

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
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FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

June 23, 2022

7:30 PM

Packard Hall

Serenade No. 1

Marsch
Lied
Ländler

Heinrich Sutermeister
(1910-1995)

Heinrich Sutermeister was born in Feuerthalen, Switzerland, and, except for a few years in Germany, spent most of his life in his home country. He received support and advice from his prime teacher, Carl Orff, a very successful German composer, who helped him to a successful career. His most famous works are for the stage, although there are numerous chamber works as well.

The Serenade No. 1 was written in 1949 for the curious combination of two clarinets, bassoon and trumpet. I know little about its origin but it would seem logical that it was written for a specific group of players or commissioned for a singular event. Regardless, it is great to have a work for such an unusual combination.

The first movement, *Marsch*, is set off by the trumpet playing march-like fanfares while the bassoon offers a near boogie-woogie like walking bassline. The clarinets often respond with more lyrical melodies in sweet harmonies. It is fun to hear how each instrument projects its musical character. The second movement, *Lied* (which simply means song), is set off by a major trumpet solo. Thereafter, the other instruments present the song in various combinations, but the trumpet remains the primary “singer.” If the listener has a hard time following a beat, it may be because Sutermeister changes time signature every few measures throughout the movement. I challenge you to tap your foot to this!

The third movement, *Ländler*, is a country dance. It has catchy rhythms that make it sound like a folk-dance. It is in many short sections and each has a distinctive quality. And Sutermeister’s settings are varied for each section. Sometimes the two clarinets have the melody in harmony, sometimes the trumpet seems to take the lead, and for still other verses we hear different combinations of all the participants. This is a lively and very colorful conclusion to this charming composition.

Romance

Amy Beach
(1867-1944)

"How inevitable it was that music should be my life's work. Both in composition and piano playing, there seemed to be such a strong attraction ... that no other life than that of a musician could ever have been possible for me." — Amy Beach

Amy Beach was an American musician (pianist and composer) who deserves credit for having broken through the glass ceiling for women composers in the United States. (The legendary Clara Schumann had accomplished much of what Beach did about 50 years earlier in Germany.) Part of Beach's success as a composer resulted from her marriage to a prominent Boston physician, Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who didn't think it was socially appropriate for her to perform publicly and encouraged her to compose privately instead. So when the doctor died in 1910, she already had a substantial number of compositions to her credit. We should note, however, that she couldn't travel to Europe to study with the great composers of the time, so she learned everything she knew by studying their music, both in theory and in practice.

Her *Romance* for violin and piano came relatively early in her career. It was composed in 1893 and dedicated to the then famous American violinist Maud Powell. Beach and Powell (born in the same year) were close friends and associates and premiered the work in the year that it was composed at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. It was such an astounding success at that performance that the audience demanded an encore on the spot! And one should not be surprised. After this hearing, I imagine many in the audience would be ready to hear the work again!

It opens with a melody built on an ascending phrase in the piano. Soon, of course, the violin picks it up. And thereafter it is never far from our thoughts because Beach brings it, or a transformation of it, back throughout the composition. It gives it a deeply pleasing sense of continuity. There are contrasting moments of tension often characterized by intensifying rhythms and harmonies, but always we find solace in that opening melodic phrase. Another satisfying feature is the variety of textures between the two instruments. At times, the violin gently soars to very high notes supported subtly by the piano's beautiful arpeggios. This will be pleasing.

Now lest you think this is a result of the gender of the composer and both original performers, here is Beach's attitude. Just before she passed away at age 77, Amy was concerned that her legacy would be shadowed by gender politics, rather than it being about her musical efforts. She said "My work has always been judged from the beginning by work as such, not according to sex. The question has rarely ever been raised." Even after all the oppression she received as a woman in her lifetime, she still downplayed it to ensure her art was heard in the future. Well, Amy, we can hear your music, loud and clear — thank you for your contribution to classical music.

Trio for flute, violin and piano

Allegro ma non troppo

Andante sostenuto

Allegro vivace con spirito

Nino Rota

(1911-1979)

Nino Rota was an Italian composer best known for Italian film scores from the mid 20th century. He worked with Fellini and Visconti in Italy, producing such masterpieces as *La strada*, *La dolce vita*, *Amacord*. And as he became an international figure, he worked with Francis Ford Coppola in works like the *The Godfather* trilogy. He received the Academy Award for Best Original Score for *The Godfather, Part II*. In total from the 1930s until his death in 1979, he wrote the original score for more than 150 movies.

Born into a musical family in Milan, Rota was known as a child prodigy. After studying in Milan and Rome, he was graduated at the age of 19 and was encouraged by conductor Arturo Toscanini to move to the U.S. to study at the Curtis Institute for two years. He subsequently returned to Milan and began his remarkable career as a film composer.

In addition to his film work, Rota was active in all types of concert music. He composed ten operas, five ballets and dozens of other orchestral and chamber works, all this while teaching at the liceo musicale (the conservatory) in Bari, Italy where he was the director for over 30 years. The Trio for flute, violin and piano is one of many such ensembles.

The first movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, opens with an insistent rhythm in the piano that dominates the ensemble. The flute and violin simply exchange little motives that seem only to decorate the driving keyboard. There are some moments where the melody instruments come into the foreground, but are generally subjected to a lesser presence. It is only in the final section that the three instruments come together. In the second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, Rota shows off his technical skills by constructing a beautiful fugue, a complex form championed by Bach in which the instruments imitate each other. We first hear the subject (main melody) in the flute, followed by the violin and finally the piano. This subject is taken from the first movement. Thereafter, there is a series of beautifully worked-out contrapuntal passages in which each individual instrument has some part of the subject while others have different melodic ideas. This music is complex, but the listener can hear the unity that holds all three conversants together.

In the final movement, *Allegro vivace con spirito*, the ensemble returns to fast insistent rhythms generated primarily by the piano, somewhat like the first movement. Again, it is hard to sort out the flute and violin until later in the movement. As one commentator noted, at the end they “unite, like puppets that, having performed their various roles for the public’s entertainment, now take their bow.”

Piano Quintet in F minor

Molto moderato quasi lento; Allegro
Lento, con molto sentimento
Allegro non troppo ma con fuoco

César Franck
(1822-1890)

César Franck's career as a composer was somewhat unusual. In his youth he was a genuine prodigy and was dragged all over France and Belgium by an ambitious father who probably had an image of young César as another child prodigy like Mozart. When, in his mid 20s, Franck decided to do what he wanted, he took positions as organist and teacher of composition and harmony with various institutions in Paris. He composed little for 20 years until his enthusiastic coterie of students, known as the *bande à Franck*, encouraged him to become more active in this area. After a difficult beginning, with the initial failure of his oratorio titled *Rédemption*, he began to compose with considerable fervor and produced most of his great works. The Piano Quintet in F minor, completed in 1879, falls in the middle of Franck's active years as a composer. These years were, unfortunately, the last 10 of his life.

One of Franck's most notable accomplishments is the idea of "cyclic" structure. The idea here is that there should be one theme that is heard in each movement of the composition. In the Piano Quintet, Franck applies this principal in a broad manner. Most notably, the second theme of the first movement is heard in each of the two successive movements.

The first movement, *Molto moderato quasi lento*, reveals Franck's late romantic style. It is rhapsodic and full of rich thematic ideas and poignant tragic feelings. It is based on the broad outlines of the sonata form. After an extended slow introduction, the themes are presented first, then developed by breaking them into distinctive motives, and finally recapitulated in a more or less complete fashion. Most important here for understanding the entire work, however, is the theme that recurs in later movements. Although it is foreshadowed by the statement of certain specific phrases, it is not heard as a fully developed melody until about 6 minutes into the movement; at this time, the first violin presents it alone above a syncopated accompaniment in the piano. The theme is lyrical; it first ascends, then descends, and uses long half notes interspersed with quick little eighth-note steps. At the end of the movement, its final statement leaves a cast of tragic sadness.

The second movement, *Lento, con molto sentimento*, opens with a section in A minor that is quiet, serene, and built on a kind of distinctive, often dark, French lyricism. In the middle section, there are transformed statements of the cyclic theme from the first movement. These are hard to discern on first hearing because often they appear in the piano which is an accompaniment, or a counterpoint, to the main melodic ideas of the movement. The listener can, however, sense the rising and falling chromatic lines that were so distinctive in the original version of the theme in the first movement.

The third movement, *Allegro non troppo ma con fuoco*, rarely loses its initial intensity and forward motion which are set off by an aggressive sixteenth-note tremolo melody in the second violin. After this tremolo passage is over, the cyclic theme, transformed still further, can be heard in the rhythms and contours of the next (and principal) theme of this movement. Franck's desire for an organic musical unity pervades the movement, and although the recurring theme is often hard to discern, when it is over the listener will have experienced a satisfying sense of logic balanced with strong 19th-century passion.