

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY



**WINTER
FESTIVAL**

JANUARY 30, 2016 – 7:30 PM

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C Major, K. 548

Allegro

Andante cantabile

Allegro

Tessa Lark *violin* / **Yegor Dyachkov** *cello* / **William Wolfram** *piano*

ERNST VON DOHNÁNYI

Sonata for Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 8

Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo: Vivace assai

Adagio non troppo

Tema con variazioni (Allegro moderato)

Bion Tsang *cello* / **Anton Nel** *piano*

INTERMISSION

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Quintet for Piano and Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 44

Allegro brillante

In modo d'una Marcia: un poco largamente

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Scott Yoo *violin* / **Andrew Wan** *violin* / **Che-Yen Chen** *viola* /

Astrid Schween *cello* / **Gloria Chien** *piano*

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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in C Major, K. 548 (1788)

By the end of the 18th century the increasing power of the piano made possible by dramatic improvements in metallurgy, facilitated true three-voice independence among the instruments. The change proved especially useful in freeing the cello from a merely supportive role. Haydn's trios were clearly dominated by the piano; indeed, they were essentially piano sonatas with secondary roles accorded the cello and violin. Mozart represents a transitional period in the evolution of the piano trio.

In his penultimate Trio, K. 548, the opening of the *Allegro* suggests a rising and rousing military fanfare, a feature found often in Mozart's canon. As soon as this throat-clearing is accomplished an airy motif announces the main theme, soon balanced by a graceful and courtly counterweight. The opening fanfare figure reappears, serving as a connective ligament to the light and deft sequences of lighthearted theme fragments that dot the landscape. A shift into G minor darkens and quiets the development section, which gives each instrument its due in sharing the spotlight. Rapid fire figuration is shared by the participants. The aforementioned fanfare makes a final visit in the movement's brief coda.

The ensuing *Andante cantabile* could well have found a place in a reflective operatic and concert aria, as is the case in many of Mozart's concerto slow movements. A flowing lyrical theme shared by the three instruments is enhanced by rising and falling scale fragments. A sudden and emphatic mid-movement minor-key interruption gives voice to subtly troubling asides where all three musicians trade off melodic kernels before returning to the balmy climes of the Major mode.

A deft and gently animated *Allegro* in 6/8 meter gently cajoles the music forward. A brief excursion into the minor only minimally adds a note of

anxiety in this predominately positive closing movement. It is the piano that sets the movement in motion; its skittering piano lines maintain momentum. The movement ends with an energetic downward unison passage that seems to upend the rising fanfare of the opening *Allegro*.

ERNST VON DOHNÁNYI

(1877-1960)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in B-flat Major, Op. 8 (1899)

Dohnányi was a superb pianist whose debut in 1897 in Berlin helped launch what promised to be a career as a virtuoso, albeit one with allegiance to core musical values rather than showmanship. Unlike his childhood friend Béla Bartók and compatriot Zoltán Kodály, Dohnányi's compositions resonate more to 19th-century German Romanticism—especially to Johannes Brahms—than to Hungarian folk music (which, of course, Brahms adored and utilized in many of his compositions). Dohnányi spent much of his life in Budapest, fled to Austria in 1944, and ended up spending his final years in the United States. His immersion in American culture influenced his musical accent, imbuing it with hints of jazz and American folk music.

His *Sonata for Cello and Piano* is a large-scale work in four movements with aesthetic links to Brahms and by extension even Chopin's earlier and substantial sonata for the same instruments. A very challenging piano part reflects Dohnányi's formidable keyboard prowess; the cello's role celebrates that instrument's great melodic capability as an equivalent to the baritone voice.

The *Allegro ma non troppo* first movement opens with a rising/falling unison theme—a bit ominous and funereal—that soon gives way to an otherwise furious essay where the cello's passion-filled melodic line is underscored by powerful thrusting rhythms from the piano. A contrasting lyrical theme redolent of Brahms (whose two cello/piano sonatas must have been familiar to Dohnányi) offers a semblance of calm before surging energy

is restored. Brief alterations between the two opposing emotional states recur frequently. After a hectic if heroic journey the movement ends in peaceful B-flat Major, a gambit not infrequently found in otherwise rambunctious movements in Brahms' canon.

A quaking cello theme in rapid sixteenth notes launches the virtuosic *Scherzo: Vivace assai* over powerful piano chords. The movement's urgency finds drama balanced by sparkling humor that at times seems to wink at Mendelssohn's elfin *Scherzos*. A stately Handelian Trio stands as a counterpoint to the *Scherzo* proper's sandwiching "A" sections.

Quiet piano chords are joined by a tender cello line in the third movement's serenely flowing *Adagio non troppo*. Occasional sparkling colors anticipate Debussy in this brief movement that serves as a lovely oasis after the highly charged movements that precede it.

A Baroque-like walking bass from the piano supports a flowing theme that serves as the "aria" for the extended set of nine imaginative variations that brings the sonata to a close. Even more than in the previous movements the almost palpable spirit of Brahms—a great master of variation form—infuses this optimistic music. The initial variation, animated and lighthearted could be termed Brahms redux. No. 2 is a lyrical episode boasting well-schooled counterpoint in the piano part. At far remove is the Hungarian-inflected and burly third variation. Gentle and almost confessional is the intimate fourth of the set. The heroic fifth variation recalls the stentorian first movement. Again drawing from material in the opening movement, Variation No. 6 has the piano swirling animatedly against the cello's part. In turn, No. 7 borrows from the *Scherzo* before dropping an interval of a minor third for use in the eighth variation, itself appropriating music from the introspective third movement. In the concluding ninth variation Dohnányi restates the variation theme with mercurial vigor, completing a thematically unified journey.

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(1810-1856)

Quintet for Piano and Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 44 (1842)

The year 1842 saw major chamber works emerge with near-lightning speed from Robert Schumann, including all three String Quartets, Op. 41, the Op. 47 Piano Quartet, and his best-known chamber work, the bracing Quintet for Piano and Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 44. The Quintet's buoyancy and youthful vigor no doubt reflected the joy deriving from his recent marriage to Clara Wieck. An immediate "hit," the Quintet has remained a much-loved staple in the chamber repertoire and established Schumann's reputation as a major composer.

All five players unite in the bold and assertive main theme of the opening *Allegro brillante*. Almost as soon as it is heard Schumann cagily transforms the bracing theme into a rhapsodic, cantabile melody that both contrasts with and enhances the motive's complementary mood states. The energetic development section pits long strands of virtuosic piano runs against sustained chords from the strings. The recapitulation reprises the opening material in a somewhat modified manner, bringing the movement to a close without a coda.

Is the ensuing *In modo d'una Marcia: un poco largamente* a funeral march as some have argued because of its rhythm, or as others assert, is the music herein simply tender and achingly expressive? Let the listener decide for him- or herself. The somber minor-key opening is assuaged by a lyrical episode in C Major, though the sighing figure incorporated in this section dims unblemished good cheer. A tempestuous *Agitato* episode in F minor follow, led by the keyboard with numerous "asides" from the strings. The movement ends with a return to the quiet ambience of the opening, in a mood of unforced calm.

Some have characterized the *Scherzo: Molto vivace* as a tongue-in-cheek nod to Carl Czerny, whose interminable but finger-strengthening

exercises are the bane of aspiring piano students, but these boundless and bounding scales mirror the subject matter of this energetic foray. There are two Trios, the first lyrical and legato with the first violin and viola in canon, and the second a swirling and high-powered perpetual motion maelstrom of Hungarian/gypsy zeal. After a return to the “A” section of the *Scherzo* Schumann appends a coda that summarizes the movement.

In the closing *Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo* the music darts through an assortment of “wrong” keys, starting in G minor, detouring into B minor after the initial episode, then into G-sharp minor at one point in the development. This movement matches the bracing vigor of the *Allegro brillante*, beginning with a muscular primary theme flung out by the piano and seconded by the strings in their obsessive repeated-note accompaniment. Before he allows his players (and the audience) to run out of breath, Schumann serves up a quiet singing theme as a perfect foil to the boundless energy of the opening moments. The short development focuses on the second theme, and ultimately builds up to a celebratory return of the first tune. The coda boasts a rigorous and exciting three-voiced double fugue utilizing the movement’s main theme as well as that from the opening *Allegro brillante*.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
