

WINTER FESTIVAL



JANUARY 25, 2013

7:30 PM

SEATTLE
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM

GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN

Sonata for Oboe and Harpsichord in A minor, TWV 41: a3

Siciliana

Spiritoso

Andante

Vivace

Nathan Hughes oboe / **Luc Beauséjour** harpsichord / **Robert deMaine** cello

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Quintet for Horn and Strings in E-flat Major, K. 407

Allegro

Andante

Rondo: Allegro

William VerMeulen French horn / **Scott Yoo** violin / **Toby Appel** viola /

Michael Klotz viola / **Edward Arron** cello

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Metamorphoses after Ovid for Solo Oboe, Op. 49

Pan

Phaeton

Niobe

Bacchus

Narcissus

Arethusa

Nathan Hughes oboe

INTERMISSION

FRANZ SCHUBERT

String Quartet in G Major, D. 887

Allegro molto moderato

Andante un poco moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Rondo: Allegro assai

James Ehnes violin / **Amy Schwartz Moretti** violin / **Richard O'Neill** viola /

Robert deMaine cello

GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN

(1681-1767)

Sonata for Oboe and Harpsichord in A minor, TWV 41: a3 (ca. 1728)

Telemann was alert and sympathetic to the emerging *galant* style that morphed into Classicism, a true harbinger of musical things to come. Immensely popular during his lifetime in Germany and throughout the Continent, his status declined precipitously in the 19th century but has enjoyed a comeback of late.

He composed the Sonata for Oboe and Harpsichord in A minor, TWV 41: a3 ca. 1728. As was common in much music from the Baroque era, alternative versions were also made available for flute and violin including an arrangement of the continuo for guitar.

The Sonata opens with a flowing *Siciliana* in gently rocking 6/8 meter, its melodic material flowing and beguilingly tender. In turn the following *Spiritoso* moves swiftly and energetically, galvanized by a five-note up/down thematic kernel that leaps upward and skitters forward from then on.

A brief *Andante* in slow triple meter provides contrast, presenting a major-key theme that grows from a rising and falling sequence of notes. The Sonata's concluding *Vivace* posits a forceful theme energized frequently by repeated notes—a device both he and Handel used to purposeful effect. A mid-movement, delectably pastoral episode in the major adds further radiance.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

Quintet for Horn and Strings in E-flat Major, K. 407 (1782)

Mozart's intense and much-noted antipathy toward Salzburg, city of his birth, was assuaged to a degree by his friendship there with Joseph Leutgeb (aka Leitgeb), who like his famous colleague eventually joined the composer in Vienna where the two musicians resumed their relationship. The two men delighted in hurling humorous barbs against one another in a manner akin to a modern "roast." Opined Mozart in jest: "W. A. Mozart took pity on Leitgeb, ass, ox and fool in Vienna on 27

May 1783." Leutgeb was a true virtuoso on the horn, and Mozart acknowledged that fact by composing four horn concertos and other works for him. Among those "other" works was the Quintet for Horn and Strings in E-flat Major, K. 407.

As late as the 1780s, the French horn remained a valveless instrument, which reduced the number of available notes to the diatonic scale. Ever up to the challenge Mozart succeeded in transcending the horn's inherent limitation, producing music abounding in good spirits, lyrical melodies and enough requisite virtuosity to attract hornists to take up the gantlet.

The unusual scoring includes two violas, which impart a lower pitch center that when joined by the horn produces overall sonic warmth. A prominent role is given to the individual violin, creating a work that hints at a *concertante* in its approximation of a work for two solo instruments.

Note in this regard that the opening *Allegro* exults in antiphonal exchanges between the violin and the horn, though Mozart entrusts the principal themes to the horn following a brief chordal introduction. The main theme features rapid scales and octave-hopping repeated notes within an essentially lyrical framework. A variant on this tune introduces an arpeggio snippet for contrast about halfway through the movement. Mozart adds further interest by varying partnerships within the movement: horn with the four strings; violin and horn; cello and horn; and strings alone. The combined effect is that of a multihued ensemble giving the impression of a larger ensemble.

As Mozart did in many of his concertos, the second movement *Andante* clearly stands as the emotional core of the Quintet, rich in tenderness and aspiring toward Romantic-era *Sensucht* or deep yearning. Strings open with a serene and intimate statement to prepare the horn's lyrical entrance. Another strings-only episode leads to a section where the horn joins its partners, which is again followed by the strings alone. This pattern of combination and separation continues throughout the movement. In common with the opening movement, textures shift through contrasting subgroups among the players.

The concluding *Rondo: Allegro* mirrors the Quintet's *de facto* relationship with the concerto genre. Lively and bright-eyed, the music cavorts playfully through roller coaster scales and bounding intervallic leaps yet maintains Classical poise and elegance. Mozartean wit prevails in the closing moments where clever five-part "round-like" imitation among all the participants establishes a clear sense of true ensemble playing.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913–1976)

Metamorphoses after Ovid for Solo Oboe, Op. 49 (1951)

With the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, England went into the import business for the next two centuries. As the 20th century approached, a new generation came forward to put English composition back on the map, a process greatly enhanced by the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Since the emergence of those worthies, British music has blossomed and flourished.

One of the modern era's finest English-born composers was Benjamin Britten, an artist whose open homosexual orientation and pacifist politics alienated his countrymen until toward the end of his life. Since his death he has become an icon in England. Abroad, too, his music has secured a firm foothold among music-lovers worldwide. In 1951, Britten composed the *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for unaccompanied oboe. The composer drew inspiration from the Roman poet's *Metamorphoses*, dedicating the new piece to Joy Boughton, who premiered it at the Aldeburgh Festival in June 1951. Each of the six brief movements bears the name of mythical characters from Ovid's work.

The work begins with *Pan*, named for the goat-god famed for his playing on the reed pipe that had been his lover, *Syrinx*. Britten marked the score here "senza misura" ("without measure"). The music, replete with pauses between successive phrases, creates a distinctive improvisatory feel, exactly what one might expect from a wind player given to spontaneous invention.

Phaeton comes next. Marked *Vivace ritmico*, we herein experience the scion of the sun god Helios for a single

day before being struck by a thunderbolt and cast into the River Padus. A steady sequence of rhythmically impelling eighth notes conveys the heavenly journey of Phaeton's ascent followed by his fatal descent.

The third movement, *Niobe*, is based on the character's famed wailing lament on the death of her 14 children and her subsequent transformation into a mountain. A tempo of *Andante* is suggested, further defined by the term *piangendo* ("weeping"). An excellent example of word painting, the music evokes the hapless woman's tears. As the movement draws to a close this musical figure becomes fearfully manic before evaporating.

The god of wine *Bacchus* is the subject of the fourth movement, one in which Britten produces a cacophony of gaggling women and lustily shouting boys. Animated, quirky and implicitly raucous, the solo oboe part is laid out in four sections carrying the respective indications of *Allegro pesante*, *Più vivo*, *Tempo primo* and *Con moto*.

The fifth movement, *Narcissus*, portrays the eponymous man who fell in love with his own image and was punished for his vanity by being turned into a flower. Marked *Lento piacevole* ("slow and pleasant"), the music captures the character's solipsistic gazing. Several mirror-like echoes replicate both viewer and his reflection.

The final movement, *Arethusa*, evokes the flight of the title woman from the love of Alpheus, the river god; for her efforts she was turned into a fountain. The music flows by in a manner that captures her effortless beauty as well as the flowing water from her eventual state as a fountain.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

String Quartet in G Major, D. 887 (1826)

Schubert's extravagant musical gifts were manifest early in his all-too-brief life. By the time he reached puberty he already knew how to write fluently for the firmly established and venerable string quartet medium, the result of having participated in countless in-home performances that served as a cohesive element in his family's life.

Having enjoyed good health throughout his youth, his constitution suffered a major blow in 1822 when he fell victim to syphilis. Though he recovered, his outlook on life darkened considerably after that devastating experience, poignantly and often dramatically expressed in his subsequent music. Naturally the string quartets reflect a bleaker perspective beginning with his single-movement "Quartettsatz" (No. 12) and including the "Rosamunde" Quartet in A minor (No. 13) and his 14th Quartet, "Death and the Maiden," his best-known work in that medium.

Even more than the aforementioned pieces, the String Quartet No. 15 in G Major, D. 887 stares unblinkingly into the future. The Quartet received a private performance in 1827 with Schubert handling the viola part. A public performance of just the first movement took place in March 1828, eight months before his death. Not until 1850 was the entire work performed in public.

In terms of tone color, extended form and extraordinary harmonic daring, this valedictory quartet still sounds astonishingly modern. Today many scholars and aficionados consider it his finest quartet, though Schubert's contemporaries carped about its "orchestral" nature, "excessive" length and over-use of tremolos, whose emotional power early listeners failed to comprehend.

The Quartet's opening *Allegro molto moderato* creates a sense of ambiguity, beginning in the "official" tonic key of G Major but quickly turning to an ardent G minor, darkening the musical and emotional landscape. A gradual anxious crescendo on one chord serves as a preface before the first violin posits the rhythmic first theme echoed by the cello and supported by a *tremolo* accompaniment. The music becomes strikingly uneasy before coming to a full stop. At this point the syncopated second theme—based on the first theme's

rhythm—emerges in a gentler song-like variant. The development section explores these thematic materials and raises the emotional temperature to heights of passion, especially in a series of unison passages that convey growing anguish. A short coda reprises material from the beginning of the movement, closing in G Major.

The ensuing *Andante un poco moto* in E minor entrusts a touching opening melodic theme to the cello. Almost without warning, dotted rhythms, furious scalar passages and an unsettling *tremolo* combine to outmatch the turbulence of the first movement, notably in a series of frantic upward scales from the first violin that end with veritable shrieks of grieving pain. A sudden retreat from this harrowing episode leads to a return of the lovely original cello theme, now played by the first violin, but this comparative restfulness is short-lived; untamed vehemence re-asserts itself with even greater ferocity than in its previous appearance. Having survived these tempestuous doings, Schubert provides a quiet coda in which the movement's opening cello theme has the final say, newly cast in E Major.

Though cast in the minor, the *Scherzo: Allegro assai* offers a deft, swift and a tad lighter journey after the emotional maelstrom of the preceding movements. The A section uses one thematic idea, a sequence of six rapid and three slower notes. The Trio section slows the pace with a warmhearted evocation of a *Ländler*, the rustic precursor to the urban waltz, before an abridged repeat of the A section.

The Quartet concludes with a fast-paced and brilliant *Rondo: Allegro assai*, likened by many commentators as Schubert's take on *opera buffa*. Based on the feverish energy of a *tarantella*, the music moves in perpetual motion with comic energy bordering on frenzy. Devilishly challenging for all four participants, the final impression is less joyful than manic whistling in the dark.

Program Notes by Steven Lowe
