



SUMMER FESTIVAL IN SEATTLE

FRIDAY, JULY 8, 2011

Ludwig van Beethoven

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2

Poco sostenuto—Allegro ma non troppo

Allegretto

Scherzo: Allegretto, ma non troppo

Finale: Allegro

Andrew Wan, violin Andrés Diaz, cello Orion Weiss, piano

Josef Suk

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, Op. 1

Allegro appassionato

Adagio

Allegro con fuoco

James Ehnes, violin Richard O'Neill, viola

Godfried Hoogeveen, cello Inon Barnatan, piano

Antonín Dvořák

Quartet for Piano and Strings in D Major, Op. 23

Allegro moderato

Andantino, con variazioni

Finale: Allegretto scherzando

Augustin Hadelich, violin Cynthia Phelps, viola

Bion Tsang, cello Anna Polonsky, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2 (1808)

During the sixteen years that separate Beethoven's three Op. 1 Piano Trios (1791–92) from the pair published as Op. 70, the scope of violin, cello and piano ensemble broadened largely because of major improvements in the genre's keyboard instrument. Iron-framed pianos facilitated thicker, heavier metal strings that gave increased carrying power to reach the back rows in the larger concert venues of the era. Equally important, the added heft in the piano's bass freed the cello from its largely supportive task in reinforcing the fortepiano's feeble response in those nether regions. The cello enjoyed a new and expanded role as a melodic instrument in the middle or tenor register, a change

Beethoven was eager to explore. In so doing, he unequivocally set the stage for the trios of Schubert and Brahms, which also celebrate the cello's melodic and expressive capabilities.

Beethoven composed the Op. 70 Piano Trios in 1808, an exceptionally productive year that yielded such major works as the Fifth and Sixth ("Pastorale") symphonies, the Op. 69 Cello Sonata, *Coriolan* Overture and "Choral" Fantasy, as well as the early stages of the "Emperor" Concerto and the publication of the three "Rasoumovsky" String Quartets, Op. 59. At that time of his life, with deafness reaching its heartbreaking nadir, his music embraced both willful optimism and despair. The composer had achieved an internal truce between the ravages of increasing deafness and the realization that he could still compose and find fulfillment through his music. The Trios express both despondency and intimations of purification and joy because of his triumph over his physical failings.

The first Op. 70 Trio is among Beethoven's best-known chamber works, no doubt the result of the outright eeriness that inspired its nickname, "Ghost" (nicknames almost invariably add to a work's appeal, which is why many publishers add them to otherwise unnamed works). Yet the "Ghost" Trio's alter ego, in E-flat Major, is a worthy companion to its mate's "things that go bump in the night" ambience. The E-Flat work exudes an essential amiability that parallels the difference between the well-loved Seventh Symphony and its modest but exemplary "fraternal twin," the Eighth, which has lived in the shadow of the bolder, proto-Romantic No. 7.

The Trio sets out with a slow *Poco sostenuto* introduction initiated by the cello and soon imitated in turn by the violin and piano. A written-out piano cadenza in scalar motion prepares the main part of the movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, which features a lyrical first theme answered by a second motive that is essentially a commentary on the material offered in the introduction. Although emotions flare in the development, the music is, on the whole, lyrical, unforced and expansive.

The *Allegretto* that follows focuses on two themes respectively in C Major. As in the *Larghetto* of his Second Symphony, Beethoven does not herein bare his deepest feelings. Instead he serves up a charming dance-like diversion populated by two contrasting themes, the first courtly in the manner of his Classical antecedents Haydn and Mozart, and the second brusque and forceful in Beethoven's familiar assertive manner. Both melodies merge in a coda.

In the ensuing *Scherzo*, marked *Allegretto ma non troppo*, Beethoven borrowed the folk-song-like main tune from his earlier Piano Sonata, Op. 26. The Trio is a veritable conversation among the principals, occasioned near its end by unmistakable musical "sighs." The repeat of the "A" section does not close the movement; Beethoven repeats the "B" section and reprises the "A" section a final time.

The *Finale: Allegro* leaps headlong into a brilliant scalar passage on the piano punctuated by dotted chords from the strings, all before the theme is fully stated. When it does complete its voyage it is via a lyrical discourse in the piano. Soaring and forceful, the

second theme follows on its heels, set up by a brief transitional passage. Yet a third rhythmically insistent theme emerges to complete the exposition. All three motives are explored in the development before returning more or less intact in the recapitulation. A lengthy coda wraps up the proceedings.

Josef Suk (1874–1935)

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, Op. 1 (1891)

The name Josef Suk covers much of the 20th-century musical scene in the Czech Republic. The current bearer of that name is the fine violinist born in 1929 who helped resurrect Antonín Dvořák's Violin Concerto, which is increasingly performed both in the U.S. and abroad. The *other* Josef Suk was his grandfather, an esteemed violinist himself and a composer whose works have gained acceptance beyond his Bohemian homeland. Regular patrons of Seattle Chamber Music Society will no doubt find his name and music a familiar part of the Society's performance history.

The yen to create music, rather than to simply perform, developed early in the composer; by adolescence he had already begun setting down his musical ideas on paper. When he enrolled in the Prague Conservatory in 1885 at age 11 he was ready to take the next important step in his evolution. In 1891, while a student at the highly respected Conservatory, he quickly established himself as Dvořák's star pupil; the master's influence burrowed deeply into young Suk's psyche. Their relationship deepened by his marriage to his mentor's daughter, Otilie, in 1898.

Suk's best known work remains his elegiac Serenade, written in memory of both his father-in-law and sadly short-lived Otilie. Like Dvořák, Suk supplemented his career as a composer through teaching; his students include composer Bohuslav Martinů and the late pianist Rudolf Firkůsny.

The Piano Quartet in A minor bears the catalog number Op. 1. Despite the fact that the young composer already had had a few works published, his decision to number it as his first opus undoubtedly reflects his high opinion of a student essay written as an assignment from his illustrious teacher. The opening *Allegro appassionato* boldly announces itself with a powerful opening chord that launches an energetic theme loaded with dramatic potential. Its youthful ardor recedes to give time and space for a beguilingly lyrical second theme.

A gentle series of repeated piano chords opens the ensuing *Adagio* and sets the stage for a sad yet lovely melody sung by the cello; the flowing theme bears the benign influence of his teacher—a supreme melodist himself—and also vaguely recalls the mood, melodic profile and even chord progressions of the main theme from the second movement of Borodin's second string quartet. Against plucked notes on the piano, the violin posits a second Romantic tune of mounting intensity. Rapid repeated chords from the piano impel the music forward. The movement ends calmly.

The concluding *Allegro con fuoco* begins with an upward sweep in the strings against strong chords from the piano, all of which create a march-like demeanor. Soon enough, lyric warmth softens the proceedings until cascading scales from the piano reassert the martial energy of the movement's opening bars. A gently rocking counter-theme rhythmically and melodically pays homage to Suk's mentor. Despite such understandable echoes of his teacher, the Op. 1 Piano Quartet makes for a brave declaration of musical independence; Suk was, even in his teens, a new and compelling talent.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Quartet for Piano and Strings in D Major, Op. 23 (1875)

With heavily weighted input from Brahms, in 1875 Antonín Dvořák received the Austrian State Prize for young, talented and impoverished artists. Receipt of the "vote of confidence" inspired a veritable eruption of compositional energy: the F-Major Symphony, the popular Serenade for Strings, the opera *Vanda* and five chamber works including his Piano Quartet in D Major, Op. 23. The last-named piece came very quickly; from start to finish it took the composer but three weeks to accomplish the task.

The first movement, marked *Allegro moderato*, opens with a syncopated theme that imparts unhurried yet inexorable forward motion. As elsewhere in his music Dvořák delights in harmonic twists; by the ninth measure he has already moved into B Major (one might reasonably expect B minor, which has the same key signature as the work's home key, D Major). A second and more lyrical theme emerges, yet its first four notes derive from an earlier triplet figure in the movement. Harmonically and melodically it exudes the composer's abiding love of Bohemian folk music. In the coda Dvořák combines the two primary themes in a unified and energetic closing statement.

The *Andantino* in B minor unfolds as a set of five variations on an elegiac theme, though Dvořák is careful not to allow the music to remain unremittingly mournful. In the third variation he inverts the melody, and in the following section he introduces a new tune in E-flat Major that adds yet further contrast. A plaintive coda brings the movement to a close.

There is no "official" *scherzo* per se. In its place Dvořák provides a finale that combines elements of a *scherzo* marked *Allegretto scherzando*, in 3/8 time, with an *Allegro agitato* in 4/4 time. The *Allegretto scherzando* begins comparatively tamely as a waltz but quickly grows in energy and rhythmic complexity to a rousing *furiant*, that wild Czech dance that shows up in many of the composer's works. The composer transforms the *Allegro agitato* music into a rustic jig, which is how he ends the piece.

Program notes by Steven Lowe