



SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

FRIDAY, JULY 29, 2011

Richard Strauss

Sextet for Strings from *Capriccio*, Op. 85

Scott Yoo, violin Aloysia Friedman, violin Richard O'Neill, viola Marcus
Thompson, viola Johannes Moser, cello Robert deMaine, cello

Franz Joseph Haydn

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, Hob XV/25, Gypsy

Andante

Poco adagio, cantabile

Rondo all'Ongarese: Presto

Amy Schwartz Moretti, violin Johannes Moser, cello Jon Kimura Parker, piano

Pablo de Sarasate

Navarra for Two Violins and Piano, Op. 33

James Ehnes, violin Stefan Jackiw, violin William Wolfram, piano

Josef Suk

Elegy

Paul Rosenthal, violin Robert deMaine, cello Anton Nel, piano

Johannes Brahms

Hungarian Dances for Piano, Four Hands, Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6

William Wolfram, piano Anton Nel, piano

Johann Sebastian Bach

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048

Allegro

Adagio--Allegro

Paul Rosenthal, violin Stefan Jackiw, violin James Ehnes, violin
Marcus Thompson, viola Aloysia Friedmann, viola Richard O'Neill, viola
Robert deMaine, cello Johannes Moser, cello Joseph Kaufman, double bass
Jon Kimura Parker, harpsichord

Richard Strauss (1864–1949)

Sextet for Strings from *Capriccio*, Op. 85 (1940–41)

After the searing edge-of-your-seat harmony and over-the-top histrionics of Richard Strauss' powerful *Salome* and *Elektra*, the composer pulled back emotionally and stylistically via his comic tribute to 18th-century sensibility in *Der Rosenkavalier*, composed in 1911, just three years before the outbreak of World War I. Three decades later, in the first full year of World War II he once again revisited a safer, saner idealized world of France before the Revolution—indeed six years before *our* Revolution. Such was the setting for *Capriccio*, a kind of opera as philosophy of esthetics in which the principals argue over the respective merits of words and music. *Capriccio* opens with what has become essentially a self-contained piece of chamber music, the Sextet for Strings (pairs of violins, violas and cellos). In the opera's story the composer Flamand has written the piece for Countess Madeleine on the occasion of her birthday. Strauss called the Sextet “a conversation piece” that serves as the stimulus for discussion about music and words. The sextet was actually heard first as a concert piece half-a-year before the opera's Munich premiere.

Often hovering in the middle and lower registers, the music is warm in spirit, gently chromatic and bathed in serenity only briefly interrupted by a sudden and short episode of startling agitation. One is reminded somewhat of Schoenberg's original sextet version of *Transfigured Night*, also rich in chromatic harmony, as well as Strauss' *Metamorphosen* for 23 strings, composed in 1945.

Franz Joseph Haydn

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, Hob XV/25, Gypsy (1795)

By 1795 Mozart was dead, Beethoven was carving a reputation as an amazingly inventive pianist and Franz Joseph Haydn was the most famous living composer both on mainland Europe and in England. Having spent several decades on the Esterhazy's family estate in Hungary he was well acquainted with the gypsy and folk music of that Central European cultural center, cross-fertilized by cultures from the Middle East as well as Western Europe. Of course one need not actually live in Hungary to appreciate its rich musical legacy. Mozart, Schubert and Brahms all wrote music in the Hungarian/Gypsy manner with varying degrees of historical accuracy.

Somewhat unusually the Haydn Piano Trio No. 39 in G Major, XV:25 opens with a leisurely *Andante* of surpassing grace and serenity, animated slightly by the opening *appoggiatura*. A brief episode adds further energy before a calm conclusion.

Marked *Poco adagio cantabile* the central movement also boasts a theme growing out of an *appoggiatura*. Here, too, the mood is serene and mannerly. Living up to its *cantabile* indication a song-like lyricism infuses the movement. An especially sweet violin-led episode, soon emulated by the cello, enhances the smiling equanimity.

During one of his visits to London, Haydn met a young widow named Rebecca Schroeder. Poverty forced her into taking on work as a music copyist in which capacity Haydn hired her.

Given our knowledge that Haydn and his wife really didn't like each other it is not surprising that the composer and his new "employee" developed a relationship that went far beyond the job description. Surviving correspondence between them documents the existence of an affair between the 60-year-old composer and Fräulein Schroeder.

Perhaps the exuberance of the "Gypsy Rondo" finale expresses Haydn's ardor during the initial phase of the naughty couple's "infatuation." Propelled by a main energetic rondo theme alternating with a series of similarly scurrying episodes, the music hurtles forward with unstoppable momentum.

Pablo de Sarasate (1844–1908)

Navarra for Two Violins and Piano, Op. 33 (1889)

Pablo de Sarasate was one of the most celebrated violinists of the golden age of 19th-century virtuosos. He was acclaimed for the beauty of his tone, his flawless intonation and perfect technique, and his utter elegance of manner. In a century of prodigies, Sarasate was another shining example. At age 10 he played before Queen Isabella and forthwith received from the suitably impressed aristocrat a Stradivarius violin.

He toured successfully throughout Europe, both Americas, South Africa, and Asia—always to enthusiastic crowds. Many works by pre-eminent composers were written expressly for him. Max Bruch composed his *Scottish Fantasy* and second violin concerto for the Spanish virtuoso; Eduard Lalo provided the *Symphonie espagnole*; from Saint Saëns came his first and third concertos; Henri Wieniawski penned his second concerto for his colleague.

Though in later life he gravitated toward the great masterworks, Sarasate established his early reputation in the playing of paraphrases and variations—mostly of his own devising—on operatic themes. He steered clear of large-scale, aggressive concertos which required a more massive sound that he chose to provide, for which reason he refused to play Brahms's epic concerto. It is Sarasate, in fact, who rhetorically asked about the Brahms concerto, "And why should I stand there and listen while the oboe has the only real melody?"

His *Navarra*, a virtuosic tour de force for two violin soloists and piano (later arranged with an orchestral accompaniment), has the two violinists engaging in all manner of pyrotechnics, sometimes in close parallel motion, elsewhere in pointed dialogue. The flavor is delectably Spanish, with an emphasis on the region of Spain that serves as the work's title. Its dance-like rhythms and general lightness reflect Sarasate's graceful, fluent style of performing. Much of the soloists' parts lie high on their instruments, further adding to the music's prevailing airiness.

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Hungarian Dances for Piano, Four Hands, Nos. 1, 4, 5, 6

In 1852, as Brahms' adolescence approached its end, he met and briefly toured with the Hungarian violinist Eduard (Ede) Reményi (1828-98), a fiddler with a pronounced Gypsy/folk style and political views that eventuated with exile from his homeland. (Reményi, incidentally,

performed in Seattle—probably in the 1880s—according to a radio broadcast of a symposium celebrating the Seattle Symphony’s 50th anniversary in 1943.)

Though Brahms and Reményi had a falling out over political differences, the composer was effectively hooked on Hungarian music for the rest of his life. As is well known, he incorporated Hungarian motifs in such major works as the Op. 25 Piano Quartet, the finales to his Violin Concerto and “Double” Concerto, and elsewhere. For several years Brahms collected Hungarian and Gypsy themes, arranging them initially for two pianos. Eventually he and others produced versions for many combinations of instruments. Brahms never claimed that the tunes were original (though a handful were), and though he was quite fond of the *Hungarian Dances*, he didn’t assign an opus number to them. His long-standing publisher, Simrock, gave him a small token fee and then proceeded to make a fortune for his company when the 21 dances became an immediate and long-lasting sensation. Regarding their authenticity, the composer noted, “I offer them as genuine Gypsy children which I did not beget, but merely brought up with bread and milk.”

The first dance, “Divine Csárdás,” was reputedly composed originally by Miska Borzó. It is one of three that Brahms orchestrated, and has existed in many versions including a 1903 recording by Brahms’ longtime friend and collaborator, Joseph Joachim.

“Souvenir of Kalocsa-Csárdás” constitutes the fourth Hungarian Dance and is believed to have been the handiwork of a composer named N. Mértý.

Without doubt, No. 5, “Souvenir of Bártfa-Csárdás,” has been the most popular of the entire set of dances. It was composed by Béla Kéler in 1858. As with No. 2, the central section derives from a Hungarian folk song.

No. 6, “Rosebush-Csárdas,” remains a mystery regarding its actual composer though it is believed to have been written ca. 1857. The piece captures the very essence of the rapid mood shifts on the Hungarian (and other Central European) folk and gypsy dances. Beyond the frequent tempo changes that include both sudden shifts and accelerandos, the tonality almost as often quickly migrates between the major and minor modes.

Josef Suk (1874–1935)

Elegy (1902)

Czech music history is dotted with a number of related musicians carrying the surname Suk. These include composer Joseph Suk and his like-named grandson, a fine and deservedly acclaimed violinist. The composer Suk was also a fine violinist who enjoyed a long and fruitful association with the Czech String Quartet. The itch to create, rather than re-create, music came early to Grandfather Joseph. He was already composing in his early teens.

Suk’s Elegy carries the subtitle, “Under the Impression of Zeyer’s Vyšehrad,” a reference to the Czech poet Julius Zeyer. In its original guise Suk scored the Elegy for violin, cello, string quartet, harmonium and harp, though he very shortly produced a version for piano trio in which format it had a far better chance of being performed by both professional and amateur musicians.

Somber piano chords serve to frame the sad and flowing elegiac melody intoned first by the violin, soon to be joined by the cello. The two bowed instruments seem to share an intimate dialogue while the piano continues to support their grieving. Before long, however, powerful emotions erupt courtesy of the piano's capacity for firmament-quaking ardor. The outburst soon quiets as inward grief returns before yet another heart-wrenching full-voiced statement.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

“Brandenburg” Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048 (ca. 1714–19)

From 1717 to 1723, Bach worked for Ludwig, Prince of Cöthen, a passionate music lover and, indeed, a quite capable musician himself. During a visit to Brandenburg to negotiate purchase of a harpsichord for Prince Ludwig, the Margrave of Brandenburg “commanded” Bach to supply him with some instrumental music. Two years later, Bach dedicated, wrapped and sent a bundle of “*six Concerts Avec Plusiers Instruments*” to the Margrave, who may well have never had them played. In any case, the virtuosic nature of the part-writing was probably beyond the ken of the Brandenburg players. No doubt Bach had his own far superior Cöthen musicians in mind as performers.

The third *Brandenburg* Concerto lacks the woodwind and/or brass colors of most of the rest of the set (No. 6 being scored for violin-less strings), but the composer's imaginative deployment of the three string choirs—violins, violas and cellos—amply compensate. At times, all three groups play together as a *ripieno* (full ensemble); elsewhere they solo as part of the *concertino* (smaller group of soloists). Throughout the concerto one is aware of Bach's animated counterpoint and rhythmic *élan* (borrowed from Vivaldi, whom Bach greatly esteemed). The short theme of the first movement, amazingly terse yet packed with energy, all but predetermines the character of all that follows.

There is no middle movement, per se, merely two chords (which can be played straight, wildly embellished, or even appended to a borrowed movement from elsewhere in Bach's canon), which lead directly into the infectious finale, a *Gigue* in the style of a *perpetuum mobile*. More than even the first movement, the finale truly stands as a testament to the virtuosity of the Prince's musicians in his court at Cöthen.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe