

FEBRUARY 2, 2024

PRE-CONCERT RECITAL

Thème Varié in A Major, Op. 89 **CÉCILE CHAMINADE**

Born: 1857

Died: 1944

Composed: 1895

Although her music is largely forgotten today, Cécile Chaminade was one of the first women to achieve fame as a composer. Chaminade showed her musical talent very early: she was composing at age 8, and she made her first tour as a pianist at 18. Her tours, which took her to the United States and repeatedly to England, and her compositions (hundreds of them) made her vastly popular in the years before World War I—in fact, Chaminade was the first woman composer to be awarded the Legion of Honor, in 1913. But music in the twentieth century passed Chaminade by, and most of her compositions, which include about two hundred short pieces for piano, have suffered the faint praise of being labeled “salon music”: tuneful, agreeable, not very difficult, and intended for domestic performance. By the time of her death at age 86, Chaminade's music had virtually disappeared from concert life. Her one work to achieve a measure of lasting popularity is her suavely melodic Concertino for Flute and Orchestra, composed in 1902 and currently available in a number of recordings. Those interested in Chaminade should know that early in the twentieth century she made a number of recordings, and these make clear how good a pianist she was.

Chaminade composed the Piano Sonata in C Minor, her only piano sonata, in 1895. The world of music was beginning to change around her, but Chaminade remained true to the idiom in which she had been trained, saying “I am essentially of the Romantic school, as all my work shows.” The Sonata in C Minor is a concise work: its three movements span only about sixteen minutes. The beginning of the Allegro appassionato is dramatic, built on a rising figure in the left hand that grows more forceful as it proceeds. This drives to a climax marked *Con fuoco* (“with fire”), and then Chaminade surprises us: this energy falls away, and a long fugal passage marked *Tranquillo* takes us in an entirely different direction. An extremely active development, repeatedly marked *triple forte*, leads to the movement's firm conclusion. The *Andante* is based on two themes, the chordal opening melody and a long-

spanned lyric idea that rises out of the piano's busy textures. We expect the central movement of a sonata to bring some relief between its active outer movements, but this *Andante* turns surprisingly dramatic, rising to a climax marked *Vivo e capriccio* before falling away to conclude quietly. Shortest of the movements, the finale is built on a rush of sixteenth-notes that continues virtually throughout. From out of this flurry of activity, a melody gradually emerges, but there is no time for its development—the music builds to another *Con fuoco* climax, and the sonata is suddenly over.

CONCERT

Piano Trio

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Born: 1918

Died: 1990

Composed: 1937

- I. Adagio non troppo — Allegro vivace — Largamente
- II. Tempo di marcia
- III. Largo — Allegro vivo e molto ritmico

Leonard Bernstein entered Harvard University in the fall of 1935. He had just turned 17, he was immensely talented, and he was immensely sure of himself. Inevitably sparks flew up, and one such incident came in a composition class taught by the composer Walter Piston, then 43. Those present recall that Piston had assigned his students to write a fugue, and when they brought in their efforts, Piston declared Bernstein's fugue subject “inappropriate.” The young man erupted, and when Piston's next assignment was to write any sort of piece the students chose, Bernstein composed a piano trio and used the “inappropriate” theme as the basis for a fugue in the first movement.

That Piano Trio, composed in 1937, is one of Bernstein's earliest surviving works. His first published work—his first “official” work—was the Clarinet Sonata of 1942, but this trio gives us a glimpse of Bernstein at a very early moment in his career. No one would claim that this music, the product of a 19-year-old student, is a masterpiece, or even that it is unmistakably the work of Leonard Bernstein, but already some of the features of Bernstein's mature music—the rhythmic energy, the confidence, the melodic sense—are evident.

The brief trio is in three movements. The first movement opens with a slow introduction that outlines the shape of the movement's main theme. The music eases ahead on a pizzicato transition, then plunges into the *Allegro vivace*, which is based on the "inappropriate" fugue theme. Bernstein's fugal writing here is fast and energetic, and after all this busy motion, the movement draws to a poised conclusion.

Bernstein marks the second movement *Tempo di marcia*, but in fact this is a scherzo rather than a march. Sectional in construction, it offers a number of themes that might be described as "popular" in character, and that too would be a trademark of Bernstein's mature music; the very ending is charming. The finale gets off to a slow beginning, as if the music is uncertain which way to proceed. That direction becomes clear at the aptly-titled *Allegro vivo et molto ritmico*, and this youthful music races home in a great rush of energy.

A masterpiece? No. But this accomplished music, written by a 19-year-old to satisfy a classroom requirement, offers some hint of Bernstein's vast talent—and of what was to come.

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Major, Op. 47, "Kreutzer"

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: 1770

Died: 1827

Composed: 1803

- I. *Adagio sostenuto* — *Presto* — *Adagio*
- II. *Andante con variazioni*
- III. *Finale. Presto*

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Beethoven was beginning to get restless. The young man who had arrived in Vienna in 1792 was a tremendous pianist, but as a composer still had much to learn, and he spent the next decade slowly mastering the High Classical form of Haydn and Mozart. By 1802 he had composed two symphonies, three piano concertos, a set of six string quartets, and numerous sonatas for piano, for violin, and for cello. These had all been acclaimed in Vienna, but in that same year Beethoven wrote to his friend Werner Krumpholz: "I'm not satisfied with what I've composed up to now. From now on I intend to embark on a new path." That "new path" would become clear late in 1803 with the composition of the "Eroica." That symphony revolutionized music—it engaged the most serious issues, and in music of unparalleled drama and scope it resolved them.

But even before the "Eroica," there were indications of Beethoven's "new path." Early in 1803 the composer met the violinist George Polgreen Bridgetower (1778-1860). Bridgetower, then 25, was the son of a West Indian father and European mother; he had played in the orchestra for Haydn's concerts in London a decade earlier and was now establishing himself as a touring virtuoso on the continent. Bridgetower and Beethoven quickly became friends, and when the violinist proposed a joint concert at which they would perform a new sonata, the composer agreed. But, as was often the case, Beethoven found himself pressed for time. He made the process easier by retrieving a final movement that he had written for a violin sonata the previous year and then discarded. Now, in effect working backwards, he rushed to get the first two movements done in time for the scheduled concert on May 22. He didn't make it. The concert had to be postponed two days, and even then Beethoven barely got it done: he called his copyist at 4:30 that morning to begin copying a part for him, and at the concert he and Bridgetower had to perform some of the music from Beethoven's manuscript; the piano part for the first movement was still in such fragmentary form that Beethoven was probably playing some of it just from sketches.

As soon as he completed this sonata, Beethoven set to work on the "Eroica," which would occupy him for the next six months. While the sonata does not engage the heroic issues of the first movement of that symphony, it has something of the *Eroica*'s slashing power and vast scope. Beethoven was well aware of this and warned performers that the sonata was "written in a very concertante style, quasi-concerto-like." From the first instant, one senses that this is music conceived on a grand scale. The sonata opens with a slow introduction (the only one in Beethoven's ten violin sonatas), a cadenza-like entrance for the violin alone. The piano makes a similarly dramatic entrance, and gradually the two instruments outline the interval of a rising second (E to F#). At the *Presto*, that interval collapses into a half-step, the movement jumps into A minor, and the music whips ahead. Beethoven provides a chorale-like second subject marked *dolce*, but this island of calm makes only the briefest of returns in the course of this furious movement. The burning energy of that *Presto* opening is never far off: the music rips along an almost machine-gun-like patter of eight-notes, and after a hyperactive development, the movement drives to its abrupt cadence.

Relief comes in the *Andante con Variazioni*. The piano introduces the melody, amiable but already fairly complex, the violin repeats it, and the two instruments briefly extend it. There follow four lengthy and highly elaborated variations, and while the gentle mood of the

fundamental theme is never violated, these variations demand some complex and demanding playing. For all its complexities, this is a lovely movement, and Beethoven and Bridgetower had to repeat it at the premiere.

The final movement opens with a bang—a stark A-major chord—and off the music goes. Beethoven had composed this movement, a tarantella, a year earlier, intending that it should be the finale of his Violin Sonata in A Major, Opus 30, No. 1. But he pulled it out and wrote a new finale for the earlier sonata, and that was a wise decision: this fiery finale would have overpowered that gentle sonata. Here, it dances with a furious energy that makes it a worthy counterpart to the first movement. At several points, Beethoven moves out of the driving 6/8 tarantella meter and offers brief interludes in 2/4. These stately, reserved moments bring the only relief in a movement that overflows with seething energy, a movement that here becomes the perfect conclusion to one of the most powerful pieces of chamber music ever written.

Beethoven was so taken with Bridgetower's playing that he intended to dedicate the sonata to him, and it is a measure of the playful relations between the two that Beethoven inscribed the manuscript to the violinist: "Mulattic sonata written for the mulatto Brischdauer, a complete lunatic and mulattic composer." And so we might know this music today as the "Bridgetower" Sonata but for the fact that the composer and the violinist quarreled, apparently over a remark that Bridgetower made about a woman Beethoven knew. The two eventually made up, but in the meantime Beethoven had dedicated the sonata to the French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, and so we know it today as the "Kreutzer" Sonata. Ironically, Kreutzer did not like this music—Berlioz reported that "the celebrated violinist could never bring himself to play this outrageously incomprehensible composition."

Piano Quartet in D minor

WILLIAM WALTON

Born: 1902

Died: 1983

Composed: 1918-1921, revised 1973

- I. Allegramente
- II. Allegro scherzando
- III. Andante tranquillo
- IV. Allegro molto

William Walton was in no sense a child prodigy, but as a boy he had a beautiful singing voice, and he sang in the

church choir conducted by his father. Anxious to arrange a good education for the boy, his father got William into the boys choir of Christ Church College at age 10. From there, it was an easy step to admission to the college itself, and William entered Christ Church at the early age of 16. But his career there was mixed. He did very well in music and began to compose, but he repeatedly failed a qualifying exam and left Oxford at age 18 without a degree.

In 1918, shortly after entering Christ Church, Walton began to compose a Piano Quartet, and he completed it the following year, when he was 17. The work was probably played at Oxford, and the young composer revised it in 1921, but the earliest record of a public performance came nearly ten years later, when it was performed at the Royal College of Music in October 1929. In the meantime, Walton had developed phenomenally as a composer, creating a sensation with the completely original *Facade* (1921), his overture *Portsmouth Point* (1925), and a *Viola Concerto* (1929) that is still regarded as one of the finest works in that form. By that point, Walton was a far different composer than the teenager who had written the Piano Quartet in college, and this early work slipped into obscurity. Walton himself, however, maintained an affection for this work of his youth. He came back to the Piano Quartet over half a century later, in 1973, and revised it, and the work is always heard today in this revised version.

The work is in four movements. The *Allegramente* opens as, over a cello drone, the violin offers a premonition of the main theme, which is soon announced by all four players. This sonata-form movement may be full of youthful energy, but it comes to a quiet close. The *Allegro scherzando* is characterized more by its energy than by any of the humor implied in that title; the development is fugal, and the movement drives to a powerful close. Walton mutes the strings for the *Andante tranquillo*, and soon they sing above rippling accompaniment. The concluding *Allegro molto* returns to the manner of the opening movement: it gets off to a violent beginning with a rhythmic first subject, and the development proceeds on a fugue introduced by the viola.

Walton's career at Oxford may not have been a success, but he remembered those who had helped him. The young man dedicated his Piano Quartet to Thomas Banks Strong, the dean of Christ Church, who had admitted him to the college and found him financial support.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger