SEATTLE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

35TH SEASON

WINTER FESTIVAL

JANUARY 23, 2016 – 7:30 PM

AARON COPLAND

Duo for Flute and Piano

Flowing
Poetic, somewhat mournful
Lively, with bounce

Lorna McGhee *flute /* **Andrew Armstrong** *piano*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 70 No. 2

Poco sostenuto—Allegro ma non troppo
Allegretto
Scherzo: Allegretto, ma non troppo
Finale: Allegro

Erin Keefe *violin /* **Robert deMaine** *cello /* **Max Levinson** *piano*

INTERMISSION

SAMUEL BARBER

Canzone

Lorna McGhee *flute /* **Andrew Armstrong** *piano*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

Animé et très décidé
Assez vif et bien rythmé
Andantino, doucement expressif
Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion

Alexander Kerr *violin /* **James Ehnes** *violin /* **Rebecca Albers** *viola /* **Edward Arron** *cello*

AARON COPLAND

(1900–1990)

Duo for Flute and Piano (1967–71)

In the early 1930s, Copland experienced an epiphany of sorts, leading to a stylistic shift from a lean and acerbic Stravinskian neo-classicism to a popular/folk/jazz idiom that has endeared him to generations of music lovers. Ballets such as *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*, film scores for *The Red Pony*, *Our Town*, etc., put this Brooklyn-born son of Russian Jewish immigrants in the forefront of American composers, especially as far as the public was concerned. These and other scores seemed to evoke the good-heartedness, warmth and pioneer spirit that Americans needed to believe in the face of 20th-century wartime horrors. During the 1960s, Copland explored the serialism current at the time, composing such stringently dissonant pieces as *Connotations for Orchestra*.

Dissonance was certainly a part of Copland's harmonic vocabulary, more so in his chamber music than in the larger part of his orchestral canon. Yet in his seventh decade, notwithstanding his encounter with serialism, the Duo for Flute and Piano—his last significant composition—revels in the familiar tonality of his populist works of the 1930s and '40s. The Duo derived from a commission from the Philadelphia Orchestra in memory of its esteemed principal flutist William Kincaid.

The engaging and lyrical first movement marked *Flowing* blends pastoral balm with flitting energy. Lean and economical textures recall his Stravinsky-influenced scoring that hearkens back to the 1920s.

Soft, largely unchanging gentle piano chords set up the introspective *Poetic, somewhat mournful* central movement. As the music proceeds the "conversation" becomes slightly less private via a somewhat greater dynamic range but remains essentially unflappable and resolutely lyrical.

Lively, with bounce fulfills its tempo marking in this energetic and often piquant finale. Highly syncopated and seemingly untroubled, the Duo did not come to fruition until Copland had devoted four years to its composition.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 70 No. 2 (1808)

By the second decade of the 19th century the cello enjoyed an expanded role as a melodic instrument in the middle or tenor register, a change Beethoven was eager to explore. In so doing, he unequivocally set the stage for the trios of Schubert and Brahms, which also celebrate the cello's melodic and expressive capabilities.

By that time in Beethoven's life, with deafness reaching its heartbreaking nadir, his music embraced both willful optimism and despair. The composer had achieved an internal truce between the ravages of increasing deafness and the realization that he could still compose and find fulfillment through his music. The Trios express both despondency and intimations of purification and joy because of his triumph over his physical failings.

The first Op. 70 Trio counts among Beethoven's best-known chamber works, no doubt the result of the outright eeriness that inspired its nickname, "Ghost." Yet that work's alter ego in E-flat Major is a worthy companion to its mate's "foreboding" qualities. The second Op. 70 Trio exudes a pervasive amiability that parallels the difference between the well-loved Seventh Symphony and its modest but exemplary "fraternal twin," the Eighth, which has lived in the shadow of the bolder, proto-Romantic No. 7.

A slow *Poco sostenuto* introduction initiated by the cello and soon imitated in turn by the violin and piano sets things in motion. A written-out piano cadenza in scalar motion prepares the main part of the movement, marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, which features a lyrical first theme answered by a second motive that is essentially a commentary on the material offered in the introduction. Although emotions flare in the development, the music is, on the whole, lyrical, unforced and expansive.

The following *Allegretto* focuses on two themes. As in the *Larghetto* of his Second Symphony, Beethoven does not herein bare his deepest feelings. Instead he serves up a charming dance-like diversion populated by the two contrasting themes, the first courtly in the manner of his Classical antecedents Haydn and Mozart, and the second brusque and forceful in Beethoven's familiar assertive manner. Both melodies merge in a coda.

In the *Scherzo: Allegretto ma non troppo*, Beethoven found new use for the folk-song-like main tune from his Piano Sonata, Op. 26. The Trio is a veritable conversation among the principals, occasioned near its end by unmistakable musical "sighs." The repeat of the "A" section does not close the movement; Beethoven repeats the "B" section and reprises the "A" section a final time.

In conclusion, the *Finale: Allegro* leaps headlong into a brilliant scalar passage on the piano, punctuated by dotted chords from the strings, all before the theme is fully stated. When it does complete its voyage it is via a lyrical discourse in the piano. Soaring and forceful, the second theme follows on its heels, set up by a brief transitional passage. Yet a third rhythmically insistent theme emerges to complete the exposition. All three motives are explored in the development before returning more or less intact in the recapitulation. A lengthy coda wraps up the proceedings.

SAMUEL BARBER

(1910–1981)

Canzone (1959)

Not reckoned a child prodigy in the mold of Mozart or Mendelssohn, Samuel Barber nonetheless began composing in his youth; even in his pubescence he knew and confidently asserted his intention to write music rather than to throw himself conventionally into adolescent sports. By adulthood he had already found his composer's "voice," a neo-Romantic style he never forsook even when adopting techniques from more modern schools of composition.
In 1959 Barber spent the summer in Martha's Vineyard where he wrote his one-movement *Canzone* for flute and piano for his housemate Manfred Ibel, a German art student and amateur flutist. A gossamer piano "wash" introduces a calm and elegiac flute melody that unfolds with sweet elegance. With unmistakable evocations of Debussy, the scintillating flute line is underscored by delicate piano filigree throughout the brief and evocative piece. Three years later Barber found a new berth for the pensive work as the second movement of his Piano Concerto, commissioned for the opening of Lincoln Center.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(1862–1918)

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10 (1893)

It was his attendance at the 1889 Paris Exhibition that helped inspire Debussy to embrace non-Western musical ideas as a way of breaking away from three centuries of tonally based minor and major scales. Four years later he composed his only String Quartet, Op. 10, a year before the premiere of his early "signature" piece *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*. The Quartet, in fact, includes the phrase "in G minor," the only one of his works that carries a specified key signature and an opus number.

Some early critics complained about the work: a French commentator noted in 1902: "Rhythm, melody, tonality, these are three things unknown to Monsieur Debussy and deliberately disdained by him. His music is vague, floating, without color and without shape, without movement and without life. ...What a collection of dissonances, sevenths and ninths, ascending with energy, even disjunct intervals! No, decidedly, I will never agree with these anarchists of music!"

Composer Paul Dukas, however, (he of *Sorcerer's Apprentice* fame) opined: "Everything is clear and concisely drawn, although the form is exceedingly free. The melodic essence of the work is concentrated, but of rich flavor... The harmony itself, although greatly daring, is never rough or hard. Debussy takes particular delight in successions of rich chords that are dissonant without being crude, and more harmonious in

their complexity than any consonances could be; over them his melody proceeds as on a sumptuous, skillfully designed carpet of strange coloring that contains no violent or discordant tints." Amen!

All four movements of the Quartet draw seemingly disparate themes from the principal subject announced at the beginning of the opening *Animé et très décidé*. The theme is cast in Phrygian mode—essentially a descending scale from e to e an octave lower using only the equivalent of the white keys of a piano. (Like many composers of the past century-plus, Debussy sought further release from the dominance of the minor- and major-scales through the employment of the older Church modes.) The theme sounds somewhat harsh initially and engenders considerable energy through complex rhythms and sheer vehemence.

The second movement, *Assez vif et bien rythmé* functions as a traditional scherzo and employs a dazzling array of rhythmic and coloristic devices to greatly expand the harmonies and sonorities of his day. Here in particular he established what soon became termed "Impressionism" in music. Strongly accented pizzicato chords are immediately countered by a quirky motive from the viola. A profusion of sudden *sforzandos* adds to the energy and chip-on-shoulder challenge Debussy was throwing into the gantlet. The plucked notes may have been inspired by Javanese *gamelan*, which had so intrigued him when he attended the 1889 Paris Exhibition, though he most likely knew Tchaikovsky's use of *pizzicato* in the Russian composer's Fourth Symphony.

As Ravel would later do in his only string quartet, Debussy places the slow movement— *Andantino, doucement expressif*—as third in the sequence. Here too one hears *pizzicatos* to underline the rhythm, though they are more internally derived. The luxuriant romance of this music reminds us that Debussy was by no means an anti-Romantic; he was specifically anti-Wagnerian and anti-German. Many of his works are signed "*Claude Debussy, musicien français*."

Debussy disliked the academicism of German music, yet the finale of the Quartet, marked *Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion*, belies his assessment; here he actually includes a rare fugal passage, introduced by the cello, that transforms the first movement's main theme. As the music progresses it grows increasingly quick as new thematic variants leap into the fray. A coda that recalls the very opening music of the Quartet ties up matters.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe