

WINTER FESTIVAL



JANUARY 26, 2013

7:30 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Serenade for String Trio in D Major, Op. 8

Marcia: Allegro—Adagio

Menuetto: Allegretto

Adagio - Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegretto alla Polacca

Andante quasi Allegretto—Allegro

Marcia: Allegro

Amy Schwartz Moretti *violin* / **Richard O'Neill** *viola* / **Edward Arron** *cello*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY/KENNETH COOPER

Sonata No. 4 for Oboe, French horn, and Harpsichord

Prélude

Scherzando

Mouvement

Nathan Hughes *oboe* / **William VerMeulen** *French horn* / **Luc Beauséjour** *harpsichord*

INTERMISSION

HUGO WOLF

Italian Serenade for String Quartet

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

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

String Quintet in B-flat Major, Op. 87

Allegro vivace

Andante scherzando

Adagio e lento

Allegro molto vivace

Scott Yoo *violin* / **James Ehnes** *violin* / **Michael Klotz** *viola* /

Toby Appel *viola* / **Robert deMaine** *cello*

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Serenade for String Trio in D Major, Op. 8 (1796–97)

Beethoven wrote five string trios, including this Serenade, before he penned his epochal set of six Op. 18 string quartets. The quartet, with its rich line of tone, greater body and textural possibilities, seemed a better medium for the serious artistic musings of the new Romantic era; the string trio, precisely because of its slender dimensions, worked especially well as the voice of light-hearted entertainment in high demand until the close of the 18th century in music-hungry Vienna. It was, in a real sense, due to “market conditions” that Beethoven did not return to its composition. He did not, as has been argued, write string trios as a rehearsal for taking on the larger string quartet. If anything, it is more difficult to write in the reduced format with fluency and fullness.

The Op. 8 Serenade dates from around 1796 and may well have been composed for the itinerant musicians the composer frequently met in his wanderings in the Viennese countryside. It is a tuneful, lightly textured work, immediate in appeal. Though its movements are structurally simple, there are (as virtually always with Beethoven) a couple of interesting features. To begin with, the opening two-part *Marcia: Allegro—Adagio* returns to conclude the piece after four intervening movements. Secondly, its fourth movement is a polonaise, a dance very popular in Germany and Vienna from the days of Bach and Telemann onwards but rarely encountered in works by Beethoven. (He did find a place for this catchy rhythm in $\frac{3}{4}$ time in the finale to his “Triple” Concerto; Franklin Delano Roosevelt noted its resemblance to “Home on the Range!”.)

The march that opens the Serenade begins with a quick, jaunty *Allegro* and is immediately followed by a lyrical *Adagio*, essentially sweet and untroubled. The ensuing *Menuetto allegretto* anticipates the brusqueness of what would evolve into a Beethoven *Scherzo*; at this stage in his development the music strongly recalls Haydn (Beethoven’s one-time teacher) more than Mozart. A lighter and less emphatic *Trio* provides textural and mood contrast before the *Menuetto* returns and ends with a delectable pizzicato coda.

A sequence comprised of *Adagio—Scherzo—Adagio—Allegro molto* follows in which the Italianate melody of the slow section, inquisitive and long-breathed, alternates with episodes of a distinctly mercurial character. At this point the above-noted polonaise captivates through its infectious lilt.

Even at this early stage of development, Beethoven was the quintessential exponent of musical variation, and the next movement, *Andante quasi allegretto*, treats the listener to a set of multi-hued variations on a stately theme. Given the timbral resources of the trio format Beethoven makes effective use of each instrument’s special tonal characteristics. Without pause, the opening *Marcia* reappears, bringing the Serenade to a happy, bumptious close.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY / KENNETH COOPER

(1862–1918)

Sonata No. 4 for Oboe, French horn, and Harpsichord

In 1915, already weakened by the cancer that would eventually take his life, Debussy declared his goal of writing six diverse chamber works. Alas, he completed only three, but what gems they are: sonatas respectively for cello and piano; flute, viola and harp; and violin and piano.

He got a start on a sonata for oboe, horn and harpsichord. The choice of harpsichord paralleled several other early 20th-century works that helped to resurrect the Baroque era keyboard instrument to renewed prominences. (Other signal works include Poulenc’s *Concert champêtre* and de Falla’s *Harpsichord Concerto*.) Debussy expressed affection for the music of 18th-century clavecinistes including François Couperin and Rameau, an esteem also reflected in *Le tombeau de Couperin* by Maurice Ravel.

The following comments have been excerpted from a preface by harpsichordist Kenneth Cooper, whose scholarship and musical insight led him to fulfill Debussy’s intended work. The full essay is included in the International Music Company’s score:

“Three Debussy pieces have been transcribed to form a plausible, or at least playable *Sonata ‘No. 4’* as some

compensation for what the composer might have written in 1918 had he lived.”

“Our first movement [Prélude] is drawn from...Debussy’s pantomime-ballet *La Boite à Joujoux* (“The Toy Box”), composed in 1913...Debussy himself gives a brief outline: ‘The plot? Oh, very simple: a cardboard soldier falls in love with a doll; he tries to show off to her, but she betrays him with *Polichinelle*. The soldier learns of this and terrible things begin to happen: there is a battle between wooden soldiers and *Polichinelles*. In short, the lover of the beautiful doll is gravely wounded during the battle. The doll nurses him and—they all live happily ever after. You see how it is simplicity itself—quite childish.’”

“There are many delicious touches in this score,” continues Cooper, “among them the dolls turning on the (electric lights) when they get up in the morning...and then winding up the phonograph to play an old record, then new, of course...The score was completed in 1919 by André Caplet [frequent orchestrator of Debussy’s piano music].”

“This mischievous scherzo [*Scherzando*], entitled ‘*pour les notes répétées*’ was composed...as the ninth of Debussy’s *Douze Études*... [Debussy] wrote the publisher... ‘I’ve put much love and much trust in the future of the *Études*. I hope they will please you, as much for the music as for their intention. You will believe, as I do, there’s no need to make technical exercises more somber just to appear more serious; a little charm never spoiled anything.’”

“Although not a late work of Debussy’s, this finale [Mouvement] to his first set of *Images*, published by Durand on October 11, 1905, possesses many of the neo-classical traits he later pursued: consistency of texture, ostinato (perpetual motion), uncluttered design, wit, passion within the form and an abstract, anti-impressionistic, soon-to-be-Stravinskyan manner.”

HUGO WOLF

(1860–1903)

Italian Serenade for String Quartet (1887)

Prodigiously gifted Hugo Wolf shared a curse with a number of artists whose innate talent was compromised by chronic mental illness and its frequently attendant

paranoia and anti-social behavior. In Wolf’s case, tertiary syphilis exacerbated his psychiatric problems. He spent his final years in an institution, dying in his forty-third year. Early admiration for Brahms led to a meeting with the established master, who, perusing some of the young man’s compositions, urged Wolf to immerse himself in a thorough study of counterpoint. Hurt to the quick, the pathologically sensitive Wolf immediately added Brahms to his list of imagined and real enemies, throwing himself headlong into the distinctly anti-Brahmsian, ardently pro-Wagner camp.

Success as a composer did not readily come to him; like Schumann before him—also afflicted with devastating mental health issues—Wolf for a time functioned as a music critic and teacher, losing most of his students through venomous intolerance with their lack of talent. In *A Lexicon of Musical Invective* (a “must” read), the late centenarian Nicholas Slonimsky quoted a letter from Wolf after one of his pieces received a scathing review: “I am sitting in the smallest room in my house. Your review is in front of me; shortly it shall be behind me!”

Known mainly for his intensely expressive songs, Wolf occasionally took up the challenge of writing chamber music. Of his scant number of instrumental works, his Italian Serenade remains the best-known. He originally wrote it for string quartet. Five years later, in 1892, he produced an orchestral version, intending but failing to write two additional movements in hopes of producing a large-scale suite. Like Schubert’s miraculous *Quartetsatz*, the Italian Serenade stands alone as a magnificent self-contained movement.

Wolf’s father died in 1887, the very year that signaled a change in his fortunes vis à vis acceptance as a composer. Perhaps that hitherto unattainable recognition helps explain the prevailing light mood of the Serenade. Presumably inspired by a novella by Joseph Eichendorff, *From the Life of a Ne’er Do Well*, the music conveys the ardent wooing of a young man who leaves home in search of success in life and love. A buoyant theme opens the brief work, animated by a lively rhythmic underpinning. The music progresses in a series of subtly varied episodes in the manner of a rondo, all of which are united by the composer’s uncharacteristic amiability. A sardonic middle section suggests the kind of ironic overstatement one encounters in, say, Mahler scherzos.

A beguiling secondary tune emerges and sets up a brief climax before the return of the main theme.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

String Quintet in B-flat Major, Op. 87 (1845)

Mendelssohn composed two string quintets, an early one dating from 1826, and the B-flat Major Quintet of 1845. In common with the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—whose overture written at age 17 blends perfectly with the remaining music composed in the 1840s—the two quintets are stylistic siblings despite the two decades that separate them. The composer's basic style emerged in his teens and remained constant throughout his life. Inspired by his thorough study of his Classical antecedents, he wrote more chamber music than most composers of the Romantic era.

Composed two years before his untimely death, he apparently never performed the String Quintet, Op. 87, of which he had intended to rework the finale. It was published posthumously as Op. 87 in 1851. The model for both of his string quintets was that used by Mozart, i.e., with a second viola, and not Schubert, as in the C-Major "Cello" Quintet.

The first movement *Allegro vivace* opens with the first violin stating the initial triadic theme. A tremolo accompaniment by the remaining strings adds palpably to the sense of urgency and bears a family resemblance to the miraculous Octet, written when he was only 16 years of age. The second theme retreats from the high energy of the first tune. Mendelssohn wrote for strings with great skill and fluency, and in the central development section he imaginatively varies the dynamics and textures for added interest. Even in the recapitulation, he expands the two opening themes and demonstrates his ease in contrapuntal writing.

The ensuing *Andante scherzando* in G minor is one of those all-but-patented skittish Mendessohnian scherzos. Alternating pizzicato and arco (bowed) passagework, plus a staccato main tune, add further to the work's varied sound world, enhanced by skilled contrapuntal manipulation. The shifting between major and minor heightens the harmonic variety as well.

Potent contrast is apparent in the following *Adagio e lento*. Cast in D minor, the counterpoint and playful spirit of the preceding movement is replaced by predominantly chordal textures and expressive harmonies. Formally elegant, the *Adagio* is unquestionably the emotional heart of the piece.

The clouds are swept aside in the effervescent finale, *Allegro molto vivace*. Hustle and bustle are everywhere, beginning with a violin run. Mendelssohn provides a lyrical countersubject announced by the violas, which he largely ignores in the recapitulation. Instead, the composer introduces a variant on a theme first heard in the development, where it is treated contrapuntally.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
