

# Program Notes

## PRE-CONCERT

### Sonata for Solo Cello, Op. 8

#### ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

Born: 1882

Died: 1967

Composed: 1915

- I. Allegro maestoso ma appassionato
- II. Adagio (con grand'espressione)
- III. Allegro molto vivace

In 1909 two young Hungarian musicians—violinist Imre Waldbauer and cellist Jenő de Kerpely—organized a string quartet dedicated to advancing the music of their countrymen Kodály and Bartók. In March of the following year, after more than 90 rehearsals, they gave premieres of quartets by Kodály and Bartók and over the next several decades championed their music at a time when it was not popular with audiences. The quartet remained intact until 1946, when both Waldbauer and Kerpely came to the United States. Waldbauer taught at the University of Iowa, and Kerpely was, at the time of his death in 1954, Professor of Cello at the University of Redlands.

It was for Kerpely, a virtuoso cellist, that Kodály wrote his Sonata for Solo Cello in 1915, and it was Kerpely who gave the first performance in Budapest on May 7, 1918. Except for some pieces by Reger, Kodály's Sonata was the first significant work for solo cello since the six great suites of Bach two centuries earlier, and it has rightfully taken its place as one of the cornerstones of the cello literature. It is also one of the greatest challenges ever conceived for the virtuoso cellist.

Faced with the restricted resources of a single instrument and the unlimited resources of a virtuoso performer, Kodály produced a sonata that is both very beautiful and spectacularly difficult to play. In one of his most novel touches, he asks the cellist to tune the two

lower strings—G and C—down a half-step to F-sharp and B; this extends the range of the cello and makes new chords possible. Kodály also stretches the resources of the cello to their limit—the sonata extends through a range of five octaves and makes use of virtually every known string technique: multiple-stopped chords, pizzicato, ponticello, complex harmonics.

Like Bartók, Kodály was interested in folk music, particularly of his native Hungary. While the Sonata for Solo Cello makes no direct quotations of Hungarian folk tunes, the entire sonata seems steeped in Hungarian folk music. The Allegro maestoso ma appassionato opens with two sharp chords before sailing into the main theme. This soaring, rhapsodic movement glides easily throughout the cello's entire range, alternating declamatory sections with quieter passages before it concludes with the same two chords with which it opened.

The Adagio, which Kodály specifies should be played *con grand'espressione*, sounds the most folk-inspired. At one point the music grows so complex that Kodály writes it on two staves: the treble line for the bowed passages, the bass clef for the complex pizzicato accompaniment. An animated middle section, marked *Con moto*, leads to the return of the opening material and a close on three quiet pizzicato strokes.

The finale, Allegro molto vivace, is the most virtuosic of the three. From the steady dance rhythms of the beginning to the blazing finish, it swirls brilliantly forward. In this dash of color and rhythm, it is easy to forget how difficult such music is to perform, particularly the passages that require simultaneous bowing and pizzicato, complex chording, and swirling arpeggios.

# CONCERT

## Piano Trio No. 27 in A-flat Major, Hob. XV:14

### FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

Born: 1732

Died: 1809

Composed: 1790

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Rondo. Vivace

When Haydn completed this trio in January 1790, his life was about to change. He was 57 years old, he had been kapellmeister for the sophisticated Esterhazy family for nearly three decades, and he had already written 92 of his 104 symphonies. But 1790 would bring vast changes: Haydn's generous patron Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy died, the court orchestra was dissolved, and Haydn would depart late that year for the first of his two wildly successful visits to London.

In 1789 Haydn had returned to composing piano trios, a form he had not used for several years. He published a set of three trios with the Viennese publisher Artaria in 1789 and then composed one more, the present Piano Trio in A-flat Major. These were not the piano trio as we have come to know it in the music of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and other nineteenth-century composers, who saw the form as a partnership of three equal participants. In Haydn's trios, the piano is clearly the controlling force: it dominates textures and the musical interest. Haydn referred to these four trios as "Sonatas for pianoforte with accompaniment for violin and violoncello," and all four were published under the title Sonatas. Haydn's description may be a little severe—the stringed instruments, particularly the violin, are allowed more important roles in this music than mere "accompaniment."

The Trio in A-flat Major is very attractive and engaging music, and it is also full of surprises. The Allegro moderato gets off to a firm and elegant—almost jaunty—beginning with a principal theme that unfolds over a long span. This music exudes energy: it is full of turns, trills, grace-notes, dotted rhythms, and Haydn calls for a repeat of the long exposition. Then come the surprises. The music

suddenly slips into the shade, and now it is full of harmonic tension. And then suddenly, another surprise: the music simply stops. For two full measures, nothing happens, and when the music resumes it pitches even farther afield harmonically, with much of the development in the extremely rare key of G-sharp minor. After all its surprises, the movement slips back into the home key of A-flat Major and comes to a pianissimo close.

The central Adagio too is full of surprises—and it is also extremely beautiful music. The piano may play the leading role in this trio, but the opening section of this ternary-form movement belongs to the violin, which sings a long and lovely melody in E Major over unobtrusive accompaniment from the other instruments. Things change completely at the central episode: now the music moves into E minor, the piano takes over, and it has a florid and turbulent solo over pizzicato accompaniment from the strings. Haydn rounds the movement off with a return of the gentle opening section.

The concluding Rondo is lots of fun. It goes fast—Haydn's marking is Vivace—and it begins as violin and piano in octaves lay out the basic rondo tune. This is a binary-form movement with some vigorous episodes along the way, and Haydn drives this remarkable trio to a firm conclusion.

## Piano Quintet in F minor, P. 35

### OTTORINO RESPIGHI

Born: 1879

Died: 1936

Composed: 1902

- I. Allegro
- II. Andantino
- III. Vivacissimo

When we think of Respighi, we automatically think of opulent orchestral scores, like the Pines and Fountains of Rome, music full of vivid color, excitement, and sonic punch. But Respighi was also very interested in chamber music. A fine violinist and violist, he was for some years a member of the Mugellini Quartet in Bologna, and he wrote for chamber ensembles throughout his life. If his chamber music has never achieved the fame of his great orchestral works, it remains an interesting body of work. Among his chamber works are a fine

Violin Sonata in B minor (championed by Heifetz), six string quartets, and *Il tramonto*, a lovely setting of a Shelley poem for mezzo-soprano and string quartet.

After early training in Bologna, Respighi spent some time in the years 1900–02 in Moscow, where he served as principal violist of the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre. While in Russia, Respighi studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov, a composer he very much admired. It appears that Respighi began work on his Piano Quintet at just this time, and he completed it about 1905. The Piano Quintet is a big, bold, confident piece, very much the work of a young man (Respighi was in his mid-twenties when he wrote it). Respighi was a capable pianist as well as string player, and he writes in unusual ways for the five instruments here. Sometimes piano and strings almost seem to inhabit different worlds: the four string players will play by themselves for extended periods, as will the piano, and Respighi takes pleasure in opposing their two quite different sonorities. The structure of the Piano Quintet is also unusual. It is a short work (its three movements span just over fifteen minutes), and the construction of those movements is episodic rather than set in clearly defined forms; tempo and mood change frequently.

The very beginning illustrates this perfectly. By themselves—and in octaves—the four string players lay out the beginning of the opening *Allegro*. This makes a very “pure” sound, a sound that is set in sharp contrast by the piano’s aggressive entrance. The piano will have long solo passages of its own, and Respighi will sometimes divide the strings into pairs. A dancing figure for the piano prefaces the cello’s presentation of the second subject, and the movement proceeds along these two principal ideas to an almost superheated conclusion.

The proportions of the movements in this quintet can also seem unusual. It begins with a substantial first movement that spans about two-thirds of the entire piece, and this is followed by a two-minute *Andantino* and a four-minute finale. The *Andantino* functions as a lovely interlude between the two powerful outer movements. Once again, Respighi introduces his material in unexpected ways: this movement begins with a long duet for viola and

cello while the other three players remain silent; those players eventually enter to expand this duet, and the movement proceeds without pause into the concluding *Vivacissimo*. Now it is the solo piano that leads the way on racing triplet rhythms. Once again, the construction is episodic, with frequent changes of mood, and as the movement nears its conclusion, Respighi presses the tempo ahead ever faster until a *Prestissimo* coda hurls his Piano Quintet to a conclusion of nearly symphonic proportions.

## **String Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96, B. 179, “American”**

### **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**

Born: 1841

Died: 1904

Composed: 1893

- I. *Allegro ma non troppo*
- II. *Lento*
- III. *Molto vivace*
- IV. *Finale. Vivace ma non troppo*

During his three-year tenure as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York (1892–95), Dvořák was fascinated by life in the New World, but he missed his family—four of his six children had remained in Bohemia—and his homeland. Dvořák’s secretary in New York City was a young violinist named Josef Jan Kovařík, who had grown up in the Czech community of Spillville, Iowa. Kovařík invited Dvořák to spend the summer of 1893 in Spillville, and the composer gladly accepted. There, with his wife (and now all his children), Dvořák spent a happy and productive summer, surrounded by familiar language, customs, and food. He was amazed by Iowa’s vast prairies and forests, he played the organ in the Spillville church, he heard native birds, and he watched as local Indians came into the village to sell herbs and dance.

Dvořák also composed that summer. He sketched the String Quartet in F Major in only three days (June 8–10, 1893) and had it complete in fifteen. Dvořák’s comment was concise: “Thank God. It went quickly. I am satisfied.” Early audiences were more than satisfied. The Kneisel Quartet gave the official premiere in Boston on January

1, 1894, and performed it fifty times over the next several seasons. The quartet quickly acquired the nickname “American.” The source of that nickname is uncertain, but it has become an inescapable part of how we think of this music, and nationalistic Americans were quick to claim that here at last was an authentic American classical music based on American materials. Dvořák would have none of that. He would later denounce any “nonsense about my having made use of original American melodies. I have only composed in the spirit of such American national melodies.” He himself offered a useful introduction to his quartet: “When I wrote this quartet in the Czech community of Spillville in 1893, I wanted to write something for once that was very melodious and straightforward, and dear Papa Haydn kept appearing before my eyes, and that is why it all turned out so simply. And it’s good that it did.”

Part of the charm of this quartet is precisely that it did turn “out so simply” and that it is so “melodious and straightforward.” The Quartet in F Major is full of instantly memorable tunes and boundless energy, and its sunny surface is seldom clouded by harmonic or textural complexities. One might not readily identify “Papa Haydn” as the father of this quartet, but that older master’s cheerful spirits and sophisticated writing for strings are very much part of this music.

It is the viola that leads the way into the opening of the Allegro ma non troppo, and that sharply inflected, rising-and-falling theme will give shape to much of the material that follows. A songful second subject in the violin has a rhythmic snap that some have felt to be American in origin, though such a snap is typical of the folk music of many lands. The development concludes with a brief fugal passage derived from the opening viola melody.

Many regard the Lento as the finest movement in the quartet—and one of the finest slow movements Dvořák ever composed. It is virtually a continuous flow of melody, as the violin’s lamenting theme—marked *molto espressivo*—sings hauntingly over undulating accompaniment. At the close the cello takes up this theme as the other instruments alternate pizzicato and bowed accompaniment.

The scherzo rips along cheerfully, its main theme sharing the rhythm of the quartet’s opening theme. About twenty measures into this movement, Dvořák gives the first violin a melody he heard a bird singing outside his window in Spillville (this bird was long identified as the scarlet tanager, though recent research suggests that it may have been the red-eyed vireo). The scherzo alternates this cheerful opening section with interludes that are minor-key variants of its opening theme.

The most impressive thing about the rondo–finale, marked *Vivace ma non troppo*, is its rhythmic energy, in both the themes themselves and the accompanying voices. The rondo theme, introduced immediately by the first violin, is one of those sparkling melodies that are impossible to forget. The central episode in this rondo is a quiet chorale, and some have heard it as a reminiscence of Dvořák’s experience of playing the tiny organ in the church at Spillville. Some of this movement’s interludes recall the shape of themes from earlier movements, and the blazing rush to the close is one of the most exhilarating Dvořák ever wrote.

Many have been quick to argue against the notion that there is anything distinctly “American” about this quartet, claiming instead that it is music composed by a thoroughly Bohemian composer while on vacation in this country. And perhaps they are right. But do we hear the influence of spirituals in the long, plaintive violin melody in the Lento? The rhythms of Indian drums in some of the accompaniment figures of the quartet’s outer movements? The song of an American bird in the scherzo? The gentle remembrance of a church organ in the finale?

Listeners may decide for themselves whether the nickname “American” is fitting for this quartet.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger.