

WINTER FESTIVAL



SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

JANUARY 30, 2015

7:30 PM

PROGRAM

JOAQUÍN TURINA

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, Op. 67

Lento—Andante mosso

Vivo

Andante—Allegretto

Karen Gomyo *violin* / **Che-Yen Chen** *viola* / **Andrés Díaz** *cello* / **William Wolfram** *piano*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sonata for Violin and Piano in C minor, Op. 30 No. 2

Allegro con brio

Adagio cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Allegro

James Ehnes *violin* / **Orion Weiss** *piano*

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Quartet for Piano and Strings in F minor, Op. 2

Allegro molto

Adagio

Intermezzo: Allegro moderato

Allegro molto vivace

Yosuke Kawasaki *violin* / **Beth Guterman Chu** *viola* / **Wendy Sutter** *cello* / **Anton Nel** *piano*

JOAQUÍN TURINA

(1882–1949)

Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, Op. 67 (1931)

Born in Seville, in 1905 Joaquín Turina moved to Paris where he studied piano with Moritz Moszkowski and composition at the Schola Cantorum under Vincent D'Indy, though exposure to the music of Debussy added a French patina to Turina's ingrained Spanish accent, as it did with many Spanish composers in the first two decades of the 20th century. Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla were appalled by Vincent D'Indy's stylistic influence on Turina's early Piano Quintet. The young composer took seriously his elders' opinion and returned to Spain in 1913 to immerse himself in his country's great heritage of regional folk music. In 1931 he composed his *Quartet for Piano and Strings in A minor, Op. 67*.

The *Lento—Andante mosso* first movement opens moodily with a theme first uttered by the unison strings followed respectively by commentary from the piano and the cello. The main section, *Andante mosso*, proceeds at a somewhat faster pace as the cello leads the way with an impassioned rising and falling theme supported by a descending figure in the bass region of the piano. Much of the main body of the movement presents the thematic material in varied instrumental colorations that suggest equally varied emotional states. Episodes of a haunting character suddenly shift into energetic outbursts driven by the piano.

With hammered chords in the bass and plucked upper strings the onset of the *Scherzo* fully lives up to its tempo indication, *Vivo*. The Spanish character of the first movement's motifs is even more pronounced here. In the central Trio the composer retreats into a more contemplative mood, which effectively balances the *Scherzo*'s contrasting mindset.

The violin launches the concluding *Andante—Allegretto* with a figure that briefly recalls the opening moments of a Bach-like solo sonata but immediately soars to expressive heights of a distinctly Spanish-Romantic nature. Impressionist harmonies remind us of Turina's absorption of Debussy. Initiated by the piano and soon followed by the strings, thematic fragments from the opening movement impart a cyclic character to the structure. Rapture, sweetness and muscularity play off against one another throughout the movement.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in C minor, Op. 30, No. 2 (1802)

The year 1802 began bleakly for Beethoven. Several attempts to find a permanent court position failed to materialize. Worse yet, his deepening deafness and attendant despair began to isolate him from the world around him. In October he wrote the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*, an unsent letter to his brothers in which he expressed his terrible anguish, doubt and admitted to thoughts of suicide. The writing of this epistle served as a genuine catharsis for the composer, freeing him to get on with the task of his life—to redirect his considerable energy and eruptive feelings into musical form. By year's end he had completed his Second Symphony, the massive so-called "Eroica" Variations, the three Op. 31 Piano Sonatas, and the three Sonatas for Piano and Violin, Op. 30.

The Sonata in C minor, Op. 30, No. 2 boasts a notably expansive treatment of instrumental sonorities, while its extended emotional range affords a preview into the heroic works that lay in the near future. C minor was for Beethoven his tonal center of conflict, struggle and eventual triumph. The Fifth Symphony comes first to mind, but also the "Funeral March" from the "Eroica" Symphony and the outer movements of the Third Piano Concerto. One

can go back as far as the third of his Op. 1 Piano Trios for that same sense of disquieting power. (It was that very Trio in C minor that bothered Beethoven's erstwhile mentor, Franz Joseph Haydn.)

In the *Allegro con brio* first movement ghostly rumblings in the piano's bass set the stage for music of portentous declamation. Shards of thematic material coalesce into a full statement of the principal theme after an expectant build-up of tension. The music unfolds with sweeping vigor, powerfully enhanced by contrasting episodes of stress and release.

In distinct contrast, the *Adagio cantabile* sails in a safe haven from the stormy waters of the opening movement, yet beneath the calm lurk ominous reminders of conflict, readily heard in the unexpected rising scales in the piano part that erupt toward the movement's end.

The *Scherzo* provides yet more contrast, delaying the return to high drama. The turbulence in its pages is clearly meant ironically to reflect the literal meaning of the term *scherzo*—joke.

In the surging *Allegro* finale emotional issues generated in the opening *Allegro con brio* return in full force. Here, too, deep rumblings and heightened dynamic contrasts thrust us into a maelstrom implicit in the very opening bars of the finale. Stretches of turbulent interplay between the instrumental protagonists stand in stark contrast to brief interludes of relative buoyancy. Here Beethoven has discarded the simpler rondo of many of his earlier finales in favor of a sonata-rondo of near-epic proportions and tempestuous demeanor.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

Quartet No. 2 for Piano and Strings in F minor, Op. 2 (1823)

The miraculous early manifestation of Mendelssohn's talent includes three quartets for piano and strings that predate his well-known *Octet* (at age 16) and *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* (at age 17). The young composer dedicated the new works, including the *Quartet No. 2 in F minor* to his eminent teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, long-time correspondent of Goethe, who valued Zelter's setting of the poet's verses.

The *Quartet's Allegro molto* opening movement posits a theme that rises from a dominant below the tonic upward to a minor third above it—C to A-flat. The theme recalls similar motifs in Mozart, e.g., the C-minor slow movement of the *Sinfonia concertante*, K. 364 and the G-minor String Quintet, K. 516. After this anxious opening theme, Mendelssohn relents, serving up a flowing lyrical tune in A-flat Major with notes scurrying around the keyboard. Like Mozart (Schubert, too, as in the opening movement of his A-minor Quartet), Mendelssohn finds more life in the main theme when lifting its spirits into the major. Amazing, isn't it, how that simple device of raising the minor third up a notch can completely redefine the emotional crux of a tune! The piano enjoys the opportunity to indulge in a bit of virtuosic hand-crossing. It is the strings, however, that direct things from the development to the recapitulation and higher-velocity coda.

The *Adagio* begins tenderly with a lovely extended theme from the piano—almost a song without words—before the strings have their chance to elaborate upon it. Even at 14 Mendelssohn shows us how to create a musical caress in this lyrical paragraph. Casting the movement in D-flat Major, the young and explorative composer shifts through different tonalities before ending on a hushed note.

In lieu of a *Minuet* or *Scherzo*, Mendelssohn inserts a gentle *Intermezzo*. The piano opens with a nostalgic tune immediately echoed by the strings. A conversational episode ensues in a kind of question-response mode between the keyboard and strings. Here, too, shifting tonalities add to overall sweet sadness. It is as if Mendelssohn-the-child is tapping into darker aspects of his psyche that may have been hidden in his privileged life.

The Quartet closes with an insistent *Allegro molto vivace* that opens with urgent prodding from the strings, accompanied by subtle throbs on the piano. The two “groups” soon reverse roles. The rapid figurations of this theme give shape to and dominate the evolution of the movement. Though not especially dramatic, the thematic fragment is a little nugget of energy and propels the music along with undiminished vigor.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
