

Jonathan Biss - 2018-19 long biography (837 words)

Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned pianist who shares his deep curiosity with music lovers in the concert hall and beyond. He continues to expand his reputation as a teacher, musical thinker, and one of the great Beethoven interpreters of our time. He was recently named Co-artistic Director alongside Mitsuko Uchida at the Marlboro Music Festival, where he has spent twelve summers. In addition, he has written extensively about his relationships with the composers with whom he shares a stage. A member of the faculty of his alma mater the Curtis Institute of Music since 2010, Biss led the first massive open online course (MOOC) offered by a classical music conservatory, *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, which has reached more than 150,000 people in 185 countries.

As 2020, the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, approaches, Biss continues to add lectures to his online course until he covers all of the sonatas in time for the anniversary year. At the same time, he progresses in his nine-year, nine-disc recording cycle of Beethoven's complete piano sonatas, which will also be completed in 2020. His bestselling eBook, *Beethoven's Shadow*, describing the process of recording the sonatas and published by RosettaBooks in 2011, was the first Kindle Single written by a classical musician. These projects represent Biss' complete approach to music-making and connecting his audience to his own passion for the music.

Biss completes his complete Beethoven piano sonata performance cycles at the Aspen and Ravinia festivals and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra this season. Audiences experienced all the piano sonatas in seven concerts over several years. In 2018-19 he performs with the Philadelphia and Philharmonia orchestras, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Dallas Symphony, among many others. He also continues his collaborations with the Elias, Doric, and Brentano string quartets. In honor of his teacher Leon Fleisher's 90th birthday, he joins fellow pianists Yefim Bronfman and Katherine Jacobson, as well as Fleisher himself, for celebratory concerts at Carnegie Hall, Perelman Theater in Philadelphia, the Kennedy Center, and Herbst Theatre in San Francisco, performing Schubert, Ravel, Dvořák, Bach, and Kirchner. Biss also tours Finland and Germany with the Japan Philharmonic, Sweden with Musica Vitae, and the Netherlands with Liza Ferschtman, Marc Desmons, and Antoine Lederlin.

This season, as part of his *Beethoven/5* project, for which the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra is co-commissioning five composers to write piano concertos, each inspired by one of Beethoven's, Biss premieres Caroline Shaw's new concerto alongside Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 at the Seattle Symphony. In the spring of its premiere alone, Shaw's piece will be performed

by Biss and three additional ensembles: the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the North Carolina Symphony, and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra. He is committed to making sure that the concertos become part of the repertoire, also performing previous commission *City Stanzas* by Sally Beamish three times over the course of the season. The other concertos which have already premiered are Timo Andres' *The Blind Banister*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music, and Salvatore Sciarrino's *Il Sogno di Stradella*. Brett Dean will write the final concerto.

Previous projects that Biss conceived have included an exploration of composers' "Late Style" in various concert programs at Carnegie Hall, the Barbican Centre, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and San Francisco Performances. He also gave masterclasses at Carnegie and published the Kindle Single *Coda* on the topic. *Schumann: Under the Influence* was a 30-concert exploration of the composer's role in musical history, for which Biss also recorded Schumann and Dvořák piano quintets with the Elias String Quartet and wrote *A Pianist Under the Influence*.

Throughout his career Biss has been an advocate for new music. Prior to the *Beethoven/5* project, he commissioned *Lunaire Variations* by David Ludwig, *Interlude II* by Leon Kirchner, *Wonderer* by Lewis Spratlan, and *Three Pieces for Piano* and a concerto by Bernard Rands, which he premiered with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has also premiered a piano quintet by William Bolcom.

Biss represents the third generation in a family of professional musicians that includes his grandmother Raya Garbousova, one of the first well-known female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his Cello Concerto), and his parents, violinist Miriam Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Biss began his piano studies at age six, and his first musical collaborations were with his mother and father. He studied at Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at the Curtis Institute of Music with Leon Fleisher.

Biss has been recognized with numerous honors, including the Leonard Bernstein Award presented at the 2005 Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Wolf Trap's Shouse Debut Artist Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award. His albums for EMI won Diapason d'Or de l'année and Edison awards. He was an artist-in-residence on American Public Media's *Performance Today* and was the first American chosen to participate in the BBC's New Generation Artist program.

For more information, please visit www.jonathanbiss.com.

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