

SUMMER FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, JULY 12, 2013

8:00 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Three Romances, Op. 94

Nicht schnell

Einfach, innig

Nicht schnell

Nurit Bar-Josef violin / **Anton Nel** piano

BEDŘICH SMETANA

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 15

Moderato assai

Allegro, ma non troppo—Alternativo I (Andante)—Tempo I—

Alternativo II (Maestoso)—Tempo I

Finale: Presto

Andrew Wan violin / **Edward Arron** cello / **Jeewon Park** piano

INTERMISSION

CLARA SCHUMANN

Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22

Andante molto

Allegretto

Leidenschaftlich schnell

Nurit Bar-Josef violin / **Anton Nel** piano

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 26

Allegro moderato

Largo

Scherzo: Presto—Trio: Poco meno mosso

Finale: Allegro non tanto—Poco più mosso—Tempo I

Karen Gomyo violin / **Bion Tsang** cello / **Adam Neiman** piano

CO-SPONSORED BY // **KARR TUTTLE CAMPBELL AND WASHINGTON STATE ARTS COMMISSION**

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(1810–1856)

Three Romances, Op. 94 (1849)

Shortly before Robert and Clara Schumann moved from Dresden to Düsseldorf with high hopes ultimately dashed by his deteriorating mental health and subsequent death in an asylum, he penned three *Romances*, Op. 94 for oboe and piano with expressed permission for alternative versions employing clarinet or violin. Though these beguiling pieces do not require a high degree of overt virtuosity they do demand expert breath-control in order to spin out long lyrical melodies and convey Schumann's feel for tone color. All three of these miniatures are laid out in "song form," i.e., A–B–A.

In the first movement, *Nicht schnell* ("not fast"), a brief and somber introductory phrase from the piano sets the mood for the violin's plaintive main theme, a sweet and sad gesture in A minor. The piano weaves a supportive accompanying web around the violin's searching lyricism. A somewhat faster-paced central section follows before returning to the tender sensibility of the opening material, briefly augmented by a series of descending chromatic lines before the piece ends quietly.

Marked *Einfach, innig* ("simply, heartfelt") the second *Romance* begins flowingly with both instruments singing together in true duet fashion. The "B" section begins energetically but leaves time for a calm variant before reprising the serene and gently rocking music of the "A" section.

Echoing the opening miniature, the third *Romance* is also marked *Nicht schnell*. The two instruments open with a slow unison statement before the pace and energy suddenly increase, only to give way to a calmer mien. More than in the preceding pieces the music rapidly cycles between Dionysian exultation and Apollonian reserve—Schumann's frequent "yin-yang" opposing but deeply connected esthetic principles.

BEDŘICH SMETANA

(1824–1884)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 15 (1855; rev. 1857)

Known and loved for the ever-popular tone poem *The Moldau* and music from his opera *The Bartered Bride*, Bedřich Smetana lived his life in Bohemia (now Czech Republic) ruled by German-speaking overlords in Vienna. Sadly, at age 50 he went suddenly deaf; like Beethoven, he continued to compose after the calamity. In 1883, he suffered total mental collapse and was hospitalized soon thereafter. The following year he died in an insane asylum.

Smetana composed his Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 15 in the aftermath of the death of his first child, Bediska. Another daughter died before he completed the work. The Trio conveys the pathos, warmth and the tender grieving of a man twice struck by the unexpected loss of two children.

The opening *Moderato assai* begins with the violin presenting a theme laden with tragedy balanced by the touching tenderness of a second melody from the cello in the relative major, B-flat. During the fluently contrapuntal development a disarmingly lovely bell-like variant of the second theme emerges in the piano's high register. The unmistakable darkness of the opening theme is re-emphasized in the coda that ends the movement.

In place of a perhaps expected slow movement Smetana provides a multi-sectional movement of varying tempos, marked *Allegro, ma non troppo—Alternativo I (Andante)—Tempo I—Alternativo II (Maestoso)—Tempo I*. Echoes of the opening movement—both thematic and emotional—reappear here. The main sections are separated by two Trios, an *Andante* in F Major, where the prevailing anxiety is abated, and an E-flat *Maestoso* where the grief finds new and ennobling expression.

The concluding *Finale: Presto* also pits strongly contrasting moods against one another. An insistent initial theme (borrowed from his 1846 Piano Sonata in G minor) alternates with a slow and poignant theme richly

intoned by the cello. Shortly thereafter, Smetana recasts this second theme as a funeral march followed by what sounds like a desperate attempt to shake off the deep gloom in his heart. The movement ends abruptly by final chords that interrupt the reprise of the principal theme, now in G Major.

CLARA SCHUMANN

(1819–1896)

Three Romances for Violin and Piano, Op. 22 (1853)

Clara Schumann was a prodigiously gifted pianist who also demonstrated a compositional gift suppressed by the antiquated but widespread notion that women were not born to write music for public consumption. Clara began composing when she was nine years old. Despite having to raise eight children after her husband Robert's early death in 1856, she had a full career as a concert pianist. Yet, she also managed to produce 66 compositions, all of them by 1853 during which year she wrote three *Romances*, Op. 53 for violin and piano, specifically for her to perform on tour with the eminent violinist and family friend Joseph Joachim. The violinist was quite taken with the pieces and continued to feature them when touring on his own.

The piano opens the *Andante molto* with a quietly ravishing passage and is soon partnered by the violin's lyrical songlike flowing tune. A brief central episode counters with energetic arpeggio figures from the piano before switching back and forth with gentler passagework.

A single piano chord launches the following *Allegretto* in the minor. The syncopated and lyrical main theme is animated by trills from the violin enhanced by energizing piano figures. A second theme in the major further heightens the energy. During the movement's central section both instruments trade off mutually imitative figures before returning to the minor-key "A" section where the piano assumes a larger role in reprising the main theme. The movement ends on an unexpected single pizzicato chord.

The finale, *Leidenschaftlich schnell* ("fervent, fast"),

opens rhapsodically with wave-like arpeggios on the piano over which the violin soars with an enchanting and optimistic song of its own. The succeeding variations all retain an engagingly lyrical quality wherein the violin continues with its lighter-than-air ambience, held aloft by the piano's bubbling accompaniment.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

(1841–1904)

Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano in G minor, Op. 26 (1876)

In 1876 Dvořák composed his Op. 26 Piano Trio in the wake of the death of an infant daughter only two days after her birth. (Adding further grief, he and his wife lost another daughter and son the following year.) Dvořák may have been influenced by the Piano Trio (also in G minor) by his mentor, Bedřich Smetana, who had similarly been struck by the death of his daughters. (Note that G minor was Mozart's chosen key for deeply personal grieving.)

Two emphatic chords open the *Allegro moderato* first movement, followed by a lament initiated by the violin. After a repeat of the chords, the cello takes up the sad tune and the piano launches a folk-inspired tune of characteristically Dvořákian lyricism. The basic tenor of the music is closer to resignation and reflection rather than furious keening or self-pity. During the course of this basic sonata-allegro movement Dvořák combines the constituent parts of the primary themes, especially during the development, and then quotes the introductory bars to begin the recapitulation.

The following *Largo* evolves from a single theme. The prevailing mood is one of consolation and hope, reflected in his choice of E-flat Major, rather than to remain in the minor mode. The warm baritone cello presents the touching theme before the piano and violin join in the intimate elegy. Piano triplet figures support the flowing violin and cello lines, casting a nod back in time to similar moments in Schubert's two piano trios (Schubert being a favorite composer of Dvořák). Sadness is tempered herein with reminiscences of unforced sweetness.

A *Scherzo* comes next with an opening theme derived from material from the *Allegro moderato*. Prodding chords from the piano impel the music forward with breathless asides from the two stringed instruments. Though energetic, it is not a “literal” *scherzo*, i.e., “joke,” but a forceful and highly canonic journey. After what sounds like a movement-ending cadence, a gentle and folk-like Trio lightens the mood considerably, another of those beguiling tunes Dvořák coaxes from his internal storehouse of natural-sound Bohemian musical ideas. Before the energetic conclusion, Dvořák interrupts with a sad comment from the cello.

The *Finale: Allegro non tanto—Poco più mosso—Tempo* opens with three bold chords followed by a skittish passage, all of which serve to introduce a rustic theme. Throughout the movement the music vaults between the major and the minor, positing episodes ranging from the tenderly elegiac to bumptiously polka-like recollections of some village scene of the imagination. There is some well-turned counterpoint in the music’s kaleidoscopic unfolding. Reflecting the composer’s ingrained religious optimism, the movement ends exultantly in the tonic major.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
