

SUMMER FESTIVAL

MONDAY, JULY 15, 2013

8:00 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9 No. 3

Allegro con spirito

Adagio con espressione

Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace

Finale: Presto

Karen Gomyo violin / **Richard O'Neill** viola / **Edward Arron** cello

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 65

Dialogo (Allegro)

Scherzo-Pizzicato (Allegretto)

Elegia (Lento)

Marcia (Energico)

Moto perpetuo (Poco presto)

Robert deMaine cello / **Jeewon Park** piano

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano in A minor, Op. 114

Allegro

Adagio

Andante grazioso

Allegro

Sean Osborn clarinet / **Bion Tsang** cello / **Adam Neiman** piano

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

String Trio in C minor, Op. 9 No. 3 (1797–98)

Beethoven's adolescent string trios, dating from around 1790, are works of undeniable charm. The Op. 9 set of 1798, however, explores new realms of imagination and expression. Indeed, the C-minor String Trio stands apart from most of the admittedly rather sparse literature in almost god-like splendor.

C minor always figures prominently in the Beethoven canon. In such works as the *Pathétique* and valedictory Op. 111 piano sonatas, the Fifth Symphony and Third Piano Concerto, this key was the composer's tonal center for music of conflict and resolution. The third String Trio of the Op. 9 set deserves a place alongside these boldly inflected masterpieces.

The four-note descending motive that opens the *Allegro con spirito* first movement immediately plunges the listener into a world of innermost turmoil only seconds after the music has begun. Dark and stormy, with intervening episodes of cloudless beauty, this large-limbed movement proceeds in quasi-symphonic fashion. Beethoven's ability to give full-throated utterance to three stringed instruments is never more impressive than in this powerful movement.

With dignity recalling Handel (who was greatly esteemed by Beethoven) the following *Adagio con espressione* balances Baroque echoes with future-looking Romantic-era expressiveness. To enrich the texture and deepen the emotional response Beethoven has one or another instrument using double stops, i.e., playing two notes on adjacent strings on the curved fingerboards of the string family.

A demonic *Scherzo: Allegro molto e vivace* comes next. It seems to anticipate Haydn's later famous "Witches" Minuet from his Op. 76, No. 2 string quartet but with distinctly Beethovenesque "attitude." The major-key Trio offers momentary relief before the minor-mode fervor returns.

The *Finale: Presto* finds much alteration between major and minor key episodes. While aftershocks from the preceding movement make their threatening presence

felt, there is no doubt that the composer is taking us from darkness to light from the downward spiral of the work's opening theme to the upwardly reaching positivism of the concluding pages.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

Sonata for Cello and Piano, Op. 65 (1961)

In the autumn of 1960, while on holiday in Greece, Britten began thinking about composing a piece for cello. Inspired by the playing of Mstislav Rostropovich (with whom he became a close friend and musical colleague), the idea for a sonata for cello and piano coalesced in his mind. The following year he and Rostropovich recorded the new work for London/Decca, the British label with whom the composer enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship. It almost goes without saying that Britten dedicated the sonata to the late Russian cellist.

The composer provided cogent notes for the recording of the new piece, herein placed in quotations:

"*Dialogo (Allegro)*. This movement is throughout the discussion of a tiny motive of a rising or falling second. The motive is lengthened to make a lyrical second subject that rises towards and falls from a pp harmonic."

Out of the spare intervallic composition of the motive, the music expands to a forceful impassioned "conversation" between the two soloists, occasionally withdrawing to a quieter exchange of thematic fragments. Swirling arpeggios from both instruments create sonic maelstroms between the quiet sections.

"*Scherzo-Pizzicato (Allegretto)*. A study in pizzicato, sometimes almost guitar-like in its elaborate RH technique."

Rapidly plucked notes on the cello are mirrored by energetic scale patterns on the piano in the relatively quiet but generally active music. Spectral recollections of Bartók's "night music" haunt the proceedings.

"*Elegia (Lento)*. Against a somber piano background, the

cello sings a long tune. This tune is developed, by means of double, triple and quadruple stopping, to a big climax, and sinks away to a soft conclusion."

Expressive piano chords open this movement, introducing a sad and initially simple melody from the cello. As the movement proceeds, the emotional temperature rises with actively pulsing piano chords. Single bass-notes underscore the cello's increasingly anguished melodic line, though several times the dynamic level and passion are muted into episodes of quiet reflection where the cello's lyrical line is gently supported by soft chord patterns on the piano.

"A brief *Marcia (Energico)*. The cello plays a rumbustious bass to the jerky tune on the piano. The Trio has horn-like calls over a repeated triplet bass. The March returns very softly, with the bass (now in the treble) in harmonics."

The boldly rising cello line leaps into action over a martial accompaniment on the piano. Soon the piano plays a series of quickly descending scales before the cello takes over the "military" aspect of the music. A *sul ponticello* ("on the bridge") passage adds a bit of acerbic sonority to the cello's part, augmented by "whipping" upward slides from the same instrument.

"*Moto perpetuo (Poco presto)*. The 6/8 saltando theme dominates the entire movement, frequently changing its character, now high and expressive, now low and grumbling, now gay and carefree."

This concluding rapid-dancelike movement skips all over the place in changing cello registers and rapidly cycling emotional utterances.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833-1897)

Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano in A minor, Op. 114 (1891)

Dating from the same year as the Clarinet Quintet—one of Brahms' most sublime chamber works—the nearly synchronous Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano is, in the words of the late composer and astute commentator Robert Simpson, the "knottier and more elliptical of the

two; it is intensely compact and its first movement is one of the most disturbed pieces Brahms ever wrote." If less emotionally available than the beloved Quintet, the Trio invites the listener to delve more deeply to find resonances to Brahms' inner feelings. Of note, the composer is said to have preferred the Trio to the Quintet. The clarinet part, so unabashedly fervent in the Quintet, is far less so in the Trio, where it often seems to serve as an obbligato to the cello's lofty melodic lines.

As if to make that point at the outset it is the cello that introduces both themes of the somber opening *Allegro*. The flowing initial theme begins in a typically Brahmsian elegiac fashion but shortly swings into a clipped and agitated mode of expression. So too with the second theme; it begins quietly in C major with another broadly paced tune and quickly moves into E minor where it becomes increasingly restive, even disruptive. The development section fitfully moves through primarily minor keys, creating an atmosphere of eeriness transformed into aggressiveness. The recapitulation does not return to the relative calm of the opening, but becomes even more *Angst*-laden. The coda seems to settle into ostensibly brighter A Major before ominous shadows intrude, ending the movement with a sense of unresolved discomfort.

The following *Adagio* in D Major exudes undeniable warmth, yet here too, the music is less peaceful than quietly intense. Two long-breathed melodies shape the movement, enhanced by Brahms' ability to utilize the wide compass and broad timbral range of the cello and clarinet.

Marked *Andante grazioso*, the third movement conjures the grace and ease of a Viennese waltz, yet at various points makes the three-to-a-bar rhythm hard to discern—not exactly what one expects in a waltz! The mid-movement Trio, however, brings unblemished joy.

The *Finale* forgoes a sunny "everything turns out all right" summing up. Instead, this *Allegro* remains determinedly in the minor mode, and the intermixing of 6/8 and 2/4 meters reasserts the agitation of the opening movement.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
