

JULY 7, 2024

PRE-CONCERT RECITAL

Sonata for Solo Cello in C minor, Op. 28

EUGÈNE YSAÏE

Born: 1858

Died: 1931

Composed: 1923

- I. Grave. Lento e sempre sostenuto
- II. Intermezzo. Poco allegretto e grazioso
- III. In modo di Recitativo. Adagio
- IV. Finale con brio. Allegro Tempo fermo

Eugene Ysaÿe composed the Sonata for Solo Cello in C minor in 1923. Ysaÿe took some pride in this composition, saying that it had been composed on paper from Japan and that it was the second of a set of five similar sonatas (those other sonatas, if they existed, have disappeared).

Listeners may hear echoes of Bach's suites for solo cello in Ysaÿe's sonata, particularly in the first movement: it has an improvisatory feel and features a great deal of chording. The Intermezzo, which has the unusual metric marking 2/4 3/4, is a poised and serious dance that eventually winks out on quiet pizzicato strokes. Ysaÿe calls the third movement a recitative, and it is unbarred—performers are free to phrase this as they choose. The sonata concludes with the expected fast movement, and this one powers its way along a steady rush of sixteenth notes.

Suite for Solo Cello

GASPAR CASSADÓ

Born: 1897

Died: 1966

Composed: 1926

- I. Preludio – Fantasia
- II. Sardana
- III. Intermezzo e Danza Finale

Cellist Gaspar Cassadó composed his Suite for Unaccompanied Cello in 1926. The Suite is strongly colored by Cassadó's Catalan heritage, both in its use of regional dances and in the music's general atmosphere. The Preludio–Fantasia opens with a free prelude section, and soon the music turns passionate, singing and surging as it evolves into a zarabanda, a Spanish variant of the old sarabande. The second

movement is a sardana, a Catalan round-dance. The brilliant finale is in several parts. The slow opening is grieving—Cassadó uses pizzicato beautifully in this section—and the finale proper takes the form of a jota, a dance in triple time from northern Spain that would sometimes be accompanied by castanets.

CONCERT

Violin Sonata No. 21 in E minor, K. 304

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: 1756

Died: 1791

Composed: 1778

- I. Allegro
- II. Tempo di menuetto

String Quartet No. 1 in A minor, Op. 7, Sz. 40

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born: 1881

Died: 1945

Composed: 1909

- I. Lento
- II. Poco a poco accelerando all'allegretto
- III. Introduzione. Allegro — Allegro vivace

Bartók completed his First String Quartet in 1909, but the music had to wait over a year for its premiere. The Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet gave the first performance at an all-Bartók concert in Budapest on March 19, 1910. All composers who set out to write a string quartet are conscious of the thunder behind them, of the magnificent literature created for this most demanding of forms. Bartók too was aware of the example of the past, and many have noted that in his First Quartet Bartók chose as his model one of the towering masterpieces of the form, Beethoven's String Quartet in C-sharp minor, Opus 131. Both quartets begin with a long, slow contrapuntal movement that opens with the sound of the two violins alone, both show a similar concentration of thematic material, both quartets are performed without breaks between their movements, both recall in their finales themes that had been introduced earlier, and both end with three massive, stinging chords. Yet Bartók's First Quartet does not sound like Beethoven, nor was he trying to write a Beethoven-like quartet. Instead, Bartók took as a very general model a quartet that he deeply admired and then used that model as the starting point to write music that is very much his own.

Bartók's mastery is evident throughout the First Quartet. The quartet is in three movements, rather than the traditional four, these movements are played without pause, and there are subtle relationships between those three movements. One of the features of Bartók's mature style already present in the First Quartet is his assured handling of motivic development. Ideas that first appear as only a tentative few notes will gradually yield unsuspected possibilities (and riches) as they evolve across the span of a complete work.

Many have noted that the First Quartet gets faster and faster as it proceeds. The music moves from a very slow opening movement through a second movement marked *Allegretto* and on to a very fast finale that grows even faster in its closing moments. Simply as musical journey, this quartet offers a very exciting ride. It gets off to quite a subdued start, however. The *Lento* opens with the two violins in close canon, and their falling figure will give shape to much of the thematic material that follows. Cello and viola also enter in canon, and this ternary-form movement rises to resounding climax before the viola introduces the central episode with a chiseled theme marked *molto appassionato, rubato*.

Bartók proceeds without pause into the second movement. A duet for viola and cello and then for the two violins suggest another fundamental shape, and the movement takes wing at the *Allegretto*. Some have been tempted to call this movement, in 3/4, a waltz, but the music never settles comfortably into a waltz-rhythm, and soon the cello's firm *pizzicato* pattern introduces a second episode. After all its energy, this movement reaches a quiet close that Bartók marks *dolce*, and he goes right on to the *Introduzione* of the finale. Here the cello has a free solo (Bartók marks it *Rubato*) of *cadenza*-like character, and the music leaps ahead on the second violin's repeated E's. *Molto vivace*, says Bartók, and he means it: this will be a finale filled with scalding energy. In unison, viola and cello sound the main theme (adapted from the main theme of the second movement), and off the music goes. For all its length and variety, the finale is in sonata form, with a second theme, a recurring *Adagio* episode, and a lengthy fugue whose subject is derived from what we now recognize as the quartet's fundamental shape. As he nears the conclusion, Bartók pushes the tempo steadily forward, and his First String Quartet hurtles to its three massive final chords.

Piano Trio No. 2 in C minor, Op. 66

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born: 1809

Died: 1847

Composed: 1882-1883

- I. *Allegro energico e fuoco*
- II. *Andante espressivo*
- III. *Scherzo. Molto allegro quasi presto*
- IV. *Finale. Allegro appassionato*

Mendelssohn wrote his second and final piano trio in April 1845, just two years before his death at age 38. It is dedicated to the German composer-violinist Ludwig Spohr, whom Mendelssohn had met when he was a boy of 13 and Spohr was 38. This music is anchored firmly on its stormy outer movements. The markings for these movement are important. Not content to name them simply *Allegro*, Mendelssohn makes his instructions more specific and dramatic: *energico e con fuoco* and *appassionato*. These qualifications are the key to the character of this music—one feels at climactic points that this piano trio is straining to break through the limits of chamber music and to take on the scope and sonority of symphonic music.

The piano immediately announces the dark, murmuring main theme of the first movement; this idea recurs continually through the movement, either rippling quietly in the background or thundering out fiercely. Violin and cello share the soaring second theme, and the development is dramatic. By contrast, the *Andante espressivo* brings a world of calm. The piano sings the main theme, a gently-rocking chordal melody in 9/8 time, and is soon joined by the strings. The propulsive *Scherzo: Molto allegro quasi presto* rockets along in dark G minor; a steady rustle of sixteenth-notes underpins the entire movement. The trio section switches to bright G major before the return of the opening material and a sudden close on quick, quiet *pizzicato* strokes.

The finale gets off to a spirited start with the cello's lively theme, and unison strings share the broadly-ranging second idea. One of the unusual features of this movement is Mendelssohn's use of the old chorale tune known in English as "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," first heard quietly in the piano. As the movement nears its climax, the chorale grows in power until—with piano *tremolando* and multiple-stopped strings—it thunders out boldly.