SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14

Zoltán Kodály
Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7
Allegro serioso, non troppo
Adagio
Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo—Presto
James Ehnes, violin Bion Tsang, cello

Antonín Dvořák
Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 21
Allegro molto
Adagio molto e mesto
Allegretto scherzando
Finale: Allegro vivace
Nurit Bar-Josef, violin Edward Arron, cello Ran Dank, piano

Frank Martin
Quintet for Piano and Strings
Andante con moto
Tempo di minuetto
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto
Andrew Wan, violin Augustin Hadelich, violin Richard O'Neill, viola
Robert deMaine, cell Adam Neiman, piano

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 own music.

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 implications. 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.

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904)
Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 21(1875)

Dvořàk composed his Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano, Op. 21 in the spring or early summer of 1875, the first of his four surviving works in this form. The word "surviving" is key here, because two earlier attempts failed to satisfy the composer, who admitted to destroying them before they saw the light of day. He also had second thoughts about the Op. 21 Trio, though considered this music worthy of revision rather than outright rejection. In its final form, the B-flat Trio breathes a refreshing air of spontaneity. In its deployment of instrumental parts Dvořák obviously had learned much from his previous efforts. One notes the fluent integration and balance of piano and string writing—an outstanding feature of virtually all of his chamber music with piano. Because he was a string player he avoided the tendency to make piano dominant, as was often the case with, say, Schumann's chamber works with keyboard.

The year 1875 proved to be one of exciting career possibilities for Dvořák. The Trio's vitality seems amply justified in light of events. At the beginning of that year he was hardly known beyond Bohemia and felt very much in the shadow of Smetana (whom he admired, of course). He received an Austrian state grant for deserving artists in February, which gave him a welcome dollop of confidence as a composer. (Bohemia at the time was part of the Austrian Empire.) Yet despite the composer's general optimism, the Trio's exuberance is tempered by recurring suggestions of melancholy.

An *Allegro molto* opens the work. The broadly paced yet confident main theme is announced by the violin before being taken up by the piano. The tune itself begins with a rising note followed by a precipitous descent. The violin then presents a diminution of its note values, turning the theme into a one-bar phrase that unleashes surging energy before

the piano counters with a folk-flavored and rhythmically dotted second subject. This new tune really creates a rustic ambience and dominates much of the movement before the main theme returns in full force. Eventually the cello offers a melodic variant that serves as a codetta theme. A minor-key episode follows—the first of several contrasting moods in treatment of the first theme. The recapitulation is heralded by ardent “shakes” in the strings and a final outburst over bounding piano octaves.

The emotional core of the work resides in the tender and expressive *Adagio molto e mesto*. The piano presents the rising and falling main theme, which is then taken up successively by cello and violin. The piano also states the sweet second theme in the major, mirroring the intimate style as the opening motive. Cello and violin take up the melody in duet, which shortly serves as a dialogue in the development under which the keyboard reintroduces the main theme in the minor. After a soaring climax, the strings return in dialogue on the second theme. This gambit leads back to the home key for a final dramatic appearance of the main theme on all three instruments in canon. The movement concludes with a coda wherein this tune is tenderly carried by the strings over funereal chords on the piano.

For the third movement *Allegretto scherzando* Dvořák delivers a charming polka, initially presented rather calmly. The instruments take turns with the theme, with the piano offering a teasing version before morphing into a forceful *grandioso*. The music swaggers along against a unison counter-melody in the strings. The mood changes considerably in the Trio, with the cello dominating in presentation of a flowing legato theme that is touchingly melancholic yet comparatively austere. The piano plays a brief series of alternating notes an octave apart as a transition to the first, pre-Trio, section.

Three separate themes inform the *Finale: Allegro vivace*. The first is presented in a somewhat animated exchange between piano and the strings. A second theme appears in boisterous canon on strings. A rising phrase derived from the first theme leads us to the third motive, which the piano opens in D minor before the music brightens in F major. Dvořák has more to say with the third theme, first in a sinister minor-key statement and subsequently in a boldly martial manner. Soon enough he abandons this variant and surprises us with a reprise of the previous movement’s opening theme, initially recalled by the cello and altered into spread-out chords on the piano. The development section focuses mainly on the first two themes before the third intrudes in the minor. An episode features the second theme but it is the first tune that gets the last word.

Frank Martin (1890–1974)
Quintet for Piano and Strings (1919)

Geneva-born Frank Martin grew up as the last of ten children in a family led by his father, a Calvinist minister. The young boy began dabbling at the piano before he reached school age, and by his tenth year had already composed a number of children’s songs. Giving added shape to his innate talent, a performance he attended of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* made a profound and lasting effect on his musical sensibilities. The “Cantor of Leipzig” became Martin’s spiritual and intellectual model for composition. Throughout

the evolution of his musical style—always rooted in tonality yet incorporating Schoenberg's 12-tone system into his own vocabulary in the 1930s—Martin's reputation has rested on his religious works in general and on two specific non-religious pieces from the 1940s, *Le vin herbé* and the *Petite symphonie concertante*. Both of these works reflected his adaptation of Schoenberg's "discovery" of dodecaphony.

In the 1920s, however, his music bore the residual fragrances of a Romantic era, though chaste and linear instrumental textures reflect Stravinsky's emergent neo-Classical orientation. A note of sadness and dark introspection informs the very opening string-led measures of the opening *Andante con moto* of his Quintet for Piano and Strings. The rhythmically steady tread of the piano at times acts as a kind of Bach-like continuo. Throughout the movement, subtle but powerful dissonances further darken the mood. It is the strings, and the cello perhaps most of all, that convey the affecting yearning quality of the music. The strings often alternate with the piano in expressing the emotional aspects of the music. Slowly descending harmonies suggest a mournful atmosphere.

Marked *Tempo di minuetto*, the dance-like second movement hovers between pervasive melancholy—not what one typically associates with a minuet—and occasional synchronous suggestions of optimism. Even in the quicker-paced Trio the music's tenor retains a kind of feverish anxiety that only intensifies the somber mindset of the composer. One can only wonder how strongly memories of the horrors of World War I acted on Martin, as it did for so many composers of the day.

Martin's affinity to Bach is evident most fully in the *Adagio ma non troppo* that constitutes the third movement. A recurring rhythmic figure keeps the music flowing uneasily in a manner that recalls the inexorable tread—and sense of tragedy—of the opening chorus of Bach's *St. John Passion*. A middle section, confined to the four string instruments, touches deeply through expressive harmonies tinged with subtle dissonances in an otherwise tonal setting.

A *Presto* brings a dash of vitality and even good cheer. Quirky and energetic, this movement seems more given to rustic-inspired dance rhythms than to Calvinist austerity or Bach's Lutheran strictures. Still, moments of Bachian rhythm make repeated appearances, imparting added impetus. Then too, deft stretches of Baroque-inspired counterpoint show Martin's absorption of Bach's multiple-stranded linear style.

Program Notes by
Steven Lowe