

SUMMER FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2013
8:00 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Sonata for Viola da Gamba in D Major, BWV 1028

Adagio

Allegro

Andante

Allegro

Julie Albers cello / Inon Barnatan piano

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Lachrymae for Viola and Piano, Op. 48

Cynthia Phelps viola / Andrew Armstrong piano

JOHN ADAMS

Road Movies

Relaxed Groove

Meditative

40% Swing

James Ehnes violin / Andrew Russo piano

INTERMISSION

PAUL SCHOENFIELD

Four Souvenirs

Samba

Tango

Tin Pan Alley

Square Dance

James Ehnes violin / Andrew Russo piano

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

Septet in E-flat Major, Op. 65

Préamble

Menuet

Intermède

Gavotte et Final

Jens Lindemann trumpet / Alexander Velinzon violin / Augustin Hadelich violin /

Rebecca Albers viola / Ronald Thomas cello / Jordan Anderson double bass / Craig Sheppard piano

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JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685–1750)

Sonata for Viola da Gamba in D Major, BWV 1028 (ca. 1740)

During Bach's lifetime great changes occurred in the design and manufacture of musical instruments. The venerable viol family died out by the mid-18th century, replaced by the modern violin, viola, cello and double bass. Significant differences in structure provided a greatly increased dynamic range for the newer instruments, which resulted in a more brilliant, less intimate and "woodsy" sound. Unlike the modern four-string cello, the viola da gamba employed six strings and had a fretted fingerboard analogous to the guitar. Though the early music movement has resuscitated all manner of earlier music-making devices—including the viol family—most modern cellists have made music originally conceived for the viola da gamba their own. So too, the modern piano often sits in for the harpsichord when Bach's gamba works are played on a cello.

Bach probably composed his three Sonatas for Viola da Gamba for Carol Friedrich Abel, a fine gamba player and respected composer. Note that just as the instrument itself was considered a relic by 1740, Bach cast *these* works in the slow-fast-slow-fast outline favored by Arcangelo Corelli. In his many concertos the Cantor of Leipzig utilized the newer fast-slow-fast format of the late Baroque era. Additionally Bach was very much up-to-date in elevating the keyboard from its earlier role as a filler of harmonic underpinning to full-fledged partnership on equal terms with the string soloist.

The Sonata in D Major, BWV 1028 is the most often performed of the three such works. An unforced and stately *Adagio* serves as a brief introduction to the fast-paced *Allegro* second movement. The leisurely nature of the cello's line in the first movement contrasts with and effectively highlights the speedy and virtuosic character of the *Allegro*. Note that in both movements the keyboard is an active participant in the proceedings.

Further contrast, and hence overall interest, is provided in the *Andante* by residing in the B minor, the so-called relative minor of tonic D Major (same key signature, i.e.,

one sharp). Here, too, the slower pace provides a respite from the animation of the previous *Allegro* as well as with the concluding *Allegro* in gleaming D Major, a buoyantly energetic finale befitting a work written for a virtuoso performer.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

Lachrymae for Viola and Piano, Op. 48 (1950)

In 1604, John Dowland composed *Lachrymae* ("Tears"), a collection of 21 dance-derived movements. Seven of these were variations on his song "Flow, My Tears," regarded as one of the instrumental gems of the English Renaissance. Much of Dowland's music is downcast, reflecting probable chronic depression. His motto, "semper Dowland, semper dolens" ("forever Dowland, forever grieving") captures the essence of much of his sad and haunting music.

In 1950, Benjamin Britten composed his *Lachrymae (Reflections on a Song of Dowland)* for violist William Primrose and himself as pianist. Shortly before the composer's death in 1976, he rescored the music for violist Cecil Aronowitz to perform with string orchestra. The three-phrase theme, taken from a Dowland song titled variously "If My Complaints Could Passions Move" and "Captaine Piper's Galliard," engenders ten variations in a wide range of styles. Only in the coda does Britten give the viola the chance to play Dowland's original tune in full.

Lachrymae opens with a nebulous harmonic wash of tone color from which emerge three rising notes from the Dowland's song. Soon the viola launches into a rhythmically jerky variant with spare pointillistic prodding from the piano, imitated shortly by pizzicatos on the string instrument that are underlined by terse dark statements in the piano's nether regions. A main feature of the score lies in Britten's desire to exploit the timbral possibilities of the viola, not merely in the otherworldly harmonies but in his use of *sul ponticello* (bowed at the instrument's bridge), which produces a rasping, edgy sound. Stark chords from the piano increase the modernistic feel of the music. Britten always worked within a recognizably tonal palette, yet he was keenly aware of more openly dissonant

tendencies in 20th-century music and used the sounds of modernity with great effectiveness. As the piece proceeds towards its closing moments upwardly rushing scalar passages from the viola are powerfully augmented by deep piano chords interspersed with assertively rising arpeggios. The viola's ability to spin out long legato melody is also exploited, expanding the range of effects Britten so cannily conjures.

JOHN ADAMS

(B. 1947)

Road Movies (1995)

One of our nation's most performed and recorded living composers, John Adams' music draws from a broad range of styles and periods, ranging from the 17th-century Baroque (as in the haunting slow movement of his Violin Concerto) to contemporary popular culture and political history (e.g., *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *Doctor Atomic*). He previously served as composer-in-residence for the San Francisco Symphony and currently occupies the position of "creative chair" for the Los Angeles Philharmonic. By his own words Adams came late to chamber music, tentatively beginning with his Chamber Symphony in 1992 before writing his string quartet, *John's Book of Alleged Dances* in 1994. The following year saw *Road Movies*, whose title, according to the composer "is total whimsy, probably suggested by the 'groove' in the piano."

Adams has characterized the opening movement, *Relaxed Groove* as a "drive down a not unfamiliar road." A busy and obsessive piano figure sets the pace under a propulsive violin part with lots of emphatic double-stopping. The music, despite its title, is relentlessly forward, syncopated and animated by violin pizzicatos. He terms it "travel music."

He describes the middle movement, *Meditative*, as a "solitary figure in an empty desert landscape." It opens with a quiet piano introduction bearing faint memories of Debussian Impressionism. Eventually the violin enters with a rising theme beginning one whole tone below the instrument's normal G-natural lowest note. The resultant sound, per the composer, produces "that curious, ultra-relaxed baritonal F-natural" quality. At the same time, the deeper sonority conveys a kind of

sly sensuality, eventually dissipated when the music becomes jumpier.

Adams calls the concluding *40% Swing* a "Perpetual motion machine with echoes of jazz and bluegrass" (the latter also implied in *Meditative*). Far more so than in the opening movement this final gesture is syncopated and irresistibly insistent, suggesting a far rougher ride than in *Relaxed Groove*.

PAUL SCHOENFIELD

(B. 1947)

Four Souvenirs (1990)

Born in "Motor City," Paul Schoenfield maintains quarters in the United States and Israel. Best known as a composer, he is an accomplished pianist whose mentors included the legendary Rudolf Serkin, among others. Wanderlust and perhaps an exploration of his Jewish roots led Schoenfield to travel to Israel where he lived on a kibbutz, serving as a math teacher. He does not refer to himself as an "art-music" composer, though his music has been performed by many "serious" ensembles including the New York Philharmonic and Seattle Symphony. Many of his pieces incorporate musical and cultural themes from Judaism including his well-known *Klezmer Rondos*. In common with a growing number of American composers, Schoenfield writes music that embraces classical music, jazz, folk and klezmer—blended and/or alternated, and always guided by an innate sense of fantasy and humor.

Four Souvenirs for Violin and Piano brings together these disparate musical voices, and like his well-known *Café Music* (performed as recently as 2009 at Seattle Chamber Music Society's summer festival), the 1990 piece proves to be a thoroughly compatible marriage of distinctive styles. The opening *Samba* immediately establishes an energetic, rhythmically dotted state of mind, light of mood and assured in its idiomatic writing for both instruments. Well into this roughly 3-1/2 to 4-minute movement Schoenfield seems to give a nod and a wink of his eye to Bach-inspired Baroque/modern counterpoint.

The ensuing *Tango* begins with a languorous and slowly lyrical violin introduction. A few minutes in, the piano

initiates the sultry tango rhythm, and the movement ends on a bluesy note. The third movement, *Tin Pan Alley* opens slowly in dreamy bluesy-ness, ultimately evoking memories of Scott Joplin's ragtime music. By far the wildest piece is the final *Square Dance*, which boasts a veritable honky-tonk piano accompaniment supporting the violin's bouncy stratospheric flights of fancy.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

(1835–1921)

Septet in E-flat Major, Op. 65 (1881)

Saint-Saëns lived long enough to survive his early reputation as a revolutionary in music to become an arch-reactionary, which says perhaps less about him than about the tumultuous changes in culture during his long, productive life. He was a consummately gifted musician with talent and intelligence in many fields. He even lectured on astronomy! An esteemed pianist and composer of great formal ingenuity, he wrote with facility in all genres from grand opera to solo recital pieces and virtually everything else in between.

Chamber music figures prominently in his extensive canon, including his sprightly Septet in E-flat Major, Op. 65 scored for the unusual combination of trumpet, two violins, viola, cello, bass and piano. The canny blending of these instruments attests to Saint-Saëns' deserved reputation as a skillful orchestrator.

The *Préamble* unfolds in a motorically Baroque vein, heightened further in a fugal section sandwiched between the energetic opening and a subsequent lyrical episode. Note the first entry of the trumpet, a long-held note calms the waters roiled in the opening moments. Throughout the movement Saint-Saëns interjects mock-Baroque pomp, no more so than in the Liszt-inspired pianistic fireworks near the close.

Humor abounds in a mock-stately *Menuet* with its jaunty trumpet-led tune over a march-like accompaniment that itself is offset by sighing strings. The central *Trio* weds the trumpet and strings in a shared melody over a rich piano accompaniment.

The third movement *Intermède* pits a singing cello line against a rhythmically urging piano. The trumpet in concert with the strings unveil a long flowing tune over an obsessive repeated note sequence courtesy of the piano.

The *Gavotte et Final* evokes the spirit of the 18th-century French dance and is first heard without the trumpet. The brass instrument eventually enters in an attitude of great élan and virtuosity enhanced by a comic bugle calls. Without warning the piano and strings elbow their way in and posit an energetic fugato stolen from a phrase in the opening movement. The work ends with the trumpet leading the ensemble into frolicsome race to final bar.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
