

SUMMER FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2013

8:00 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

SAMUEL BARBER*

String Quartet, Op. 11

Molto allegro e appassionato

Adagio—attacca

Molto allegro (come prima)—Presto

James Ehnes violin / **Amy Schwartz Moretti** violin / **Richard O'Neill** viola / **Robert deMaine** cello

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18 No. 1

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso e appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegro

Erin Keefe violin / **Alexander Velinzon** violin / **David Harding** viola / **Amit Peled** cello

INTERMISSION

IGOR STRAVINSKY

The Rite of Spring for Piano, Four Hands

Part I: The Adoration of the Earth

Introduction

Auguries of Spring

Mock Abduction

Spring Khorovod (Round Dance)

Games of the Rival Tribes

Procession of the Wise Elder

Adoration of the Earth (The Wise Elder)

Dance of the Earth

Part II: The Sacrifice

Introduction

Mystical Circles of the Young Girls

Glorification of the Chosen One

Ritual of the Ancients

Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)

Anna Polonsky and **Orion Weiss** piano

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SAMUEL BARBER

(1910–1981)

String Quartet, Op. 11 (1936)

Although not a child prodigy in the sense of a Mozart or Mendelssohn, Samuel Barber began composing in his youth. His abundant musicality received nurture from his aunt, the famous contralto Louise Homer, who taught the boy to sing at a tender age. In 1936, still a young man, Barber composed his String Quartet, Op. 11. Though he could always use dissonance when it served his purposes he more typically employed a neo-Romantic tonal vocabulary.

The Quartet's opening movement, *Molto allegro e appassionato*, asserts itself with a vibrant main theme that is eventually pitted against a quiet chorale-like counter theme. A third legato theme emerges before Barber weaves the three elements together.

The ensuing *Adagio*—most familiar in its string orchestra arrangement for Arturo Toscanini—is laid out in arch form. The basic flowing and elegiac main theme slowly moves through the different string instruments, beginning with the violins before a downward shift into the viola's realm. The work's expansive central section entrusts the theme to the cellos, then builds to a powerful *fortissimo* climax in the high regions of the string ensemble's range, followed immediately by dead silence—which greatly intensifies the dramatic impact of the climax. A series of wrenchingly sad chords provides a transition to the final section where the opening theme is heard. The affecting conclusion uses the first five notes of the melody, holding the final note over a moment of silence followed by an accompanying figure that ebbs away to nothingness.

In its string orchestra version the *Adagio* has served to commemorate tragic occasions ever since, including the funerals of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Prince Rainier of Monaco, as well as the ceremony at the site of the World Trade Center following the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001.

Though the *Adagio* seems to come to a full close, the term *attacca* precedes the *Molto allegro (come prima)*—*Presto* finale that emerges Phoenix-like out of the

silence, i.e., without pause. A very brief and fairly quiet figure almost immediately launches an energetic and anxious episode before the music grows temporarily quiet before bringing the quartet to an energetic, forceful and anxious close.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 18 No. 1 (1798–1800)

Beethoven's 16 string quartets remain the iconic works that have defined the chamber music experience for two centuries. From the six Op. 18 quartets of his youth, through the dramatic works of his adventuresome middle years, to the last unparalleled masterpieces of his full maturity, Beethoven built upon the great quartets of his immediate predecessors Haydn and Mozart and set a standard of excellence approached but never surpassed. As a body of music, Beethoven's quartets explore and express the vast range of emotion of a composer whose heart beat to the rhythm of our shared humanity. The Op. 18 quartets show mastery of the mature classical style of Mozart and Haydn.

Though composed second, Beethoven listed the F-Major Quartet as the first of the set of six, most likely because he had spent a great deal of time revising, improving and expanding this richly inventive and emotionally explorative work. Extensive evidence from Beethoven's notebooks clearly show how much effort he spent honing and polishing the six-note motive that opens and dominates the *Allegro con brio* first movement. The eminent writer Joseph Kerman aptly describes that powerful figure as "a coiled spring, ready to shoot off in all directions." As in many of his compositions Beethoven employs such pithy kernels of potential energy to generate forward motion and drama, e.g., the "Fate" motive of the Fifth Symphony and the opening phrases of the "Serioso" Quartet (No. 11) and the similar figure that initiates the Overture to *Fidelio*. Beethoven does provide a secondary theme, gentler and deftly syncopated, but its function actually enhances the dynamic power of the all-important generative motive that guides the movement through its varied paces and emotional range. In the development

section Beethoven demonstrates his absorption of counterpoint—he was, of course, thoroughly trained in Bachian fugal writing in his early studies—and his skill in creating independence and interplay among the four instruments. In this large and implicitly symphonic movement Beethoven has another trick up his sleeve: in the coda he introduces a new theme, a rising scalar figure that he soon unites with the primary motive, which asserts its primacy at the very end.

Beethoven performed the ensuing *Adagio affettuoso e appassionato* for his friend Karl Amenda, telling him afterward that the music was inspired by the tomb scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. Cast in the D minor, it begins with a sad and longing theme spun by the first violin supported by halting chords below. The second violin introduces a short descending theme followed by another short downward phrase from the viola. Each of the three themes is reserved in nature yet enables Beethoven to combine them into a highly energetic and emotionally rich development section.

The *Scherzo: Allegro molto* retreats from the depth and anxiety of the *Adagio*. A buoyant and humor-filled dance-like atmosphere prevails, enhanced by frequent syncopations and bounding energy suggested by octave jumps and arpeggio figures. Yet there also are lingering traces of what commentator Basil Lam once described as “unrest that links it with the first half of the quartet.”

The Quartet’s Finale, *Allegro* is a combination of Sonata-Rondo wherein the primary theme alternates with contrasting episodes of a Rondo and a *de facto* development section with clever interplay of the material as in Sonata form. The skittish primary theme bears more than a passing resemblance to the equivalent movement in Beethoven’s C-minor String Trio, Op. 9, No. 3 (performed on July 15 during this Summer Festival). Again we witness the composer’s gift for incorporating Bachian counterpoint into a thoroughly Classical era sound world.

IGOR STRAVINSKY

(1882-1971)

Le Sacre du printemps (“Rite of Spring”) for Piano, Four Hands (1912-13)

While working on *The Firebird* in 1910, Stravinsky began thinking of a new ballet scenario based on a pagan ritual in which tribal elders sitting in a large circle watch a young maiden dance herself to death. Stravinsky secured help in devising the scenario from his archeologist friend Nicholas Roerich, and wrote, “What I was trying to convey in *The Rite* was the surge of spring, the magnificent upsurge of nature reborn.” As he worked on the nascent score he came to realize that this new piece marked a significant stylistic change from the overt Romanticism of *The Firebird* and incipient bitonality of *Petrushka*, claiming later that he was guided by no system whatever in *The Rite of Spring*. For reasons both practical and financial, rehearsals for ballet (and opera) performances often utilize piano reductions of the final orchestral works. Stravinsky created four-hand piano scores for all of his ballets, including *Le Sacre du printemps*.

Part I, *The Adoration of the Earth*, unfolds in eight unbroken sections beginning with an Introduction intoning a Ukrainian folk tune, the only borrowed theme in the score. The *Auguries of Spring* follows immediately as if shot from a cannon, its abrasive polytonal chord and asymmetrical rhythms a veritable battle cry of modernity. Though much is made of *Le Sacre’s* harmonic daring, it is truly in its lacerating rhythms that the music is most startlingly innovative.

The *Mock Abduction* heightens the frenzy already established in the *Auguries of Spring*, then gives way to *Spring Khorovod (Round Dance)*—based on a four-note snippet of a theme—which begins tranquilly before turning rambunctious. Another short theme informs the *Games of Rival Tribes*. A stark new theme in *Procession of the Wise Elder* announces the arrival of the tribal elders. Striking in its contrast, the *Adoration of the Earth (The Wise Elder)* consists of four measures of barely audible otherworldly harmonies. The first section concludes at fever pitch in *Dance of the Earth*, its impact relentlessly hammered by aggressive sonorities in the piano nether regions in four-against-three rhythm.

Part II, *The Sacrifice*, begins slowly and quietly, its inchoate thematic material finding fuller expression in the following *Mystical Circles of the Young Girls*. A series of eleven thudding chords initiates the *Glorification of the Chosen One* with Banshee-like wailing and electric ostinatos. At the same tempo, the *Ritual of the Ancients* ushers in powerful swells that alternate with strident fanfares. Starting quietly, the concluding *Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen One)*—its time signature changing 154 times in 275 measures—builds to a moment of near violent ecstasy, and ends with the death of the maiden in a (tongue in cheek?) dominant-tonic cadence.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
