

ChamberFest: a conversation with cellist Peter Wiley

by Jeremy Reynolds



Upon entering the Curtis Institute of Music at age 13, cellist Peter Wiley embarked on a colorful career that now spans over five decades. In the 1980s, he began performing with the Beaux Arts Trio. In the 1990s, he co-founded the Opus One piano quartet with pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. And in 2001, he inherited his mentor David Soyer's position in the Guarneri Quartet — Wiley has been nominated for Grammy Awards with the Beaux Arts Trio as well as the Guarneri Quartet.

This year marks Wiley's first year performing in ChamberFest Cleveland, during which he will play in the first four concerts on June 17, 18, 19, and 21. (See our [interview](#) with the Frank and Diana Cohen for details about each concert.)

I spoke with Wiley on the phone a few hours after he arrived in Cleveland, and I asked him how he came to be involved in ChamberFest.

"I'm here because I've known Diana Cohen and Frank, especially Frank, for many many years," he responded. "I first met Frank in the early 1970s up at the Marlboro Festival. We've played together a number of times — most recently in Reno, Nevada during their Winter Festival about two years ago." (Wiley first performed at the [Marlboro Festival](#) in 1971 and continues to regularly participate.)

What repertoire will he perform during ChamberFest? "For my first concert, I'm playing Mozart's *Quintet in Eb Major for Horn and Strings* (K.417), which is on Wednesday, June 17," he said. "The Horn Quintet is interesting because it has two violas and only one violin instead of the other way around. Of course, it's really like a concerto for the French horn.

“Next will be Shostakovich’s *Piano Quintet*, which has become one of the monuments of the piano quintet literature,” Wiley said. The *Piano Quintet* will be featured during the program titled “Darkness to Light” on Thursday, June 18. Sandwiched between Thomas Ades’s desolate *Darkness Visible* for solo and piano and Beethoven’s *Septet* (Op. 20), the Shostakovich pivots the concert from its bleak opening gambit to its luminous finale.

Where exactly is the turning point? “It’s a fantastic piece, very, very dark in some respects,” Wiley said, “but, strangely enough, the last movement changes the character — it’s much lighter compared to the other movements.”

Wiley will play in Brahms’s *Quintet for Clarinet and Strings in B Minor* (Op. 115) during the program dedicated to Frank Cohen entitled “Frank!” on Friday, June 19. Has he performed the Quintet with Cohen before?

“No, I’ve never played it with Frank,” he said. “We’ve done the Brahms Trio and the Beethoven Trio, but this will be our first Brahms Quintet.” The cellist went on to outline the work’s origin, “There’s a wonderful string quintet (Op. 111) with two violas that was going to be his very last work. But then he met clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld and composed all of this additional repertoire — the two Sonatas for clarinet and piano, the Trio, and the Quintet. Pretty nice, huh?”

The Quintet is notoriously difficult to balance between the clarinet and string quartet. With only a few days to rehearse, how does Wiley anticipate the performance sounding? “I think it’s going to sound fantastic! I know all of the players, and I’m confident everyone is of a like mind on all of the important things. But you know, with Brahms, that’s often the case.”

Wiley’s final concert with ChamberFest will be “Who’s Romantic” on Sunday, June 21. “I’m playing Schubert’s *Quintet in C Major* (Op. 163), with cellist Clive Greensmith,” he said. The Cello Quintet is Schubert’s last published work, and it calls for an additional cello instead of the more conventional second viola. Has Wiley worked with Greensmith prior to this concert? “I certainly have. In fact, we’ve played this piece together before.”

Immediately following ChamberFest, Wiley will depart Cleveland to perform at another summer festival. Does he enjoy the full travelling schedule? “Certainly!,” he responded. “Summer festival’s are a wonderful time for musicians. I’m hopping around several different festivals starting now and finishing in September. We love doing that, and of course we see a lot of familiar faces. It’s a good time to reconnect with people.”

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