

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

35TH
SEASON

**WINTER
FESTIVAL**

JANUARY 29, 2016 – 7:30 PM

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, Hob. XV:25, “Gypsy”

Andante

Poco adagio cantabile

Gypsy Rondo

Andrew Wan violin / **Astrid Schween** cello / **Anton Nel** piano

ALEXANDER BORODIN

String Quintet in F minor

Allegro con brio

Andante ma non troppo

Menuetto

Finale: Prestissimo—Adagio—Prestissimo

Tessa Lark violin / **Scott Yoo** violin / **Che-Yen Chen** viola / **Bion Tsang** cello / **Yegor Dyachkov** cello

INTERMISSION

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Suite No. 1 for Two Pianos, Op. 5, “Fantaisie-tableaux”

Barcarole

A Night for Love

Tears

Russian Easter

Gloria Chien piano / **William Wolfram** piano

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FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

(1732–1809)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G Major, Hob. XV:25, “Gypsy” (1795)

Franz Joseph Haydn, whose combined string quartets and symphonies account for almost 200 works in his ample canon, wrote 45 piano trios plus more than a hundred others for the extinct baryton (the cello-like instrument played by the composer’s employer at the Esterháza estate in Hungary). Note that his piano trios fall under the heading “Keyboard Music” in the current *Grove Dictionary*. Why? Simply because until the trios of Beethoven and Schubert, the cello and violin parts were more-or-less discretionary, in large part because of the need to reinforce the feeble dynamics of the harpsichord and early *fortepiano*, especially the doubling of the piano’s left hand line by the cello’s lowest register.

Having spent several decades in Esterháza, Haydn was intimately 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*, radiating 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 song-like lyricism infuses the movement. An especially sweet violin-led episode, soon emulated by the cello, enhances the smiling equanimity.

The exuberance of the “Gypsy Rondo” finale expresses great ardor. Propelled by a main

energetic rondo theme alternating with a series of similarly scurrying episodes, the music hurtles forward with unstoppable momentum.

ALEXANDER BORODIN

(1833–1887)

String Quintet in F minor (1853–54)

Alexander Borodin was undoubtedly history’s most successful amateur composer, treating music as a beloved hobby secondary to his dual profession as a chemist and surgeon. His musical education was scanty, that in chemistry quite the contrary. Scientific journals of the time praised his scientific work, while fellow composers—spurred by the advocacy of Balakirev—applauded his musical efforts. He became one of the “Mighty Handful,” as the dominant Russian composers—with the conspicuous exception of “Westernized” Tchaikovsky—were termed by each other and their clagues. When Borodin died unexpectedly from a burst aneurysm in 1887, his lengthy and ambitious opera, *Prince Igor*, remained unfinished until completed by Rimsky-Korsakov and Alexander Glazunov.

As a student at the Academy of Physicians in St. Petersburg, Borodin played an active role in chamber music *soirées* at the home of an amateur cellist. In these informal gatherings he heard and performed music by Boccherini, Spohr and other essentially Western European composers. During this period Russian composers inspired by the example of Mikhail Glinka began incorporating Russian folk tunes and derivatives into their compositions. Borodin’s String Quintet is a case in point. Further nationalist impetus came in the figure of Franz Xavier Gebel (1787–1843), a German-born inhabitant of Moscow who borrowed from Russian folksong in his popular salon pieces.

Yet from the very opening notes of the first movement, marked *Allegro con brio*, it is the spirit of Mendelssohn that courses through the music. Flowingly lyrical and redolent of that composer’s many *Songs without Words*, the music takes wings and seemingly floats in dreamlike wind currents. Note that this quintet, like Schubert’s profound

C-Major Quintet, Op. 163, D. 956, employs a second cello rather than a second viola à la Mozart and Brahms in their respective strings quintets. Despite the expected darker timbres, Borodin is able to suggest Mendelssohnian lightness throughout this movement. Still, a hint of stereotypically Russian melancholy leaves its mark here as well.

The ensuing *Andante ma non troppo* begins in the lower strings before the ingratiating Russian-sounding theme is appropriated by a solo violin. A central section entrusts the main theme to a cello accompanied by pizzicatos elsewhere. Here, too, a violin takes up the fetchingly Romantic theme before returning to the cello. In form, the movement is essentially a set of two variations shared by violin and cello.

A light and airy *Menuetto* follows, somewhat in the nature of an elfin Mendelssohnian *scherzo*. The mid-movement Trio, however, has the lilting cadence of a rustic *Ländler* (precursor to the urban, Viennese waltz), so beloved of Schubert and Bruckner.

An energetic *Prestissimo* opens the final movement, once again suggesting the fluency of Mendelssohn. The descending main theme alternates with a rising secondary tune. Among the several episodes in the sonata-rondo is an *Adagio* wherein the first cello's quietly commanding presence darkens the mood against sustained minor-mode chords. The return of the initial themes sounds even more distinctly Mendelssohnian in the reprise of the *Prestissimo*. Borodin appends a brief coda to end the piece.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

(1873-1943)

Suite No. 1, Fantasia-tableaux for Two Pianos, Op. 5 (1903)

Throughout his entire life, Sergei Rachmaninoff was rightly considered one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century. His stature as a composer was never in doubt with the concert going public, but critics and unsympathetic musicians have not

been as kind in their assessments of this aspect of his career. The past decade or so has seen the "professionals" catching up with the public in recognizing the compositional genius of this unabashed Romantic.

As a composer for his chosen instrument, his piano style derived directly from Chopin and Liszt, though one hears occasional echoes of Schumann and Brahms. He ignored almost wholly Debussy's revolutionary treatment of the piano. The basic Rachmaninoff "sound" consists of vocal melodies, rich sonorities and virtuosic embellishments that invite virtuosos and scare away lesser players.

He was barely out of his teens when he composed his first of two suites for piano, and truth be told, his recognizably great works lay in the future. Still, the innate musical gift and technical competence are already in full view in the engaging four-movement Suite No. 1. One hears the pianistic signature in Rachmaninoff's practice of spreading melodies across right and left hands, the mania for triplet figuration and the ripe emotional expressiveness of his harmony.

The opening *Barcarole*, gently rocking in the character of its dance-inspired title, evolves from a lyrical theme of considerable intimacy. Inspired by poetry by Lemontov ("Gondola Song"), the movement's opening slightly anxious arpeggios are a porous scrim through which melodic fragments flow from the second piano. In the central section a new animated theme emerges against the rippling water.

The following movement, *A Night for Love*, lives up to the promise of its title. Byron's poem Parisina figures here as Rachmaninoff's muse. Once again water and wind are evoked in differing moods ranging from sweetness to a symbolized emotional maelstrom. A recurring three-note motif launches broken chords that betoken deeper feeling and surrounds a middle episode marked *Agitato* that provides vigorous contrast, gathering in storm-swept intensity before returning to a state of comparative calm.

The level of intimacy is even more pronounced in the third movement, aptly named *Tears* and specifically inspired by words from the Russian poet Tyutchev. Opening with a repeated and obsessive descending theme, the music is both anxious and brooding, reflecting Rachmaninoff's chronic depression, sublimated into expressive art. The descending theme gains in fervor and heightened dynamics, maintaining its obstinacy throughout the movement.

The full-bodied harmonic/chordal flow of the concluding *Russian Easter* evokes the celebratory aspect of his homeland's tradition of bell-ringing (which shows up often in his music, most tellingly in the opening chords of the Piano Concerto No. 2). Note, too, that the iconic Russian bells are limned in "The Great Gate of Kiev" in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and, of course, in Rimsky-Korsakov's eponymous *Russian Easter Overture*. Unlike the initial three movements, brooding is swept away in an extroverted demonstration of near-manic jubilation. Manic is the key here: it is driven and even more relentlessly obsessive than what occurs in the previous movement.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
