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Timo Andres' "The Blind Banister" for pianist Jonathan Biss and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra named Pulitzer Prize finalist

"The Blind Banister" is the first work of Biss and SPCO's *Beethoven/5* project: the commissioning of five new piano concertos inspired by Beethoven's

It was [announced today](#) that composer Timo Andres' work "The Blind Banister" was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist in the music category.

Andres' concerto, which was given its world premiere by pianist Jonathan Biss and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra at the Ordway Concert Hall in November 2015, is the first installment of the SPCO and Biss's *Beethoven/5* project, for which The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra has commissioned five composers to write new piano concertos, each inspired by one of Beethoven's five piano concertos.

Called "unfailingly compelling" by *The Star Tribune*, "The Blind Banister" will be performed by Biss and the Orchestra of St. Luke's this summer at Caramoor (a co-commissioner of the work) on July 10, and with the New York Philharmonic at David Geffen Hall on April 20-25, 2017. The name of the piece was taken from Tomas Tranströmer's "Schubertiana." "Like when the light goes out on the stairs and the hand follows—with confidence—the blind banister that finds its way in the darkness."

"The SPCO extends its heartiest congratulations to Timo on this well-deserved recognition from the Pulitzer committee," said SPCO Artistic Director and Principal Violin Kyu-Young Kim. "The Blind Banister is a beautifully conceived and wonderfully orchestrated piece that really touched our audiences and our musicians, and served as a wonderful kickoff to our 5 year commissioning project with Jonathan."

Biss says, "I'm so happy that 'The Blind Banister' has been recognized by the Pulitzer committee. From the time I began working on it, I've been taken with its beauty and its wit, and it's been such a pleasure to share the piece with audiences, who invariably seem to feel the same way about it. I hope that this honor will mean that Timo's wonderful concerto finds its way to more and more audiences."

Andres describes his piece [here](#), saying, "Beethoven gave his early second piano concerto ('not one of my best', in his own estimation) a kind of renovation in the form of a new cadenza, 20 years down the line (around the time he was working on the 'Emperor' concerto). It's wonderfully jarring in that he makes no concessions to his earlier style; for a couple of minutes, we're plucked from a world of conventional gestures into a future-world of obsessive fugues and spiraling modulations. Like any good cadenza, it's made from those same simple gestures—an arpeggiated triad, a sequence of downward scales—but uses them as the basis for a miniature fantasia."

"My third piano concerto, 'The Blind Banister,' is a whole piece built over this fault line in Beethoven's second, trying to peer into the gap. I tried as much as possible to start with those same extremely simple elements Beethoven uses; however, my piece is not a pastiche or an exercise in palimpsest. It doesn't even directly quote Beethoven. There are some surface similarities to his concerto (a three-movement structure, a B-flat tonal center) but these are mostly red herrings. The best way I can describe my

approach to writing the piece is: I started writing my own cadenza to Beethoven's concerto, and ended up devouring it from the inside out."

The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra is the lead commissioner on all five *Beethoven/5* pieces, including new concertos by Sally Beamish, paired with Beethoven 1, to premiere January 20-22, 2017; Salvatore Sciarrino, paired with Beethoven 4, to premiere in 2017-18; Caroline Shaw, paired with Beethoven 3, to premiere in 2018-19, and Brett Dean, paired with Beethoven 5, to premiere in 2019-20.

ABOUT TIMO ANDRES

Timo Andres (b. 1985, Palo Alto, CA) is a composer and pianist who grew up in rural Connecticut, studied at Yale University and now lives in Brooklyn, NY. A Nonesuch Records artist, his newest album of orchestral works, *Home Stretch*, has been hailed for its "playful intelligence and individuality," (*The Guardian*) and of his 2010 debut album for two pianos, *Shy and Mighty*, Alex Ross wrote in *The New Yorker* that "it achieves an unhurried grandeur that has rarely been felt in American music since John Adams came on the scene... more mighty than shy, [Andres] sounds like himself."

In the 15/16 season Andres' commissions included a string quartet for the Takács Quartet, co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall and the Shriver Hall Concert Series in Baltimore. He tours with fellow composer/performer Gabriel Kahane, performing a duo program including new works from each artist, commissioned by a consortium of presenters led by Carnegie Hall. He also tours with Philip Glass, joining the composer in marathon performances of Glass's complete piano Etudes, with dates in Mexico City and Chicago. (These follow 14/15 performances with Glass at Brooklyn's BAM, San Francisco Performances, the National Concert Hall in Dublin and London's Barbican Centre.)

Other recent highlights include commissions from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and a consortium including Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam and San Francisco Performances for Jonathan Biss and the Elias String Quartet. Andres has also written works for Kirill Gerstein, Tertulia Chamber Music, yMusic, and the Library of Congress for the Attaca Quartet. His 2014 song cycle *Work Songs*, written an ensemble including Gabriel Kahane, Ted Hearne, Becca Stevens, Nathan Koci and himself, was premiered at the Ecstatic Music Festival and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra's Liquid Music Series.

As a pianist, Andres has performed solo recitals for Lincoln Center, Wigmore Hall, the Phillips Collection, (le) Poisson Rouge, and San Francisco Performances. He performed his distinctive re-composition of Mozart's "Coronation Concerto" at the 2014 Ojai Festival with the Knights Chamber Orchestra, and his own work, *Old Keys*, and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, with Edwin Outwater and the North Carolina Symphony in January 2015.

Andres earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the Yale School of Music and is one sixth of the Sleeping Giant composers' collective. He performs regularly with ACME, has worked professionally as a graphic and web designer, and has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, BMI, and ASCAP, as well as grants from New Music USA and the Copland Fund.

An avid cyclist, Timo can often be sighted commuting astride his 1983 Mercian.

ABOUT JONATHAN BISS

Jonathan Biss is a world-renowned pianist who shares his deep musical and intellectual curiosity with classical music lovers in the concert hall and beyond. He performs a diverse repertoire ranging from Mozart and Beethoven, through the Romantics to Janáček and Schoenberg, as well as works by contemporary composer György Kurtág and commissions from Leon Kirchner, Lewis Spratlan, and Bernard Rands. Biss has a noted recording career, including an album of Schubert sonatas and two short Kurtág pieces that NPR Music named as one of the best albums of the year. His recent albums for EMI won Diapason d'Or de l'année and Edison awards, and in 2016 he releases the fifth volume of his nine-

year, nine-disc recording cycle of Beethoven's complete piano sonatas.

Biss studied at Indiana University and at the Curtis Institute of Music, where he joined the piano faculty in 2010. He led the first massive open online course (MOOC) offered by a classical music conservatory, *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, which has reached more than 100,000 people in more than 160 countries, and he will continue to add lectures until he covers all the sonatas. His bestselling eBook, *Beethoven's Shadow*, published by *RosettaBooks* in 2011, was the first Kindle Single written by a classical musician. For more information, please visit www.jonathanbiss.com.

ABOUT THE SAINT PAUL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Renowned for its artistic excellence, remarkable versatility of musical styles and adventurous programming, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, now in its 57th season, is widely regarded as one of the finest chamber orchestras in the world. The SPCO has recently undergone transformational change, with the opening of its new home, the Ordway Concert Hall, the addition of a new generation of players, and significant changes in the scope of its artistic aspirations and profile. Committed to championing new music, the SPCO is primarily an uncondacted ensemble that works in close collaboration with a diverse series of [artistic partners](#). The orchestra's current artistic partners are Jonathan Cohen, Jeremy Denk, Martin Fröst, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Pekka Kuusisto, Christian Zacharias and Thomas Zehetmair. Past Artistic Partners include Roberto Abbado, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Douglas Boyd, Joshua Bell, Nicholas McGegan, Stephen Prutsman and Dawn Upshaw.

The virtuoso musicians of the SPCO present more than [130 concerts](#) and [educational programs](#) each year, and are regularly heard on public radio programs which reach 1.2 million listeners each week on 289 stations. Additionally, the SPCO reaches more than 200,000 listeners annually through its free online [Listening Library](#). The SPCO has released [67 recordings](#), commissioned [146 new works](#), and tours nationally and internationally, including performances in premier venues in Europe, Asia and South America. Recent engagements in Berkeley, CA, New York's Carnegie Hall, the Ojai Festival, and tours to Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe were met with great critical acclaim.

The SPCO is nationally recognized for its commitment to broad community accessibility, its innovative audience outreach efforts, and its [educational and family programming](#). Regular subscription series are performed in a [variety of different venues](#) across the Twin Cities metropolitan area each season, a unique commitment to geographic accessibility for a major orchestra. The SPCO offers the most affordable tickets of any major orchestra in the United States, with over 50 percent of tickets available for \$12 or less. The orchestra also offers an innovative new [ticket membership model](#) in which members pay \$5 per month to attend unlimited concerts. The SPCO's award-winning [CONNECT education program](#) reaches over 5,000 students and teachers annually in 12 Minneapolis and Saint Paul public schools, and its [Target® Free Family Music](#) program provides engaging and educational experiences for thousands of Twin Cities children and families each year. The SPCO's [Liquid Music Series](#) (named "Best of Classical" by *The New York Times*) creates a space for innovative new projects and iconoclastic artists in unique presentation formats and invites adventurous audiences to discover the new and the fascinating within the flourishing landscape of contemporary chamber music.

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