

## Oberlin's second opening festival to consider "End of Life, End of Time"

by Daniel Hathaway



Last September, Oberlin violin professor Sibbi Bernhardsson was the catalyst for a two-day festival, "Creative Arts & Music in the Shadow of War," marking the centenary of the end of World War I with four concerts, two panel discussions, and parallel events at Oberlin's Allen Art Museum.

That festival built on Bernhardsson's fascination with music written during The Great War, and proved to be a great success. "Although the topic was somber, it ended up being an energizing and fun project — a way to collaborate with different professors in the College and the Conservatory, and a great opportunity for students to kick off the school year and see the faculty in action as performers and speakers," the violinist said in a telephone conversation. "Since Oberlin has so many intellectual and musical resources, I wanted to do some kind of compelling project as a follow-up."

The impetus for this year's Festival came from Bernhardsson's colleagues, who wanted to perform Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, written and performed in a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1941. "It's such a great and important work that it's not the kind of piece you play on a Sunday afternoon faculty recital and then go out and have a dessert afterward. But it occurred to me that maybe it would be a great work to build a festival around."

A second theme arose from Bernhardsson's fascination with what composers are going through and thinking about toward the end of their lives. "It's interesting that a lot of them turn to writing chamber music," he said. "The last five pieces Beethoven wrote were string quartets, and many of Mozart's and Bartók's last works were

chamber pieces. Perhaps they're wanting to be more personal, more reflective and spiritual. But they also seem to become more experimental — thinking forward to what comes next. I thought that maybe I could tie those two ideas together.”



Things came into focus rather quickly. “Oberlin being Oberlin, it was so easy for me to start talking to people,” Bernhardsson said. “It turned out that a faculty friend of mine who is a geologist specializes in extinction, so he is going to give a little talk on that. Another friend who teaches in the classics department is going to discuss the end of time in ancient Greek and Roman thought. The format is the same as last year, which worked very well — four concerts with pre-concert talks — and two panel discussions that I’m excited about.



The first panel will feature Andrew Shenton (*left*), a musicologist from Boston University. “He’s the only person we’re bringing in. He’s written a book about the Messiaen Quartet, and is going to be presenting a paper on that topic. The second panel will consist of four religious professionals — a pastor, the campus rabbi, and the College’s Muslim and Buddhist affiliates. They’ll talk about burial traditions, pastoral care — things everybody has to deal with the end of life. It seemed logical to bring a psychology professor onboard to talk about what happens in our psyche toward the end.”

Since the topic is broad, Bernhardsson said he was able to program music ranging from Purcell (his *Funeral Music for Queen Mary*), through Beethoven, Schubert and Fauré all the way to the early 20th century. “It would have

been tricky to program any more recent music because composers are still alive, and I didn't want to jinx them!"

In addition to the concerts and panel sessions, two limited-admission gallery talks at the Allen Art Museum will discuss late works by Claude Monet.

"In all, there will be 18 performers, plus the Oberlin Choir, and a little string orchestra I've organized to play the slow movement from Beethoven's last quartet — the last slow movement, and the last set of variations he ever wrote. It's nice to involve some students in the festival as well," Bernhardson said.

## **Oberlin End of Life, End of Time Festival 2019**

### **SEPTEMBER 7 - SATURDAY**

**1:30 pm - First Concert.** Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31, Op. 110 (Angela Cheng), Fauré's Cello Sonata No. 2, Op. 117 (Amir Eldan & Haewon Song), Purcell's Funeral Music for Queen Mary (Oberlin College Choir, Gregory Ristow, conducting) & Schubert's Fantasy in C for violin and piano (David Bowlin & Tony Choi), with poems selected & read by DeSales Harrison. 1:00 pm pre-concert lecture by Charles McGuire. Warner Concert Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 43 South Professor St, Oberlin. Free. Click [here](#) for live stream.

**3:30 pm - Murphy Lecture Series Panel Discussion,** Charles McGuire, moderator, with Oberlin professors F. Zeb Page (Geology) & Chris Trinacty (Classics) & Andrew Shenton (Musicology, Boston University). "Musicological, Geological & Classical Perspectives on the end of time". Stull Recital Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 77 W. College St. Free.

**7:30 pm - Second Concert.** Beethoven's Six Bagatelles, Op. 126 (Peter Takács), Haydn's String Quartet in d, Op. 103 (David Bowlin, Marilyn McDonald, Kirsten Docter & Darrett Adkins) & Messiaen's Quatuor pour la fin du Temps (Quartet for the End of Time, Richard Hawkins, clarinet, Darrett Adkins, cello, and Haewon Song, piano), with poetry selected & read by Chanda Feldman. 7:00 pm Pre-Concert talk by Andrew Shenton. Stull Recital Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 77 W. College St. Free. Click [here](#) for live stream.

### **SEPTEMBER 8 - SUNDAY**

**1:30 pm - Third Concert.** Shostakovich's Viola Sonata, Op. 147 (Peter Slowik & James Howsmon), Lili Boulanger's Nocturne (Two Pieces for violin & piano, Marilyn McDonald & James Howsmon), Debussy's Syrinx for solo flute (Alexa Still) & Brahms' Clarinet Sonata No. 1 (Richard Hawkins & Angela Cheng). Poems selected and read by Chanda Feldman. Pre-concert lecture at 1:00 pm by Andrew Pau. Warner Concert Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 43 South Professor St, Oberlin. Free. Click [here](#) for live stream.

**3:30 pm - Panel Discussion,** moderated by Oberlin's Director of Hillel & Jewish Campus Life Rabbi Meghan Doherty, with Oberlin Psychology Professor Paul Thibodeau, Pastor David Hill (First Church of Oberlin) & Jaques Rutzky & Maysan Haydar, Buddhist & Muslim affiliates in Oberlin's Office of Religious & Spiritual Life. "Us at the End: Hearts, Minds, and Souls." Stull Recital Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 77 W. College St. Free. Click [here](#) for live stream.

**7:30 pm - Concert Four.** Prokofiev's Flute Sonata in D, Op. 94 (Alexa Still & Robert Shannon), Brahms' Four Serious Songs (Tim LeFebvre & James Howsmon), Schumann's Marschenbilder for viola & piano (Kirsten Docter & Scott Cuellar) & Beethoven's Largo (String Quartet, Op. 135), arr. for string orchestra. Poems selected & read by DeSales Harrison. 7:00 pm pre-concert lecture by Brian Alegant. Warner Concert Hall, Oberlin Conservatory, 43 South Professor St, Oberlin. Free. Click [here](#) for live stream.

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