

WINTER FESTIVAL



JANUARY 18, 2013

7:30 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

*Duet for Viola and Cello in E-flat Major, WoO 32,
"With Two Eyeglasses Obligato"*

[Allegro]

Minuetto

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt *viola* / **Julie Albers** *cello*

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C Major, D. 934

James Ehnes *violin* / **Max Levinson** *piano*

INTERMISSION

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Quartet for Piano and Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 87

Allegro con fuoco

Lento

Allegro moderato grazioso

Allegro ma non troppo

Emily Daggett Smith *violin* / **Toby Appel** *viola* / **Jeremy Turner** *cello* /

Jeewon Park *piano*

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Duet for Viola and Cello in E-flat Major, WoO 32, “With Two Eyeglasses Obbligato” (ca. 1797)

Beethoven’s first published works were his three Piano Trios, Op. 1, which date from 1791–92. At the time the young composer made his second and lasting visit to Vienna to study with Haydn. (He had previously left his birth city, Bonn, to study with Mozart but had to return home due to reports of his mother’s failing health; when he returned to the Austrian capital Mozart was dead.) Yet a largish handful of Beethoven’s early music—including many composed *after* the aforementioned Trios — remained unpublished until he was already famous; such pieces therefore bear publication numbers in no way commensurate with their chronological placement. Other scores were not published during his lifetime and carry the code “WoO,” i.e., works without opus numbers.

Such is the case with his Duet for Viola and Cello in E-flat Major, WoO 32, which bears the sobriquet given by the composer, “With Two Eyeglasses Obbligato.” The two-movement work came to light only in the past century: the opening unmarked [*Allegro*] was published in 1912. The concluding *Minuetto* was not discovered until the 1940s. Both movements had shared a common berth in the pages of one of Beethoven’s notebooks.

At the time of its composition Beethoven frequently played viola and wrote the Duet for him to perform with his friend, amateur cellist Nikolaus Zmeskall who, like Beethoven, wore spectacles. In a letter to Zmeskall, Beethoven jestingly referred to their poor eyesight, noting that two eyeglasses were needed to play the piece “...because my eyes are also weak, and thus we are brothers in affliction.” Beethoven composed the Duet as a gesture intended to enhance their friendship, which is reflected in the light, deft and good-humored nature of the music. It was, in effect, a private piece to be shared rather than a work intended for publication.

With a blend of lyricism and energy the viola launches first movement, [*Allegro*] with an engaging theme supported by the cello’s Baroque-like “walking bass.” The entire movement scurries by as an animated conversation between friends, each echoing the

other’s fragmentary “statements” either in alternation or together. Brief assertive chordal passages provide contrasting textures. A short sortie in the minor heightens interest. For the most part cantabile passages stand out in contrast to the arpeggio accompanying figures. Shortly before the closing recapitulation Beethoven adds further contrast by having the instruments exchanging plucked and bowed passages. A brief “false ending” immediately restarts the music before the true and clear close.

The ensuing *Minuetto* shows a somewhat gentler demeanor that balances the élan of the first movement. Here, too, the viola presents the initial thematic material accompanied by the cello, frequently playing arpeggios. Midway through the movement Beethoven, ever the master of counterpoint, indulges in some clever canonic writing between the two partners.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

Fantasy for Violin and Piano in C Major, D. 934 (1827)

Schubert’s Fantasy for Violin and Piano dates from the penultimate year of his tragically short life, and was probably composed for two well-known artists of the day, violinist Josef Slavik (likened by Chopin to a “second Paganini”) and pianist Karl Maria von Bocklet (one of the most talented musicians in Vienna, again according to the generally none-too-charitable Chopin).

The work is cast in one movement comprised of a number of interlinking sections. An *Andante molto* serves as an introduction whose quiet piano tremolo and shifting harmonies add an appealing degree of mystery to the yearning theme uttered by the violin.

The ensuing *Allegretto*’s crisp rhythms do not fully lighten the mood, despite a glimmer of major tonality in this otherwise minor-mode episode. The third section finds Schubert weaving variations on his 1821 song, *Sei mir gegrüsst* (“Receive my Greetings”). After a modified reprise of the Fantasy’s opening material a rousing and energetic finale brings the music to a brilliant close.

Oddly, given its immediacy of appeal, one might be puzzled by the comment of an early critic: “The Fantasia

takes rather longer than the Viennese are prepared to spend on aesthetic pleasures. Little by little the auditorium emptied, and the reporter must confess that he, too, is unable to discuss the conclusion of this composition." Perhaps Beethoven was accurate when he castigated the Viennese at roughly this time for their lack of taste.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

(1841–1904)

Quartet for Piano and Strings in E-flat Major, Op. 87 (1889)

By the late 1880s, Dvořák was well established as a composer, enjoying a reputation that went far beyond the borders of his homeland; he was especially esteemed in England. Around 1885, the composer's publisher Simrock asked Dvořák for a new chamber work. Since he was preoccupied with other projects Dvořák had to table the request, fulfilling the commission in 1889 with his Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat Major, Op. 87—14 years after his far less mature Piano Quartet No. 1. Though nearly four years had passed since Simrock's request, the composer sketched out the new work in just three days, completing the final scoring but a few weeks later. He wrote to a friend that the "melodies just surged upon me." Despite the lyric and rhythmic imprint of Dvořák's Bohemian heritage, the second Piano Quartet also evokes Brahms' brand of German Romanticism. It was Brahms, of course, whose advocacy for his younger colleague inestimably aided the ever-grateful Dvořák.

A bold unison string statement opens the first movement *Allegro con fuoco*. This primary motif provides the basic material for the entire movement. Following an energetic response from the piano, Dvořák adds a bit of leavening humor before the strings introduce a lyrical reshaping of the stark unison theme. Much of the development section relates to the primary theme, but atypically the recap reverts to the second, song-like motive, before giving us another variant on the initial theme in the coda. Dvořák's mature writing and organizational facility belies the absurd and by now thoroughly discredited idea that Dvořák lacked requisite intellect regarding form, an early prejudice against non-German composers of "serious" music.

The *Lento* second movement unfolds through five distinct sections that vary in mood in the manner of the traditional Central European "recruitment" dance, *dumka*, used winningly by Dvořák in his irresistible *Slavonic Dances* and elsewhere.

The spirit of Terpsichore is also recalled in the scherzo-like third movement, *Allegro moderato grazioso*. The piano figurations at times suggest the plucked sounds of a *cimbalom*, the dulcimer one hears in much Czech and Hungarian folk music. When the main theme appears for the third time, the piano's triplet-based accompaniment greatly enhances the sense of momentum. The Trio suggests the influence of Middle Eastern music. While atypical of Dvořák, as a musician from Central Europe he was amply familiar with exotic musical colorings that traveled west from Asia.

Marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, Dvořák has another music trick to engage our attention in the finale, beginning not in the expected E-flat Major, but in E-flat minor. Even so, the prevailing mood is exuberantly upbeat and vivacious. Its second subject is fashioned from a chain of theme fragments, two of which give pride of place to the viola—Dvořák's chosen instrument as a performer (not that he couldn't play the violin and piano parts with considerable dexterity). After a sequence of dazzling modulations, the movement closes emphatically in E-flat Major.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
