



**SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE**

**MONDAY, JULY 11, 2011**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, K. 564

*Allegro*

*Andante*

*Allegretto*

Stefan Jackiw, violin   Bion Tsang, cello   Anna Polonsky, piano

**Franz Schubert**

Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello in B-flat Major, D. 471

Augustin Hadelich, violin   Richard O'Neill, viola   Godfried Hoogeveen, cello

**Claude Debussy**

Quartet for Strings in G minor, Op. 10

*Animé et très décidé*

*Assez vif et bien rythmé*

*Andantino, doucement expressif*

*Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion*

Joseph Lin, violin   Augustin Hadelich, violin

Richard O'Neill, viola   Godfried Hoogeveen, cello

**Richard Strauss**

Quartet for Piano and Strings in C minor, Op. 13

*Allegro*

*Scherzo: Presto—Prestissimo*

*Andante*

*Finale: Vivace*

Nurit Bar-Josef, violin   Cynthia Phelps, viola

Edward Arron, cello   Orion Weiss, piano

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)**

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, K. 564 (1788)

Second to the ubiquitous string quartet, the piano trio remains a favorite format for composers, performing musicians and lovers of the intimate confines of chamber music. Until the piano itself evolved in carrying power and low-register authority—both

accomplished before the middle of the 19th century—the violin-cello-piano arrangement limited the cello to reinforcing the keyboard’s anemic bass. Beginning with Beethoven and truly taking off with Schubert, the increasing power of the piano made possible by dramatic improvements in metallurgy facilitated true three-voice independence among the instruments. Franz Joseph Haydn’s trios were clearly dominated by the piano; indeed, they were essentially piano sonatas with secondary roles accorded the cello and violin. Mozart represents a transitional period in the evolution of the piano trio. Five of Mozart’s six piano trios date from his mature years in Vienna. (He termed the first trio, K. 254, a *divertimento*.)

Mozart’s final work in the format was the Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, K. 564, composed the same year as his final three exquisite symphonies, K. 539, K. 540 and K. 551, the so-called “Jupiter.”

The opening movement of K. 564 may have grown from a piano sonata, yet the blending and balancing of the stringed instruments sounds completely idiomatic and anticipates the independence of line that matured under Schubert and Brahms in particular. The main theme of the opening *Allegro* begins with the piano’s voice, followed in parallel motion by the two stringed instruments; the second subject comes via the violin. The mid-movement development section veers atypically into D minor and maintains a lively dialogue among the participants.

Mozart shifts to C Major for the second movement, an *Andante* that posits an almost Scottish/Irish folk-type theme first announced by the piano and followed by six variations. Though the piano is dominant, the cello and violin enjoy their time in the spotlight. Noteworthy are the contrapuntal niceties of the fourth variation and the darkening in the penultimate variation with its shift into C minor.

An *Allegretto* cast as a combination sonata and rondo closes the Piano Trio. As expected given the work’s possible genesis as a piano sonata, the first theme appears from the piano before expanding in power when all three instruments combine their added color and heft. As Mozart had done so successfully in many of his mature piano concertos written during his final decade in Vienna, he reprises the primary theme in several episodes that migrate into contrasting keys. After a quirky bit of close imitation among the parts, the Trio ends quietly and without fanfare.

### **Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello in B-flat Major, D. 471 (1816)

Mozart has long been considered the precocious composer incarnate, recently joined (or replaced) by Mendelssohn following his bi-centennial birth anniversary in 2009. But surely Franz Schubert rates a spot on the winner’s stand! He had been playing (and writing) chamber music since his pre-adolescent years, both at home and at the Convikt School, where he was a student under the watchful eye of the posthumously much-maligned Antonio Salieri. Precious little Beethoven reached Schubert’s ears in those early and impressionable years; the models were emphatically the “proven” greats,

Haydn and Mozart, and as with his teenage symphonies (i.e., the six preceding the magnificent and wholly Romantic “Unfinished” Symphony of 1822) the ghosts of Wolfgang and Franz Joseph informed the textures and sound world of young Schubert.

Disarming and beguiling, this trio—probably the first movement of an intended four-movement work—has enjoyed a comfortable place in the chamber literature, if closer to the wings than to center stage. If the spirits of his Viennese predecessors hover above, the natural lyricism is Schubert’s authentic voice shining through this modest but sweetly enticing miniature. As one might expect from a preternaturally gifted musician familiar since early childhood with fluent string writing, the Trio shows true accomplishment in the deploying of the three instruments. Beethoven and others before and since have commented on the challenges posed in scoring for this combination. In a real sense, writing for string quartet is an easier task due to the convention of four-part harmony that has dominated writing since the 17th century.

### **Claude Debussy (1862–1918)**

Quartet for Strings in G minor, Op. 10 (1893)

Even as a young student, Debussy reveled in extemporizing audacious chord progressions at the piano to the consternation of his more learned and conservative teachers. By the time of the great artistic upheaval in *fin de siècle* Paris, he had already embraced, rejected, and transcended his early and passionate Wagnerian idol-worship, now espousing a musical philosophy and methodology rejecting the time-focused expectations of tonal music. Chords were no longer to function harmonically. Dissonances no longer served to allow relaxation into consonance. By absorbing non-Western scales from Asian and Pacific Island cultures, he broke away from our sacrosanct system of tonal harmony. Whole-tone and pentatonic scales facilitated the breakdown of the system of harmony developed since the Renaissance.

It was his attendance at the 1889 Paris Exhibition that inspired Debussy to embrace non-Western musical ideas as a way of breaking away from three centuries of tonally based scales. Four years later he composed his only String Quartet, Op. 10, a year before the premiere of his early “signature” piece *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*. The Quartet, in fact, includes the phrase “in G minor,” the only one of his works that carries a specified key signature and an opus number.

Early critics were mixed in their opinions. One French commentator noted in 1902: “Rhythm, melody, tonality, these are three things unknown to Monsieur Debussy and deliberately disdained by him. His music is vague, floating, without color and without shape, without movement and without life. ... What a collection of dissonances, sevenths and ninths, ascending with energy, even disjunct intervals! No, decidedly, I will never agree with these anarchists of music!”

Composer Paul Dukas, however, (he of *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* fame) opined: “Everything is clear and concisely drawn, although the form is exceedingly free. The melodic essence of the work is concentrated, but of rich flavor... The harmony itself,

although greatly daring, is never rough or hard. Debussy takes particular delight in successions of rich chords that are dissonant without being crude, and more harmonious in their complexity than any consonances could be; over them his melody proceeds as on a sumptuous, skillfully designed carpet of strange coloring that contains no violent or discordant tints.” Amen!

All four movements of the Quartet draw their themes from the principal subject announced at the beginning of the opening *Animé et très décidé*. The theme is cast in Phrygian mode—essentially a descending scale from e to e an octave lower using only the equivalent of the white keys of a piano. (Like many composers of the past century-plus, Debussy sought further release from the dominance of the minor- and major-scales through the employment of the older Church modes.) The theme is rather harsh in its initial presentation and engenders considerable energy through complex rhythms and sheer vehemence.

The use of a germinal theme throughout the Quartet shows influence from César Franck and Saint-Saëns. There is precious little of the true counterpoint associated with the German composition. The special qualities of Debussy’s piece are its use of modal harmony and an astonishing sensitivity to instrumental color. Unlike Franck, Debussy was less interested in carefully maintaining cyclic structure than in ever-changing fluid motion. His late orchestral masterpiece *Jeux* (1913) was a final manifestation of his desire to avoid repetition.

The Quartet’s second movement, *Assez vif et bien rythmé* acts as a traditional scherzo and employs a dazzling array of rhythmic and coloristic devices that greatly expanded the harmonic and timbral practices of his day. It is this movement in particular that established what was soon called “Impressionism” in music. Strongly accented pizzicato chords are immediately countered by a quirky motive from the viola. A profusion of sudden *sforzandos* adds to the energy and chip-on-shoulder challenge Debussy was throwing into the gantlet. No doubt the plucked notes are more beholden to Javanese *gamelan*, which had so intrigued him at the above-mentioned Paris Exhibition, than to, say, the *pizzicato* Tchaikovsky had employed in his Fourth Symphony.

As Ravel would later do in *his* only string quartet, Debussy places the slow movement—*Andantino, doucement expressif*—as third in the sequence. Here too one hears *pizzicatos* to underline the rhythm, though they are more internally derived. The luxuriant romance of this music reminds us that Debussy was by no means an anti-Romantic; he was specifically anti-Wagnerian and anti-German. Many of his works are signed “*Claude Debussy, musicien français.*”

If Debussy avowed a dislike for the presumed academicism of German music, in the finale of the Quartet, marked *Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion*, he actually includes a rare fugal passage, introduced by the cello, that is a transformation of the first movement’s main theme. As the music progresses it grows increasingly quick as new thematic variants leap into the fray. A coda that recalls the very opening music of the Quartet ties up matters.

## **Richard Strauss (1864-1949)**

Quartet for Piano and Strings in C minor, Op. 13 (1884)

Richard Strauss grew up in a family ruled by his highly esteemed hornist father, Franz Strauss, a musical conservative who loathed the modern works of Wagner, Liszt and the entire group of anti-Brahmsian advocates for the “music of the future.” As a youngster poor Richard had little choice but to toe the line—or the barline. His considerable compositional talent manifested early and, given the home environment, paid homage to the composers favored by his domineering father, e.g., the “Classical” triumvirate of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, plus their “descendents,” Schubert, Schumann and Brahms.

Richard Strauss composed the C-minor Piano Quartet in 1884 while living in Berlin. By then he had already attracted the attention of conductor/pianist Hans von Bülow, who would secure for him the important position of assistant music director at Meiningen the very next year. From 1885, under the influence of Alexander Ritter and other musicians of Wagnerian persuasion, Strauss’ compositional energies would be employed to develop the “New German” music to unparalleled intensity of expression.

The most striking feature of the Piano Quartet is the astonishing leap in command of the still young composer’s materials. In this work he summed up the lessons of his student days in a chamber piece that is not only thoroughly professional but is imbued with good tunes, ardent drama and idiomatic writing for the respective instruments.

In 1884, however, Strauss was still attached to the musical language of Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms. The rich textures often suggest Brahms while the rhythm and melodic references hearken back to Schumann.

The imposing opening *Allegro* is both lengthy and weighty. Rich and full sonorities test the limits of chamber music, expressing a kind of symphonic grandeur that is remarkable for so modest a battery of instruments, a lesson learned from perusing Brahms’ piano quartets. This is music of declamatory passion crafted with contrapuntal fluency. Its emotional range is large, too, and in this manner anticipates the heightened drama of his subsequent tone poems. Thematically the movement (and indeed the work as a whole) is filled with long arching melodies.

Strauss chose to place the *Scherzo: Presto—Prestissimo* as the second movement, adopting the precedent Beethoven established in his iconic Ninth Symphony. In this movement, the young composer sought to provide a buffer before launching into the distinct pains and passions of the *Andante*. The *Scherzo* begins skittishly with a nod to Mendelssohn’s wonted “elfin” *scherzo* style, yet only moments later we encounter the beefier presence of Brahms. Here, too, the incubating spirit of the future Strauss can be traced in the occasional flashes of harmonic daring and in the profusion of “fantastic” elements—colorific and expressionistic—that are not typically in Brahms’ lexicon.

The opening bars of the *Andante* assure us that it was worth the wait. Broadly inflected melodies, touching pathos, and a poetic feel redolent of Schumann are in evidence as Strauss, almost for the first time in his music, really shares deep feeling (rather than *gestures* of feeling) with the listener.

Marked *Vivace*, the *Finale* leaps forward as an impetuous gallop with stylistic reference to both Schumann and Brahms. This extended sonata/rondo shows signs of flawed control over material, amply compensated, however, by tremendous verve.

**Program notes by Steven Lowe**