SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

WESDNESDAY, JULY 13, 2011

Zoltán Kodály
Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7
Allegro serioso, non troppo
Adagio
Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo—Presto
Stefan Jackiw, violin   Edward Arron, cello

Bohuslav Martinů
Quartet for Piano and Strings, No. 1
Poco allegro
Adagio
Allegretto poco moderato—Poco allegro—Allegro—Andante—Allegretto—Allegro
Joseph Lin, violin   Richard O'Neill, viola
Godfried Hoogeveen, cello   Jeewon Park, piano

Franz Schubert
Quartet for Strings in D minor, D 810 "Death and the Maiden"
Allegro
Theme and Variations: Andante con moto
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Presto
Augustin Hadelich, violin   Nurit Bar-Josef, violin
Cynthia Phelps, viola   Bion Tsang, cello

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967)
Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7 (1914)

Zoltán Kodály's long and productive life embraced multiple careers as composer, ethnomusicologist and gifted pedagogue. Blessed with innate musical talent he taught himself to play cello as a child in order to participate in a string quartet with his violinist father. Against such a background it is understandable that chamber music would prove a powerful draw on his creative instincts. Along with his fellow countryman, Béla Bartók, Kodály felt a deep connection with Hungarian folk and gypsy music. For both composers

that rich and living legacy provided a potent arsenal of rhythms and harmonies in their respective compositions.

Though Kodály composed his Duo for Violin and Cello in 1914 it had to wait four years until it received its first public performance. A large-scale work cast in three movements, it is richly flavored with Hungarian musical seasonings. Additionally, it is particularly striking in the independence of both instruments' "voices."

The opening *Allegro serioso, non troppo* announces its presence with a bold declamatory statement of epic implication. Long-breathed melodies alternate between the protagonists, punctuated by rhythmic thrusts from whichever instrument is providing the harmonic undercurrent at the time. The fusion of classical sonata form and ethnic elements is masterly.

The following *Adagio* stretches sonata form into a freer, fantasy-like structure. The cello—the composer's "own" instrument, of course—launches this searching, ruminative essay, and at times erupts with anguished passion.

Beginning slowly, the two-part *Finale* borrows the main theme of the previous movement before leaping headlong into a propulsive *Presto* that directly quotes a well-known Hungarian children's song.

Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959)
Quartet for Piano and Strings, No. 1 (1942)

Bohuslav Martinů wrote scads of music. In common with Alan Hovhaness and Heitor Villa-Lobos his prolific output reflects a composer whose musical instinct flowed as unceasingly as an Artesian well—a canon of close to 400 works. Essentially self-taught in composition, he drew inspiration and influence from a number of 20th-century stylistic languages, including Bohemian and Moravian folk music, Stravinskian neo-Classicism, the music of Albert Roussel and Debussy, as well as early English madrigalists, Renaissance polyphonists, and even jazz. Commentators have noted unevenness in his works, but at his considerable best, his music has immediate coloristic appeal, rhythmic vitality, and a bracing neo-Classic economy of texture.

Born in a church tower in Polička, Bohemia where his father served as watchman and tower keeper, Martinů studied violin with a local tailor. By adolescence he was fully smitten by the need to compose. By his 20s, he had already written well over a hundred works in many genres. Admitting to weaknesses in his compositional technique, he studied briefly with Joseph Suk, and then in 1923 with Roussel in Paris. In 1940, he fled the German invasion of France and settled in the United States, where he taught at Princeton University and at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, Massachusetts. After the war, he returned to Prague to teach. In 1957 he served as composer in residence at the American Academy in Rome.

The works from his American years proved to be both prolific and consistent in quality. He elicited strong praise from music commentator David Ewen in the 1949 edition of *American Composers Today*, writing "The predominant traits of Martinů's works are clarity and simplicity. He says what he has to say with directness. He prefers harmonic structures that are almost primitive, a fluid transparent counterpoint, and the most elementary tone color. Yet there is no poverty of expression. There is great wealth of feeling and a fine discerning intellect in all his major works."

Safely ensconced in the United States, Martinů composed his Quartet for Piano and Strings, No. 1 in 1942. The first movement, marked *Poco allegro,* opens with a busy, jangling figure with quirky upward scales on the piano and abrupt asides from the strings. This strongly rhythmic figure provides the germ for subsequent development in a movement fueled by energetically scurrying runs in the strings. The impetuous character of the music finds further élan in hammering chatter from the piano. At times strongly syncopated, the overall atmosphere is balanced by sensitive piano embroidery.

The ensuing *Adagio* provides the emotional heart of the Quartet. Sad and understated, the strings enter first, creating a melancholy ambience that most likely reflected a sense of tragic loss in his homeland. Not until well into the movement does the piano make an appearance, offering a slightly anxious respite before sinking back into melancholy.

The piano introduces a rustic and comforting theme in the concluding *Allegro poco moderato*, a multi-sectional essay whose primary material seems to suggest American folk music, perhaps a gesture of gratitude for his adopted country. Skittish episodes, by turns nervous and cheekily manic contrast with the quiet optimism of the movement's opening music. Frequent changes in sonority and mood impart an improvisatory quality throughout, and the work ends on a positive note.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, *Der Tod und das Mädchen* ("Death and the Maiden"), D.810 (1824–26)

From early childhood Franz Schubert's life drew sustenance from the interpersonal musical relationships built on performing chamber music with his family. During his all-too-brief life he composed 15 string quartets of which No. 14, *Death and the Maiden* has resonated most keenly in music-lovers' collective heart and soul.

Schubert began tentative work on the Quartet in 1824, waiting two years before completing it. Its title, *Death and the Maiden*, derives from the variation theme of the second movement, taken from a song the composer had written in 1817 to a text by Matthias Claudius. In the poem/song, a young maiden begs Death to spare her, only to hear the following words coming from the spectral figure: "I do no harm. Come, sleep peacefully in my arms." Though Schubert most likely composed the Quartet in response to a request from a group of his friends to utilize the above-mentioned song, the depth and power of the music undoubtedly grew out of a grave medical crisis with profound emotional consequences. By 1822, he had contracted syphilis, exacerbated by the

presumed “cure” of the day—mercury—which brought him face-to-face with mortality and colored much of the music he wrote for the next six years accorded him. (A small wind ensemble played the variations movement at the composer’s funeral.)

A dramatic and often grave demeanor prevails throughout the Quartet. Except for the *Scherzo*’s Trio, it is cast in emotionally troublesome D minor, a key long associated with dark, tempestuous drama as in the massive and fearsome first movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony as well as Mozart’s turbulent Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 466.

The opening *Allegro* begins stormily with a series of fiercely inflected chords; an atmosphere of nearly continuous turbulence propels the music forward with unflagging energy. A secondary theme, ordinarily conceived to provide contrast to the opening idea, is less aggressive but is still filled with anxiety. Indeed, an undercurrent of unease permeates the entire movement.

The somber variation movement follows. Its song-derived theme’s slow and nearly static pace provides a striking contrast to the feverish motion of what has preceded it. Additionally, the intentionally limited range of the song’s melody—really more of a rhythmic figure historically associated with death—allowed Schubert to more fully explore the emotions that underlay this simple theme. Despite a powerful climax attained in the fifth, final variation, the prevailing mood is grieving.

Syncopation and displaced accents impart to the *Scherzo* an unsettling fervor that recalls the first movement. The threatening dynamism of the *Scherzo* proper (the opening and closing sections) is briefly leavened by the unexpectedly tranquil Trio.

Emotional relief does not come in the *Finale.* As an early Romantic, Schubert rejected the semi-obligatory “happy ending” that would have lifted the spirits had it been conceived in the spirit of late 18th century Classicism. Instead, the music becomes even stormier, its galloping rhythms as menacing as the piano accompaniment to his first published (though by no means first written) song, *Der Erlkönig* (“The Erl-king”).

Program Notes by Steven Lowe