



SUMMER FESTIVAL ON THE EASTSIDE

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 11

Zoltán Kodály

Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, Op. 12

Allegramente

Lento, ma non troppo

Vivo

Joseph Lin, violin

Lily Francis, violin

Richard O'Neill, viola

Johannes Brahms

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 101

Allegro energico

Presto non assai

Andante grazioso

Allegro molto

Stefan Jackiw, violin

Robert deMaine, cello

Anna Polonsky, piano

Antonín Dvořák

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E minor, Op. 90, "Dumky"

Lento maestoso—Allegro vivace

Poco adagio—Vivace non troppo

Andante—Vivace non troppo

Andante moderato—Allegretto scherzando

Lento maestoso—Vivace

Scott Yoo, violin

Ronald Thomas, cello

Orion Weiss, piano

Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967)

Serenade for Two Violins and Viola, Op. 12 (1919–1920)

“If I were to name the composer whose works are the most perfect embodiment of the Hungarian spirit, I would answer, Kodály. His work proves his faith in the Hungarian spirit. The obvious explanation is that all Kodály’s composing activity is rooted only in Hungarian soil, but the deep inner reason is his unshakable faith and trust in the constructive power and future of his people.” So wrote his friend and compatriot Béla Bartók in 1928.

Even before gaining international fame, both men had earned reputations as committed ethnomusicologists whose own music reflected their deep immersion in Hungarian folk music. Differences in their respective musical styles are apparent: Bartók’s music emphasizes rhythmic thrust and dissonant-rich harmonies (though his latest works mark a retreat into more consonant harmony) while Kodály infused his compositions with melodic shapeliness derived from his essentially vocal orientation. (Many of his vocal/choral works are scarcely known outside of Hungary.)

Kodály was also a fine cellist whose chamber music favors his chosen instrument. Other than an early *Adagio* for violin and piano, his Serenade for Two Violins and Viola is his only chamber work to forego the cello. (Even with the *Adagio* Kodály eventually provided alternative versions for viola or cello.) With the Serenade, completed in 1920, his chamber essays came to a close. Henceforth his compositional energies largely focused on orchestral and vocal/choral music.

In the realm of trios, it is obviously the familiar “piano trio” (violin, cello and piano) that rules the roost in sheer quantity. A smaller number of “string trios” (violin, viola and cello) dot the landscape, and fewer still are those for the unusual deployment of two violins and viola. That Kodály’s Serenade so engagingly succeeds bears testament to his fine sense of string sonority. A review by Bartók in 1921 captures the essence of the work: “Despite unusual chord combinations and surprising originality [the Serenade] is still firmly based on tonality, though not to be interpreted strictly on the major/minor system....It reveals a personality with something entirely new to say and one who is capable of communicating this contest in a masterful and concentrated fashion. [It is a work] extraordinarily rich in melodies.”

The opening movement, marked *Allegramente* establishes an outdoorsy, fresh-air ambience that parallels that of Dvořák at his most delectably rustic. The vivacious rhythms—emphasized by insistent pizzicatos—derive from dance and inspire foot-stomping on the part of the engaged listener. (Please try this at home, *not* here!)

Beginning eerily and quietly, the ensuing *Lento, ma non troppo*, provides great contrast and borders at times on the periphery of Bartók’s wonted “night music” fantasies that often color that composer’s slow movements. Quivering tremolos and anguished recitative-like melodies create a tense dialogue between the instruments.

Having exorcized the terrors of the night, Kodály returns to the sunlit spirit of the dance in the concluding *Vivo*. In a series of rich and contrasting sonorities a drone-like

accompaniment supports the folk-ish Terpsichorean journey. As with the previous movements the range of string color adds immeasurably to the Serenade's appeal.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 101 (1886)

Aside from his pairs of strings-only quartets, quintets and sextets Brahms incorporated the orchestra-like sonorities of the piano into virtually all of his other chamber music. A pianist himself, it allowed the performer in him to participate in performances of much of his music—which also included, incidentally, piano reductions of much of his orchestral music and even works *with* one piano already in the original versions.

In the summer of 1886, Brahms was soaking up the pleasures of the Swiss resort of Hofstetten. As was his wont, this recuperative interlude included concentrated time devoted to composition; it was in effect a “working vacation.” In this particular case he balanced work on three major pieces, his second sonatas respectively for violin and cello, both with piano, of course, and his final Piano Trio, Op. 101, cast in the dramatic key of C minor. Keeping his fingers active, he handled the piano role at the Trio's premiere in 1887, joined by members of the Heckmann String Quartet.

As he matured as a composer, Brahms' music underwent a process of remarkable concision. Largely gone were the leisurely and expansive movements of some of his early works, such as the oceanic scope of the Op. 5 Piano Sonata and the first version of the Op. 8 Piano Trio. He sought to pare the “fat” from his late scores, taking to heart a sentence he had underlined in a copy of a book in his library, Vischer's *Goethe's Faust*. “The artist should only provide the essentials, and eliminate everything inessential; in this way he will transform the real into the ideal.” Faintly Platonic, this remark resonated to Brahms' evolving esthetics, and has special meaning for a work such as the Op. 101 Piano Trio. As with his slightly later Clarinet Quintet, a basic three-note thematic kernel informs all four movements, creating great musical wealth from a minimal (in size, not implication) thematic germ.

This “germ” appears virtually immediately in the left-hand piano part at the beginning of the opening *Allegro energico*. At this point the music is aggressive and defiant, yet magician that Brahms can be, the flowing lyrical second theme also grows and ripens from this initially terse three-note figure. Overall, the movement's heated and agitated passion belies the usual attribution of “autumnal” to Brahms' late works.

Ghostly sonorities inhabit the second movement, *Presto non assai*. They too derive from the three-note figure, though the rhythm differs considerably from its earlier incarnation. Plucked arpeggios from the cello against quietly martial chords from the piano add to the eerie atmosphere of the music.

The meltingly lovely and unabashedly expressive theme announced by the strings at the beginning of the *Andante grazioso* does, at last, give us a hint of the “autumnal,” and here too the heartfelt melody so nobly intoned especially on the cello is an outgrowth of the abovementioned motive, though with wider spaces between the notes. The theme is

unusual in its atypical seven-beat length. Moments of sublime yearning darken and intensify meaning in this movement.

Both animated and *Angst*-filled, the concluding *Allegro molto* generates great thrust and borrows the altered three-note germ in both of its primary themes. Brahms the alchemist mixes and refashions new tunes from permutations of the theme's already varied manifestations. Lest we think that Brahms was just a cantankerous old man, he forsakes the storm and stress of the work's C-minor tonality, ending the piece in the major in a spirit of enveloping warmth.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E minor, Op. 90, "Dumky" (1891)

Inspired by the example of fellow countryman Bedřich Smetana, Dvořák embraced the principle of expressing national yearnings through his music. Even during his extended stay in New York and Spillville, Iowa where he incorporated thematic ideas deriving from his fascination with Native American and African-American music, ever-potent Bohemian "DNA" insinuated itself in virtually everything he composed. Even within the European classical tradition, where he was strongly drawn to and affected by the music of Wagner and Brahms, it was the Czech countryside that shaped the contours of his melodies and suggested the harmonic underpinnings of his compositional style. Given the initial and lasting enthusiasm for his music outside of his homeland—England, Germany and the United States in particular, we are repeatedly reminded of the nearly continuous presence of a Bohemian accent of his music. Obviously we expect it in the *Slavonic Dances* and other Czech-themed works, but it's strongly felt in his symphonies and ample chamber music.

Four works constitute Dvořák's piano trio canon, though at least two early trios failed to survive the composer's trash bin. Dating from 1891, the "Dumky" Trio is the last of the lot and the best known. Unlike the first three extant trios—each cast in traditional classical sonata structure and overall layout—the "Dumky" is more like a suite, but of mood rather than of dance rhythms. Six two-part *dumky* (plural of the singular *dumka*) constitute this folk-inspired work. Dvořák was clearly laying the groundwork for a retreat from the classical forms of his middle years (most tellingly represented by the ultra-Brahmsian F-minor Trio, Op. 65 of 1883), a journey that would culminate in his late-life tone poems and the opera *Rusalka*.

A *dumka* is a Slavic folk song conveying melancholy and wistfulness relieved by contrasting interludes that range from the quietly lyrical to near mania. Though forward looking, Dvořák keeps one toe in the past: there is an internal unity in this work that nods toward classical form and avoids pastiche. The first three *dumky*, played without pause, more or less correspond to a first movement, albeit one with an engaging variety of moods. The fourth *dumka*, somber and deliberate, is the traditional slow movement, while the two remaining movements function respectively as a scherzo and a rondo finale.

**Program Notes by
Steven Lowe**