



2012 WINTER FESTIVAL

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2012

Sergei Prokofiev

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op.119

Andante grave

Scherzo: Moderato

Allegro, ma non troppo

Edward Arron, cello William Wolfram, piano

Antonín Dvořák

Bagatelles for Two Violins, Cello and Harmonium, Op. 47

Allegretto scherzando

Tempo di minuetto

Allegretto scherzando

Canon

Poco allegro

Scott Yoo, violin James Ehnes, violin Bion Tsang, cello

Andrew Armstrong, harmonium

Antonín Dvořák

Silent Woods (Klid) for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 68, No. 5

William Wolfram and Andrew Armstrong, piano

Johannes Brahms

Quintet for Strings No. 2 in G Major, Op.111

Allegro non troppo

Adagio

Un poco allegretto

Vivace

Amy Schwartz Moretti, violin Erin Keefe, violin Roberto Díaz, viola

Richard O'Neill, viola Robert deMaine, cello

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C Major, Op.119 (1949)

Just three years after the end of World War II, the iron hand of Soviet repression once again sought to stifle artistic creativity through the infamous “Resolution on Music” formulated by Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov. Prokofiev, Shostakovich,

Khatchaturian and Miaskovsky were only the most famous composers denounced in Zhdanov's speech to the Communist Party Congress; all artists understood the genuine threat of Stalin's bloodlust. This situation only worsened Prokofiev's already precarious state of health, though he still felt the fire of creativity burning within. He wanted to compose but knew there was in effect a tacit ban on his music.

Despite the above situation, Prokofiev's spirits were lifted by his friendship with cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, whom he had met in 1947. After hearing Rostropovich perform Miaskovsky's Second Cello Sonata, Prokofiev felt inspired to write a sonata of his own for the great cellist, which resulted in his Cello Sonata in C Major. Since the composer (a first-rate pianist) was not in good health he enlisted the services of the resolutely apolitical legendary pianist Sviatoslav Richter to handle the piano part. After the premiere of the new piece, Miaskovsky noted in his diary "Yesterday Rostropovich and Richter openly played the Cello Sonata by Prokofiev in concert—a miraculous piece of music!"

The Sonata opens with an *Andante grave* initiated by a somber and mysterious chorale. Much of the writing for cello lies in its dark lower register, not unlike how Brahms had treated the cello in his first sonata for that instrument. Occasional flashes of Prokofiev's typically sardonic wit alternate with darker-hued passages.

Marked *Scherzo: Moderato* the middle movement opens lightheartedly, only to be followed by rapturous music of a Romantic persuasion in the central Trio-like section before returning to the *Scherzo* proper.

Prokofiev ends with a fast, deft and (perhaps) surprisingly positive *Allegro, ma non troppo* that employs two themes. The first, an engagingly lyrical tune, is countered—perhaps mocked—by a humorous circus-dancing ditty.

Antonín Dvořák (1840–1904)

Bagatelles for Two Violins, Cello and Harmonium, Op. 47 (1878)

Though essentially a quaint and antiquated instrument today, many households in Europe and the United States boasted a harmonium, a more-or-less portable free-reed organ. The person playing the keyboard pumped air through the instrument via a pair of foot pedals. Some models had two keyboard manuals, each boasting a range of five octaves and as many as a baker's dozen stops. Outside the home, the harmonium also served as an affordable instrument for churches that could not afford an actual pipe organ.

Many 19th-century composers wrote serious music for the harmonium, including Saint-Saëns, Franck, Rossini, Richard Strauss and Dvořák. During the silent film era, harmoniums were used to accompany the cinema in the same fashion as the more typically employed piano.

Dvořák composed his Bagatelles for two violins, cello and harmonium in 12 days in May 1878 for use at one of the many informal chamber music soirées at the home of music

critic Josef Srb-Debrnov, which housed a harmonium. The two violins share responsibilities in bringing out the ingratiating and homey melodies that course through the piece, aided by the cello's *pizzicato*-laden role in its high register. The harmonium acts as an analog to Baroque continuo, essentially providing a supportive harmonic underpinning to the melodic action above it.

A soulful theme at the outset of the initial *Allegretto scherzando* serves as a unifying device, reappearing in the third movement (with the same tempo marking) but cast in a happier mood. Hints of the same theme recur as well in the lively *Poco allegro* finale. Movements two and four function as contrasting interludes, giving the overall impression of a *Rondo* format. The second movement, *Tempo di minuetto* is gentleness incarnate, while the fourth number, *Canon*, shows Dvořák's grasp of two-part contrapuntal writing.

In the Bagatelles Dvořák was in no way attempting a serious musical exposition on the human condition, but rather bestowed upon his music-playing partners and his grateful listeners a folk-like and endearing set of unified miniatures.

Antonín Dvořák

Silent Woods (Klid) for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 68, No.5 (1883)

In 1883, Dvořák composed a set of six pieces for piano under the collective title *Ze Šumavy* ("From the Bohemian Forest"), the result of an urgent request from his publisher, Fritz Simrock. Eight years later he produced a version for cello and piano of the fifth number, *Silent Woods*, for a concert tour he gave in partnership with the eminent Czech cellist Hanuš Wihan. The newly scored piece quickly became quite popular, and seeing further opportunity, the composer made yet a third version for cello and orchestra.

When he composed the original version Dvořák gave it the German title *Die Ruhe* ("The Silence"), a literal translation of the Czech "Klid," but when published by Simrock in 1894 it received its final name, *Waldesruhe* ("Silent Woods"). Like his popular sets of Slavonic Dances, Dvořák originally scored Klid for piano-four hands.

Dvořák's music virtually always demonstrates an innate gift for melody in which area he bears favorable comparison with Schubert, whose music the Bohemian composer greatly admired. (Dvořák, in fact, wrote an essay on Schubert characterized by Sir George Grove as "certainly the best and most interesting thing that has ever been written upon that great musician....I shall read and re-read it until I know it by heart." The insightful article appears as an appendix in John Clapham's study of Dvořák, published 1966.)

Silent Woods fully entices by virtue of its warmth and song-like character. A touching and unfailingly lyrical theme is uttered in the treble with harmonic support in the bass. A rocking middle section in the minor intervenes before the reprise of the main theme.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Quintet for Strings No. 2 in G Major, Op.111 (1890)

In his orchestral and chamber music Brahms had a demonstrable fondness for burnished, bronzen sonority. His early serenades omit violins altogether, and much of the “action” in his symphonies and concertos lies in the middle or nether regions of the orchestra. Late in his life he penned two quintets for the same format as Mozart: a string quartet with added viola. The second of these autumnal works, the G-major quintet, Op. 111, began life as a proposed orchestral work, ultimately reworked by Brahms into its chamber format. Its origin may help explain the amazingly “orchestral” sound that Brahms achieved, especially in the opening movement. When the composer sent the manuscript to his publisher he attached a note indicating that this quintet would be his last work; fortunately for us, he changed his mind.

The *Allegro non troppo* that opens the work is cast in 9/8 time, which gave to Brahms the opportunity to revel in his favorite late-life rhythmic device, three-against-two (most evident, for instance, in the opening of his “Double” Concerto, Op. 102). A sweeping and confident primary theme on the cello sets the music in motion, and is contrasted by a less assertive tune posited by the violas and a third theme uttered by the violins. After weaving these three motives through an ambitious development, the movement ends in a mood of exaltation.

One primary theme courses through the impassioned *Adagio*, cast in D minor but hovering to good effect in intentionally ambiguous tonal centers, another Brahmsian ploy noticed as early as the orchestral introduction to his First Piano Concerto, G-major Sextet and (later) in the Clarinet Quintet.

The relaxed waltz-like third movement, *Un poco allegretto* alternates between G minor and G major, ultimately and serenely ending quietly in the major. The aptly noted *Vivace* finale is one of those bracing Hungarian dance movements so beloved of the composer ever since his early concert tours with violinist Eduard Remenyi (who actually performed in Seattle in the waning years of the 19th century) and his long friendship with Hungarian-born violinist Joseph Joachim. Even in its quiet moments high spirits carry the day, and the quintet comes to a rousing close.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe