Quartet no. 11, but in this case Carrillo is engaged in a dialectic between chromatic scales and the more expansive sounding whole tone scale. And then - he adds quarter tones to the mix, juxtaposing regular chromatic scales with chromatic motion in quarter tones, and transposing figures in whole tones up and down by quarter tone increments.

Another quintessential Carrillo-ism which you will hear in both works on tonight's program is his passion for sequences. This is an especially apparent feature in all of Carrillo's microtonal quartets, including String Quartet no. 11. Dizzying swirls of whole tone motives (a favorite is the first three notes of the major scale) going down (and sometimes but more rarely up) by quarter tones as far as the ear can hear...After hearing the eighth quartet, Carrillo's daughter Dolores Carrillo wrote, "Dehumanization of sounds; a desire to transcend the atmosphere and pass beyond the stars! The amazement of a man, a single man, during the first space flight."

Speaking of repetition - the Momenta Quartet is going to play A LOT OF CARRILLO over the next three years and beyond. We are happy to announce that we recently signed a contract to record Carrillo's complete string quartets for Naxos! Thanks to a generous Project Grant from Chamber Music America, we were able to record the first CD, consisting entirely of historic world premieres (String Quartets 5, 6 and 13), this past summer. Now onto the editing - and getting ready to make the next record in January. Stay tuned for more creative Momenta programming including Carrillo 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 in every possible context over the next few years!

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HORN FIFTHS

Curated by Alex Shiozaki
with guests Nana Shi, piano and David Byrd-Marrow, horn

Saturday, September 17, 2022
Broadway Presbyterian Church

Hirofumi Mogi (b.1988): *In Memory of Perky Pat* (2021) for horn and string quartet

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969): Piano Quintet No. 2 (1965)

- I. Moderato
- II. Larghetto
- III. Allegro giocoso

-INTERMISSION-

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897): Trio for Piano, Violin, and Horn in E-flat Major, Op. 40 (1865)

- I. Andante
- II. Scherzo: Allegro
- III. Adagio mesto
- IV. Allegro con brio

Momenta Quartet

Emilie-Anne Gendron and Alex Shiozaki, violins
Stephanie Griffin, viola; Michael Haas, cello



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Program Notes by Alex Shiozaki:

Part of the excitement of being a quartet that performs so much new music is the possibility of discovering a gem in each brand-new composition that we perform. 2022 was no exception, as we premiered a whimsical work for horn and string quartet through our connection with Music From Japan. Winner of the Toru Takemitsu Composition Award and the Akutagawa Prize, Japanese composer **Hirofumi Mogi** writes about *In Memory of Perky Pat*:

The title of this work is taken from a sci-fi story by Philip K. Dick, "The Days of Perky Pat". The story begins in a war-devastated world, with the "adult" survivors trying to construct a lovely miniature of their dear old town and curiously absorbed in a young female doll named Perky Pat. The main characters of the story, a married couple, are especially keen to create the fake town and reach a higher level of perfection. Challenging a neighboring colony for possession of a different doll named Connie Companion, the couple win the contest and bring Connie back to their own colony. Connie is an adult doll, and while everybody is initially besotted with the new toy, the couple and their children are cast out when it is discovered that Connie is "pregnant". At this point the story ends.

It is not a very long story, but it portrays the human resistance to growing up as well as the exclusionary nature of a narrow-minded society. With the two dolls in front of them—one the eternal child and the other carrying the inevitable future in the form of an unborn child—the main couple are reminded of the reality of growing up. The great irony of the story is that the children of the colony are already actively pursuing life in the present and building toward the future. In this work, I layered the horn with the soul

of “Perky Pat”, while the quartet represents the “childish people” who desire to grow. The quartet relies on the horn yet closely accompanies it and ultimately moves away from it; the doll takes its last breath.

French hornist **David Byrd-Marrow** joined us for the premiere, and flew in from Colorado for this seconde performance. He plays with the International Contemporary Ensemble, as well as The Knights. He has also appeared with the New York Philharmonic, Decoda, the Atlanta and Tokyo symphony orchestras, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra, the Washington National Opera, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In addition to all of this, David is on faculty at the Lamont School of Music in Denver. It was enough of a pleasure to play with him the first time that we invited him almost immediately after the premiere to join us on Momenta Festival!

Just a few years ago, I would have considered **Grażyna Bacewicz** to be a relatively unknown composer. More recently, she seems to have been gaining some traction. This may be in part due to the relatively recent 50th anniversary of her passing. (My perception may also be clouded because I have been programming her works on many of my own concerts!) Regardless, Bacewicz’s creativity and mastery of the string genre are undisputed. She was an incredible violinist--principal violinist of the Polish Radio Orchestra as well as frequent soloist--and her knowledge of the instrument shows itself in astonishingly idiomatic string writing. While many of her early works may be described as neoclassical or post-Romantic, her later works reflect her discovery and exploration of serialism and other avant-garde techniques. Bacewicz’s **Piano Quintet No. 2**, dating from the last few years of her life, is a work of both tranquility and fire, opening with serenely quintal harmonies and closing with an angrily angular chromatic descent. Between those bookends, Bacewicz creates a sonic world that is at times dissonantly emotional and dryly humorous. Throughout all of it, I constantly marvel at her craftsmanship, both musically and technically.

Joining Momenta on piano is friend-of-the-quartet **Nana Shi**, whom you may remember from Momenta Festivals II and III. She concertizes around the city in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, Roerich Museum, Tenri Cultural Institute, and more. Whenever we can, the two of us also perform together as the Shiozaki Duo, most recently this past June at the Union Church of Bay Ridge in Brooklyn. Nana is part of the piano faculty at SUNY New Paltz and Interlochen Arts Camp, as well as being a staff accompanist at the Juilliard School.

With such great collaborators as Nana and David, it was a no-brainer to program **Johannes Brahms’s Horn Trio**, the only piece of the evening that actually contains horn fifths. A composer who needs no introduction, Brahms created this work to commemorate the death of his mother Christiane, who had passed away earlier that year. Possibly due to the association of the horn with nature, the Horn Trio is a gentle work that leans into the overtones of a natural horn in E-flat. Unusually--and somewhat necessarily, due to the harmonic limitations of the natural horn--all four movements of the piece share the tonic of E-flat. Despite this restriction, Brahms does explore a variety of moods. I see a different type of happiness in each movement. The first movement has a nurturing quality--one might say a mothering quality--with just a little bit of drama. The second movement is much more exuberant in its joy, fiery and virtuosic for all three instruments. The third is the most ambiguous, overall somber yet with its moments of light and tranquility. The fourth movement is clearly a celebration: of life, of music, and of being together and experiencing this moment.

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VISIONARY SOUNDS

Curated by Emilie-Anne Gendron

Sunday, September 18, 2022

Broadway Presbyterian Church

Stefan Wolpe (1902-1972): Twelve Pieces for String Quartet (1950)

Mario Davidovsky (1937-2019): Synchronisms No. 9 (1988) for violin and electronic sounds

David Glaser (b. 1952): String Quartet No. 5, in memoriam Mario Davidovsky (2022)

*world premiere, written for Momenta Quartet

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): String Quartet No. 11 in f minor, Op. 95 "Serioso" (1810)

I. Allegro con brio

II. Allegretto ma non troppo—(attacca subito)

III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso—Più allegro

IV. Larghetto espressivo—Allegretto agitato—Allegro

Momenta Quartet

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Program notes by Emilie-Anne Gendron:

"Visionary Sounds" assembles four works that lead the listener somewhere unexpected, whether offering a new perspective on something established, or creating a wholly original sound world. Festival regulars might notice that while I think up a different title every year, my programs often gravitate to this idea. Albert Einstein, an avid music lover (among other jobs) once said, "I am enough of the artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." Imagination engenders hope, and without it, we cannot envision possibilities that extend beyond our present circumstances. It is an act of mental courage that can seem quite radical—no less at present, as the world seems to be finding as many ways as possible to self-destruct. It reminds us what a shortsighted fallacy it is to consider the arts and humanities nonessential. We all need a bit of vision to see us through dark times.

Tonight's program begins with a mainstay of Momenta's repertoire, the rarely-performed **Twelve Pieces for String Quartet** by German/American composer **Stefan Wolpe**. Born in Berlin in 1902, Wolpe—a Jew and an ardent communist—fled Nazi Germany in 1933 after being branded a "degenerate artist." Eventually, he landed in New York City in 1938 by way of Vienna (where he met and studied with Anton Webern), then Bucharest, then Palestine. Becoming an American citizen in 1945, Wolpe soon established himself as an influential and dedicated teacher, with ties to the innovative Black Mountain College, Long Island University, and Darmstadt Summer Courses. In the final decade of his life, despite a long struggle with Parkinson's ending with his passing in 1972, his music began to be championed by artists and organizations in his adopted country.

Wolpe's voraciously eclectic style incorporates aesthetics as diverse as jazz, improvisation, bebop, Arabic scale systems, serialism, the Bauhaus, and Dadaism. (Elliott Carter, remarking on Wolpe's compositional daring, once famously said, "He does everything wrong and it comes out right.") These pieces came into being in 1950 after Wolpe began attending meetings at the Eighth Street Club, a hub for Abstract Expressionist artists. Intended as a musical study on this emerging post-war visual art form, the *Twelve Pieces* explore a wide palette of sound colors, emotions, and contrapuntal possibilities through a highly economic use of material (the whole work lasts about five minutes). At turns violent, acerbic, humorous, introspective, whimsical, and poignant, the vignettes are boldly gestural and carefully crafted,

yet also intensely personal, direct, and unpretentious. It can be seen as an encapsulation of Wolpe's radical, utopian belief in the potential—even obligation—of avant-garde art forms to connect with all people equally. He said it best in a diary entry from 1951: "The world has to get conscious of my way of making music...a thoroughly organized but proud, erect, hymnic, profoundly contained, human evocation."

Momenta is fortunate to have obtained this sheet music in the early 2000's through our founding violist Stephanie Griffin and our friend, the composer Matthew Greenbaum, a former student of Wolpe and member of the Stefan Wolpe Society. Matthew connected us to chairman Austin Clarkson, who before his passing in 2021 was the pre-eminent Wolpe authority and founder of Soundway Press, publisher of the Twelve Pieces. The earliest incarnation of Momenta (before we even had our name) gave the work's world premiere in 2002 at a festival celebrating Wolpe's centenary at the Center for Jewish History in New York City. We are pleased to be presenting it twice this month: the reprise being next week (Sept. 22) on the Village Trip Festival, celebrating composers influenced by Greenwich Village.

Mario Davidovsky's Synchronisms No. 9 for solo violin and electronic sounds has been on my wishlist since August of 2020, when I learned his Synchronisms No. 2 for a virtual concert presented by Composers Conference (which Davidovsky directed for over 50 years). The Argentine-American composer, who passed away in 2019, was a longtime resident and citizen of the United States. Born in Buenos Aires in 1937 to Lithuanian-Jewish refugees from Imperial Russia, he sought violin and composition studies at the conservatory in Buenos Aires, which afforded him a rigorous training due to the number of German and Austrian émigrés on the faculty. He was invited to the Tanglewood Music Center by Aaron Copland and Milton Babbitt, the latter of whom encouraged him to emigrate to the U.S. in 1960. He joined the newly opened Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in NYC, eventually becoming its director until joining the faculty of Harvard in 1994. While Davidovsky's output includes many non-electronic works, he left a trailblazing legacy in the field of electroacoustic music.

Synchronisms No. 9 was written in 1988 for the violinist and new-music maven Rolf Schulte. It is part of the larger "Synchronisms" series, consisting of 12 independent works composed over 40 years for various combinations of acoustic instruments and tape. In Davidovsky's words, he wanted "to find ways of embedding both the acoustic and the electronic into a single, coherent musical and aesthetic space." The pieces are particularly visionary for their exploration of melding such disparate sound worlds. On Synchronisms No. 9, Davidovsky wrote: "I was trying to embed two musical spaces into one and hopefully come up with something that was more than the sum of its parts. The violin initiates gestures that the tape finishes. The violin modulates the tape and the tape modulates the violin."

In experimenting with the interplay between tape and performer, Davidovsky plays up both our similarities and radically different abilities for creating timbres, attacks, sustains, and textures. A human and tape also, naturally, sit at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of spontaneity. It is a loaded counterpoint that Davidovsky weaves between the demanding writing of the violin part (which necessitates freedom) and the litany of electronic sounds on the other (which, while inventive and unpredictable-sounding, are predetermined). While there are plenty of moments where the tape sits back and lets the violin shine, it makes for a duo that is inherently tense and also humorous. I find it more than a little bit funny to be rehearsing and performing with a robot. In this collaboration for the modern age, who is really in control?

Looking at an established tradition in a new light is a strong thread running through this program, and Synchronisms No. 9 offers a new look at virtuoso violin writing. Davidovsky's early training as a violinist was steeped in what he called "turn-of-the-century violinism." Like a distorted memory of a Paganini Caprice or salon showpiece, this piece is full of flashy *pizzicati*, *arpeggios*, *ricochets*, and other flourishes. Daring *glissandi* are often humorously dovetailed with (or mocked by?) similar sliding effects in the electronic track, like sentimental *portamenti* gone wrong. At other times, rhapsodic and tender utterances remind us of the violin's fundamental identity as a personal, expressive voice. (It is at these moments that the tape, in all its icy unwavering precision, comes across as more sinister than playful—like a modern take on the age-old trope of the violinist embroiled in a Faustian bargain with the devil.) The piece is, in

the words of composer and writer Eric Salzman, “Sarasate or Wieniawski serialized”—a futuristic recasting of the Romantic *bravura* sensibility.

Tonight marks the world premiere of **David Glaser’s String Quartet No. 5**. After the completion of our last in-person Momenta Festival in 2019, I reached out to David, our longtime friend and collaborator, about programming one of his quartets on our next festival. We were delighted that he agreed to write us a new work, and we hoped to present it on the opening night in October of 2020, neatly coinciding with David’s birthday. Of course, the pandemic had other plans. Two years and one virtual festival later, we are delighted to premiere this work written in honor of his late mentor Mario Davidovsky. Momenta’s friendship with David extends back many years. One of our first residencies was at Yeshiva University’s Stern College for Women, where he has taught since 1996. He was the driving force behind that residency, involving an important concert series focusing on contributions made by Jewish composers to modern concert music.

About the composer:

David Glaser was born in New York in 1952. He remembers at a very early age asking his parents to play some of the records they owned, especially Mozart’s *Jupiter Symphony*, Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, and Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Although he played French horn in his junior high school band and studied classical guitar in high school it wasn’t until he heard Schoenberg’s *Pierrot lunaire* in college that he decided to pursue a career in music. He studied at Hunter College (BA), Queens College (MA) and Columbia University (DMA). His teachers included Mario Davidovsky, George Edwards, Martin Boykan, Jacques-Louis Monod and Jack Beeson. He has been the recipient of a CAP Grant and a Margaret Fairbank Jory Copying Assistance Grant from the American Music Center, the Dr. Boris and Eda Rapoport Prize in Composition from Columbia University and Fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and Wellesley Composer’s Conference. He received a 2007 Fromm Foundation commission to compose a work for Parthenia viol consort. In 2005 he received the Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters which described his work as “...subtly potent...” His music is published by the Association for the Promotion of New Music (APNM). He is past President of the United States section of the League of Composers/ISCM and is currently serving on its board. He also serves on the board of APNM and is president of the board of Parthenia, a consort of viols. His music has been commissioned by the NewMusic@ECU festival for Christopher Grymes, Parthenia – a Consort of Viols, the New York New Music Ensemble, Judith Kellock, Susan Narucki, Linda Larson, the Cygnus Ensemble, No Exit, the Peconic Chamber Orchestra, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and Glaux, the new music ensemble of Temple University. He is Professor of Music at Stern College for Women of Yeshiva University in New York. A CD of his music, *Kinesis* (TROY1343), is available on the Albany Records label. It includes a performance by Momenta with guitarist Oren Fader.

About this work, David Glaser writes:

In 1970 Mario Davidovsky was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his *Synchronisms No. 6* for Piano and Electronic Sound. By 1972 the piece had been recorded and released on Turnabout Records. This recording was my introduction to Mario’s music. By the second or third hearing I decided that I had to study with him. It took a while, but eventually I did. His insights, about music and about how to live an ethical life, had a profound impact on me. I still miss him.

My *String Quartet No. 5* represents a departure in some respects from my earlier works. It is more concentrated and intense, with a greater focus on gesture and texture. The piece is in one movement, with several clearly defined sections. It opens with a series of intense gestures and many rapid shifts of texture and sonority. This kaleidoscopic section ends with a long pause. The music that follows is slower, if only briefly, and then takes up ideas similar to those of the first part, with the difference that more time is spent with individual ideas.

When I started to write these notes, I looked back to see when I composed my first piece for Momenta. The year was 2006, and the piece was my second string quartet. Momenta’s enthusiasm and artistry have been a continuing source of inspiration for me. I am grateful for our ongoing, very fruitful collaboration.

Ludwig van Beethoven’s revolutionary and humane musical voice laid the groundwork for the Romantic era and beyond. He composed his **String Quartet No. 11 in f minor, Op. 95**, which he nicknamed the “Quartetto serioso,” in 1810 near the end of his so-called middle or “Heroic” period. More truly, however, it

is a transitional piece, a window into the experimentation he would continue into his even more creative late period. As Beethoven strained to break free of Classical restraint and moderation, his work became ever more bold and exploratory, characterized by grand gestures of struggle informed by his idealistic belief in the equality of all mankind. He also continued to develop his reputation among his peers as a turbulent, stubborn, opinionated, and unpredictable personality. Moreover, his deafness had been advancing since his mid-twenties and was almost complete by this point, causing him huge amounts of inner despair. Add in the precarious state of his overall physical health and fears over financial insecurity, and one has a pretty clear idea of what the “Serioso” is like: brusque, restless, tense, emotionally raw, and often violent.

The “Serioso” boasts Beethovenian hallmarks like the compelling use of silences; metric ambiguity; sudden outbursts; juxtaposition of loud and soft dynamics; and unexpected harmonic shifts or modulations. At just over 20 minutes, it is also his shortest quartet, with truncated thematic developments, condensed recapitulations, and densely packed statements. The brevity makes it even more significant to note what he does choose to repeat. Take for example the very opening statement, where the four of us burst forth in a violent 11-note unison followed by tense silence. The initial five-note germ is obsessively reiterated through the movement before the music evaporates, as if suddenly too exhausted to continue. Beethoven’s use of silence is as shocking as his music. In this piece, rests feel unyielding and impassive, like the blackness enveloping one’s existential scream into the void. The slow movement—actually not so slow, marked *Allegretto*—taps into a reflective and searching mood, while somehow always managing to stay objective (making it all the more poignant when our lonely voices follow each other into a contrapuntal, chromatic *fugato*). It runs without pause into the third movement, an angry romp contrasted by two chorale-like midsections. The last movement opens with a tragically imploring introduction leading to an unrelenting main section, which despite its dance-like lilt, feels more often like it is running for its life. It never settles or lands, and after all the fury, something odd happens at the very end. Beethoven abruptly does a 180°, with the music happily scampering away and ending in an exhilarating F Major conclusion.

We have run into an interesting issue in previous performances. Despite an ending which I think could not be more obvious, audiences sometimes seem hesitant to clap, as if confused. (I don’t think it is because we played it that badly!) Part of the issue could be the connection of the middle two movements, making some people second-guess whether the piece is actually finished. But I think the real root of the confusion is deeper—perhaps, surprise that after all of his ranting and raving, Beethoven has really just turned to us and...laughed. Was this all a joke? Is the joke on us? Much has been theorized about the ending and its potential meaning, but I think no one has put it more eloquently than Mark Steinberg of the Brentano Quartet:

...The music flutters, ascends, evinces a sort of liberated joy. Some commentators have seen this as a reflection of the ideas of political liberation which were much in the air and certainly much in Beethoven’s consciousness at that time. Perhaps. But my own reaction to this extraordinary peroration is that it may be something different from the exultation of victory; it is instead a leave-taking from the Ego’s tribulations. Here is awareness of some greater space, a space that holds and allows the suffering without succumbing to it. The relationship of this coda to the rest of the piece is that of the resurrection to the crucifixion. All is let go and rises.

It seems that Beethoven was aware that the “Serioso” might alienate the audiences of 1810. He did not dedicate it to a wealthy or royal patron but instead, to his lifelong friend Nikolaus von Zmeskall, an official at the Hungarian court in Vienna and a cellist. (Beethoven composed the famous “Eyeglass” viola/cello duo for himself and Zmeskall, who both wore spectacles.) Beethoven delayed having the “Serioso” published for six years and when he finally did, he explained to the London impresario George Smart, “The Quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public.”

As a supporter of adventurous music and a friend of the Momenta Quartet, consider yourself one of those forward-looking connoisseurs who would have made Beethoven’s cut!