



SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2011

Luigi Boccherini

Quintet for Strings in C Major, G. 310, Op. 28, No. 4

Allegro con moto

Minuetto con moto

Grave

Rondeau: Allegro con moto

Nurit Bar-Josef, violin Amy Schwartz Moretti, violin Richard O'Neill, viola
Bion Tsang, cello Godfried Hoogeveen, cello

Laura Kaminsky

Horizon Lines for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano

Manasota Key

Spuyten Duyvil, Ice Floes

Wappinger's Creek, Hudson River Valley

The Fells, River Caldew, approaching storm

Ebey's Landing, Swallows

Amagansett, Twilight

Ben Hausmann, oboe Seth Krimsky, bassoon Craig Sheppard, piano

****World Premiere**** commissioned by SCMS Commissioning Club

Dedicated to Toby Saks, in celebration of her 30 years as

Artistic Director of Seattle Chamber Music Society

Johannes Brahms

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 26

Allegro non troppo

Poco adagio

Scherzo: Poco allegro

Finale: Allegro

Joseph Lin, violin Cynthia Phelps, viola Edward Arron, cello Jeremy Denk, piano

Luigi Boccherini (1743–1805)

Quintet for Strings in C Major, G. 310, Op. 28, No. 4 (1779)

A virtually perfectly aligned contemporary of Haydn (1732–1809), Luigi Boccherini earned fame as a virtuoso on the cello, writing scads of works in which he soloed on that

splendid instrument. In the realm of chamber music he is credited with “inventing” the “cello” quintet, i.e., a string quartet supplemented by the addition of a second cello rather than the more typical model employing a second viola. This practice allowed one cello—Boccherini, naturally—to have a comparatively star role in the upper register while the second cello firmed up the bass region of the ensemble. By way of contrast, none of Mozart’s string quintets are so scored; it’s not until Schubert’s sublime late-life C-Major Quintet do we encounter another truly great example.

Boccherini’s stature as a composer was unfairly diminished in the 19th century when he was dismissed as “Haydn’s wife,” an unwarranted sobriquet to anyone who has sampled his engaging music. Today more of his music enjoys representation in live and recorded performances, including his novel quintets with added guitar, which almost looks like a cello with frets. (How many in the audience recall having seen cellist Stephen Isserlis—in a concert with Seattle Symphony—place his cello across his lap and strum an encore as if it were a guitar?)

Still, it was the cello that dominated Boccherini’s attention; he composed some 110 cello quintets. By the time he wrote the Quintet for Strings in C Major, G. 310, Op. 28, No. 4 he had already written a sufficient number to ensure mastery of that combination of instruments. Just in case you’re curious: Boccherini’s works were catalogued in 1969 by the French musicologist Yves Gérard, therefore carrying the prefatory “G” numbers.

The opening *Allegro con moto* begins with a skittish descending theme announced by the cello, soon echoed by the higher strings and almost immediately recast in the minor, albeit more or less in an upward variant of its initial appearance. A second graceful tune provides a counterweight. Throughout the spirited movement Boccherini shows his wonted gift for attractive melody as well as special consideration given to the first cellist, i.e., himself!

Placed second, the *Minuetto con moto* begins in a delectably off-beat manner with a “tick-tock” theme that animates the proceedings. The mid-movement Trio brings a hint of sadness through the minor-key soliloquy intoned by the primary cello.

The ensuing *Grave* blends grace with unforced tenderness, providing a comfortable respite after the preceding energy-filled movements. Here, as elsewhere, one cello gets a chance to “sing” freely, allowing its partner to provide a firm bottom to the overall sonority.

The quintet concludes with a *Rondeau: Allegro con moto* of far greater renown than the rest of the piece, often appearing in the guise of a cello and piano encore piece. Buoyant and cheerfully chirpy, the bounding energy returns to the spirit of the opening movement.

Laura Kaminsky (b. 1956)

Horizon Lines for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano (2011)

Born in New York City, Laura Kaminsky, currently serves as artistic director at Symphony Space in New York City, as well as professor of music at the Conservatory of Music at Purchase College/SUNY where she had served as the dean from 2004-2008. She is currently on the board of Chamber Music America, and has previously served on the boards of the American Music Center and the New York Foundation for the Arts. Her many awards, as both composer and presenter, include grants from the NEA, New York State Council on the Arts, North Carolina Council on the Arts, Seattle Arts Commission, Artist Trust, Meet the Composer, Copland Fund, Kenan Institute for the Arts, and, for international work, the Likhachev Foundation, Trust for Mutual Understanding, and CEC ArtsLink, among others. She was recently given an award from the Minister of Culture in Poland for her innovative programming in celebration of the Chopin Bicentennial. Kaminsky also has an important connection to Seattle: she previously functioned as chair of the Department of Music at Cornish College of the Arts (1999-2004). Formal studies included mentoring in composition by Joseph Wood at the Oberlin Conservatory and Mario Davidovsky at the City College of New York, where her ensemble, Musicians Accord, has been in residence since 1984.

Through its Commissioning Club, the Seattle Chamber Music Society continues its tradition of commissioning chamber music, in this case a new work by Kaminsky, *Horizon Lines*, which receives its premiere at tonight's concert. According to the composer:

"Horizon Lines, commissioned by the Seattle Chamber Music Society in tribute to founding Artistic Director Toby Saks, is dedicated to her with affection and respect. It is a multidisciplinary work for oboe, bassoon, and piano that incorporates paintings by artist Rebecca Allan, within a digital film by New York-based filmmaker John Feldman that is projected as part of the performance.

"Horizon Lines was begun during a joint residency last winter at the Hermitage Artist Retreat Center on the gulf coast of Florida, for which Rebecca and I are most grateful. The work derives from our shared concern with the fragility of the environment, and with its enduring power to transform our lives. We took, as mutual points of reference, places where we have gone to paint and compose, and where we have found pleasure in the different landscapes, from the River Caldew in Cumbria, to Ebey's Landing on Whidbey Island in Washington State, and, more locally, to the confluence of the Harlem and Hudson Rivers, which we overlook from our New York studios. Water is essential throughout --- all six movements and their corresponding paintings reference various shorelines and rivers. The film weaves image and sound together to create a meaningful narrative.

"Concurrent with the performance, SAM (Seattle Art Museum) Gallery is presenting an exhibition of Rebecca Allan's paintings, from July 5th through August 5th, 2011."

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A Major, Op. 26 (1857–62)

Even the casual concertgoer is familiar with Brahms's oft-performed orchestral music—four imposing symphonies and a like number of concertos plus two terrific overtures and the “Haydn” Variations. For chamber aficionados, however, his canon of chamber music makes an equal if not stronger claim for variety, innovation and rich emotional expression. Beginning with his early Op. 8 Piano Trio (much revised decades after its first appearance) through his four late-in-life clarinet-centered works, Brahms bequeathed all manner of chamber pieces including three scored for piano, violin, viola and cello—aka piano quartet.

The Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25 continues to enjoy greater popularity than its two sequels, no doubt because of the insistent drama of its first movement, overall warmth and perhaps most of all because of its irrepressible Hungarian dance-like finale. That work had a telling impact on Arnold Schoenberg, who recast it for orchestra, even adding a part for triangle!

Schoenberg was not drawn to provide an orchestral alternative to the Op. 26 Piano Quartet. Its considerable beauties have remained somewhat under-appreciated in the bright glow of its immediate predecessor. Brahms worked on both of these piano quartets more or less simultaneously. If the Op. 25 quartet *commands* one's attention, its A-Major work *entices* the listener through graceful lyricism and unforced romance. Brahms was relieved and thrilled by the audience response to Op. 26, a performance that took place only 13 days after that of Op. 25. Of the newer work's premiere Brahms wrote to his parents, “I had much joy yesterday. My concert came off very well. The quartet was well reviewed, and I had extraordinary success as a pianist.”

If the Op. 25 piece conveys a sense of “masculine” assertiveness, such a trait is balanced by the “feminine” manner of Op. 26. Coincidence or otherwise, the latter piece was the uncommonly insightful Clara Schumann's personal favorite. The widow of Robert Schumann maintained a life-long relationship with Brahms, proffering wise and highly valued musical insights to the grateful composer about many of his works.

The opening *Allegro non troppo* starts with a symmetrical theme that avoids squareness through subtly disruptive silences on beats that would normally be heavily accented. Interplay of three-against-two rhythms, a true Brahmsian signature, adds interest-provoking stress and in so doing actually enhances the expansive and lyrical mood.

Beginning and ending with muted strings, the following *Poco adagio* brings hushed nocturnal beauty that grows out of luxurious melodic material that recalls the intimate style of the German *Lied* that Brahms inherited from Schubert and Schumann. The flowing main theme is announced by the piano and enriched by the muted strings' delicately woven supportive lines. A series of threatening arpeggios starting low on the piano shatters the pacific nature of the opening moments, but is short-lived. Led by the strings a heart-string-tugging central section brims with intoxicating romance. This too runs its course, yielding to moments of quiet anxiety interrupted by passionate *forte* outbursts from the piano. In like manner, the music proceeds in alternate statements of beguiling tenderness and forthright Brahmsian gruffness.

Marked *Scherzo: Poco allegro*, the third movement starts off with a lyrical string theme answered by a bouncy, jovial rejoinder from the piano. Brahms, uncommonly knowledgeable about earlier music, nurtured a deep and inspiring love for Bach that shows itself in the comparatively stormy canonic Trio.

As in the Op. 25 Piano Quartet, Brahms' unquenchable taste for Hungarian themes clearly defines the energetic, dancelike and folk-inspired *Finale: Allegro*. Contrasting episodes temporarily impede the headlong rush of energy but nothing really stops the music from barreling to a powerful *animato* conclusion where Brahms is calling on the four players to create a virtually symphonic ambience.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe