



SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

FRIDAY, JULY 16

Frank Bridge

Phantasie Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C minor

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco

Andante con molto espressione

Allegro scherzoso

Allegro moderato

Nurit Bar-Josef, violin Bion Tsang, cello Adam Neiman, piano

Igor Stravinsky

Suite Italienne for Violin and Piano

Introduzione

Serenata

Aria

Tarantella

Minuetto

Andrew Wan, violin Ran Dank, piano

Franz Schubert

Quintet for Strings in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo

Allegretto

James Ehnes, violin Augustin Hadelich, violin Richard O'Neill, viola
Edward Arron, cello Robert deMaine, cello

Frank Bridge (1879–1941)

Phantasie Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C minor (1907)

Frank Bridge's name is familiar to concertgoers primarily because of his role as mentor for Benjamin Britten, and especially because of the latter's well-known "Variations on a Theme by Frank Bridge." Yet Bridge's music deserves far more than a respectful nod for providing his student with a workable motif. Son of a bandmaster with 12 children, musical talent coursed through the entire Bridge family. In childhood, the future composer was an excellent string player, which led to a scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he studied composition under Charles Villier Stanford. From Stanford he

absorbed the language of Brahms-centered German Romanticism, only to move on to the Impressionist fragrances and colors of Debussy, and later still, to the increasingly chromatic vocabulary of Schoenberg and Berg. Leaving the user-friendly harbor of tonality probably cost Bridge his audience, though lately his star seems to be on the ascendant. Chamber music and song loom large in his corpus of works, which probably (and sadly) militated against a wide hearing. Had he devoted more time to producing orchestral canvasses he might have reached a wider audience.

His chamber music, nonetheless, is highly regarded for its fluent writing and sheer inventiveness. In the first decade of the 20th century Walter Wilson Cobbett, an amateur musician with a passion for 17th-century English music, and especially for the numerous “phantasies” penned by such British worthies as Henry Purcell, sponsored annual competitions for composers to submit chamber scores designed to resurrect the centuries-old phantasia (or fantasy), essentially a piece in which a sequence of unrelated and varied sections were assembled to create an extended composition. For several years, Bridge submitted a number of pieces that often carried the subtitle “Phantasia.” At that time, Bridge was still composing in a late German Romantic style that presciently evoked a *souçon* of Debussy as well.

The *Phantasia* Trio, which dates from 1907, is cast in one arch-like movement in four independently marked sections played without pause, i.e., *attacca*, to use the standard Italian terminology. The first part, *Allegro moderato ma con fuoco*, begins with a passionate upward sweeping gesture in the strings, countered by a descending run on the piano, itself followed by a somber and melancholy episode started by violin and seconded by cello. Soon enough descending piano chords and ardent commentary from the violin mark an emphatic return to the movement’s opening vehemence. A rhapsodic paragraph initiated by rippling piano figurations follows in an unabashedly Romantic style. A sudden silence attended by a reduction in dynamics and urgency ensues as the piano initiates an introspective section with the strings in support. The music alternates between insistent passion and introspective, Romantic lyricism. A skittish pizzicato- and trill-laden faster section serves as a coda, ultimately returning the mood to passionate declamation and leading to the next “movement.”

Without pause, the *Andante con molto espressione* begins with the cello presenting a searching flowing theme punctuated by chords from the piano. The addition of the violin sweetens the texture considerably, which is further enriched when the piano and cello join in.

The quirky *Allegro scherzoso*, animated by string pizzicatos, is essentially a rapidly scurrying scherzo—energetic and utterly vivacious. The Trio, however, is far more reserved and lyrical. Delicately embroidered piano figures highlight the ardor of the string instruments as the emotional temperature rises and falls before ending gently.

In the concluding *Allegro moderato* upward-reaching figures in the violin are matched by descending piano runs that recall the opening movement. The violin announces a sadder theme against quietly impulsive figuration in the piano, echoed by the cello. Strenuous

episodes return, adding a sweeping ardor to the proceedings. Rushing and powerful piano scales add further élan to the movement, which ends assertively.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Suite Italienne for Violin and Piano (1925)

The shock, horror and devastation of World War I set in motion a wave of revulsion and a profound questioning of traditional religious and secular ethical values. A yearning for spiritual comfort and for the perceived (if illusory) sanity, traditional morality and esthetics led many creative artists to seek inspiration in the past. Famed impresario Diaghilev approached Stravinsky to write a ballet based on the centuries-old *commedia dell'arte*. To win over the reluctant composer, Diaghilev showed his famous collaborator several manuscripts he had brought to Paris from a recent trip to Italy. Stravinsky read through the various scores and found himself drawn to works attributed (several in error, one must add) to the short-lived composer Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-36), a talented transitional figure whose music breathes as much the air of the Baroque as the Rococo. ‘I looked,’ said Stravinsky, “and I fell in love.”

The fruit of this across-the-centuries encounter was *Pulcinella*, an essentially neo-Classical work—neo-Baroque is an even better term—that reined in Stravinsky’s self-styled primitivism as expressed most shockingly in his 1913 *cri de guerre*, *The Rite of Spring*. Stravinsky used Pergolesi’s melodies and bass lines more or less as handed down in the manuscripts shared by Diaghilev, overlaying the 18th-century material with irregular rhythmic phrases and piquant harmonies. He remained quite fond of this music, drawing material from the original ballet for the orchestral suite in 1922 (revised in 1947), adding further versions for violin and piano (1925, revised 1933) and for cello and piano (1932). The two duet versions were thorough rewrites; hence their new title, *Suite italienne*. Of special significance is that for the three decades subsequent to Stravinsky’s perusal of those manuscripts, much of his music—his entire neo-Classical output—derived from his serendipitous encounter with these infectious scores from the early 18th century.

The *Introduzione* presents a serious/comic mien in its slightly pompous unfolding of the violin’s theme over a steady Baroque rhythmic underpinning. The following *Serenata* evokes melancholy and touching sentiment through its affecting harmonies and broadly flowing *siciliano* melody. In the original ballet (but in none of the suites), this section was a song for tenor soloist, and its *cantabile* origin is gracefully expressed by the violin.

An aria follows—it too was originally a vocal number in the ballet—in Stravinsky’s most sardonic vein; it is a strangely compelling wedding of the grotesque and the lyric. Echoes of the main theme from the *Introduzione* are heard in its final bars.

In 6/8 meter, a lively and technically demanding *tarantella* follows. A comic, intentionally awkwardly paced *Minuetto* provides a few moments of respite before launching headlong into the gaiety and élan of the virtuosic finale.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Quintet for Strings in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956 (1828)

In a greatly foreshortened life of but 31 years, Franz Schubert penned more than 600 surviving songs. Collectively, his works in all areas—symphonies, chamber works, piano music, even operas—numbered around 1000. His music shows astonishing lyric and harmonic originality, thorough familiarity with established classical forms, and a poet's gift to tap deeply into the human psyche. A bout of syphilis in 1822 brought the young man perilously close to death's door. Though he recovered physically (only to die of typhoid fever six years hence), the encounter with his mortality deepened his music considerably.

In his final year, Schubert created a number of magnificent chamber works, including the Quintet for Strings in C Major, often called the “Cello” quintet to distinguish its deployment of a second cello from the “normal” complement of a string quartet with added viola. The “Cello” Quintet's rich melodic profile and aching humanity have assured its composer a place among the immortals. It is no surprise that musicians and audiences alike count it among the most beautiful chamber works ever written. One respected annotator wrote of this quintet, “In nobility of conception, beauty of melody, and variety of mood it is without equal.”

The very opening measures of the first movement *Allegro ma non troppo* are simplicity itself: the three upper strings play a simple C major chord that swells and contracts before moving into new harmonies attended by gradually increasing emotion. After the music intensifies in feeling, Schubert brings forth a disarming melody of exquisite tenderness, a lovely and loving tune that stands in splendid contrast to the fervor that surrounds it. The movement proceeds as a journey through an emotions-rich landscape, guided with a master's sure hand for beguiling melody and expressive harmony.

The *Adagio* in the remote key E Major invites us to share in the profound sadness of a hitherto healthy and energetic young man ravaged by life-threatening disease, though the music is by no means maudlin or mawkish. It *is*, however, ravishing in its lyricism and brilliantly imaginative in its explorative harmonic modulations. Here the presence of a second cello adds soul-stirring grief and an almost orchestral grandeur. The upwardly reaching main theme given by the first violin is touchingly accompanied by pizzicatos from the second cello and richly expressive chords from the middle strings. Seemingly out of nowhere, the music suddenly grows increasingly restive, anxiety-ridden and almost unbearably intense. Low-pitched rumblings in the cello darken matters further. (Similar unearthly sounds darken the first movement of his great posthumous B-flat Major Piano Sonata.) Long silences, a feature of much late-Schubert keyboard and chamber music, haunt the proceedings. Near the end of the movement a flare-up of these smoldering feelings resurfaces, only to be replaced by a mood of quiet acceptance.

At first, relief appears to come to the *Scherzo* in the guise of a stroll in the countryside. Hunting calls mingle with folk-dance gestures in what seems initially like a bracing affirmation of renewed vigor. Yet there is something of a manic, as opposed to genuinely

happy, quality herein. The sad mood and slow pace of the Trio, marked *Andante sostenuto*, suggest that the enthusiastic and outdoorsy mood of the *Scherzo* proper may have been a brilliant, even irresistible ruse—a kind of “denial,” as it were.

Yet though the concluding *Allegretto* has moments of reprised despair, its rollicking, rhythmically infectious demeanor suggests not so much a resignation to fate but a determination to get on with life. A fusion of sonata and rondo, its pages abound in ingratiating themes beginning with a paprika-flavored rambunctious dance tune, followed by a warm and lyrical melody associated with Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*. Any doubts about Schubert’s determined optimism are dispelled in the up-tempo coda, which ends spiritedly on a positive note. It seems almost cruel to note that two months after he completed the Quintet, Schubert was dead.

**Program Notes by
Steven Lowe**