



Program Notes
by
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Festival Artists Concert

Sunday, June 21, 2020

3:00 PM

Packard Hall

Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581

Allegro
Larghetto
Menuetto
Allegretto

W. A. Mozart
(1756-1791)

Mozart biographer Eric Blom wrote "the [Clarinet] Quintet has that quality of clairvoyance which so often surprises and gently oppresses us when we are confronted with his best work, the kind of infallibility in doing precisely the right thing at precisely the right moment which must often have made him stand back, not to say stagger back, from his work and ask himself in happy consternation: 'How did I do it?'"

We will never know if Mozart ever truly wondered how he did what he did. But this quintet, composed in 1789, just two years before his death, undeniably possesses that inscrutable quality that results from genius at work. Perhaps most stunning is the way Mozart combines the varied sounds of the clarinet - clear in its high register, lyrical and warm in the middle, and darkly colorful in the lower, or *chalumeau*, register - with the strings. This instrument, for which Mozart had a particular affinity, can either blend with or contrast the bright violins and the darker viola, and in this Quintet the composer explores a multitude of tonal combinations. In fact, this quintet remains an outstanding example of Mozart's interest in a sheer beauty of sound that characterizes many of his late works.

The opening *Allegro* begins with the clarinet in charge of the thematic content. But in the development section we hear a truly memorable passage in which the strings play fast arpeggios, passed around from one to another, while the clarinet plays slower and wider arpeggios which seem to wrap around the entire string consort. This is one of the striking moments when Mozart gives the effect that a soloist is accompanying the entire ensemble, kind of like the tail wagging the dog.

The second movement, *Larghetto*, simply contains, among other things, one of the most sublimely beautiful melodies Mozart ever wrote, here given over entirely to the soft, sweet breath of the clarinet. One does wonder, at this moment, "how *did* he do it?" The third movement, *Menuetto*, is curious for the presence of two *trios* (short sections that come after the *minuet* proper); the first of these is for strings alone, the second is a *Ländler* (an Austrian folk-dance) for the clarinet; the quality of the melody reminds the listener of the rustic origins of the instrument itself.

The final movement, *Allegretto*, is a theme with six variations. In each one, Mozart creates a different character or feeling and often features just one or two of the instruments. The first variation, in a cute mood, gives the clarinet "cute" two-octave leaps; the third offers the cello an expressive, plaintive, sighing melody in a melancholy mood, while the fourth returns to joviality and puts the clarinet and first violin through a little speed drill in arpeggios and scales. After a pensive fifth variation, this stunning work closes with a bright and positive *Allegro* that clearly recalls the original theme.

Souvenir du Rigi

Franz Doppler
(1821-1883)

Franz Doppler (1821-1883) was a part of a family of musicians from Hungary. He studied first with his father, a composer and concert oboist, and, after numerous international tours, found his way to success in Vienna where he taught flute at the Vienna Conservatory. During his lifetime he was one of the most well-known flute virtuosos in Europe. He toured internationally with his brother, also a flautist, to rave reviews. And he wrote great deal of music for them. Franz and Karl continued to make regular tours of Europe and helped found the Hungarian Philharmonic Orchestra in 1853. When he was 18-years-old he became first flutist at the opera in Budapest which stimulated a passion for composing operas. He went on to be the first flutist and conductor of the Vienna Court Opera, a position of considerable prestige.

Souvenir du Rigi refers to a mountain in the Swiss Alps. Located in the center of Switzerland, the "Rigi" has long been an attraction for tourists and was certainly well-known during Doppler's life. The first railway up the *massif* opened in 1871, but there is no evidence that Doppler rode it. Still, the title he gave this work, translated as "Remembrance of Rigi," suggests that he knew the mountain first-hand and was sufficiently impressed to transform his remembrances into music.

The one-movement work begins with an elaborate flute cadenza, which at times sounds like a shepherd's strain and at others like birdsongs. Then another familiar Swiss mountain sound the Alpenhorn echoing across a valley is suggested by the entrance of the French horn. This lyrical melody is reminiscent of William Tell (the Swiss folk hero) as immortalized in the famous overture to Rossini's opera which by the way Doppler would certainly have known. After the flute and horn have had their solos the rest of the work meanders through a series of charming duets for the two lead instruments which just occasionally yield to the piano. Toward the end, Doppler calls for a *clochette* (handbell) in C. This sound, reminiscent of sheep bells, is the icing on the cake in his depiction of an idyllic Swiss alpine setting.

Au-delà du Temps

Yuko Uebayashi

Contemporary composer Yuko Uebayashi was born in Japan but moved to Paris in 1998. Her works have been met with much success in both Japan and France, and *Au-delà du Temps*, for two Flutes and Piano is no exception. Flautist Jean Ferrandis described Uebayashi's works as "gems that, although they are so different, they yet belong to the same world, a world of vivacity, dreams, tenderness, humour, and one that is subtly contradicted by vehemence, virtuosity, melancholy and sorrow."

Au-delà du Temps, written for two flutes and piano, is made up of four movements. In this performance we will hear just the 1st and 4th. The title, which translates best as "Beyond Time" expresses different aspects of time. The first movement is titled "La lumière lointaine de nuit" ("distant light of the night"), the second "La lumière tournante dans le rêve" ("revolving light in a dream"). In both of these movements, Uebayashi shows her awareness of the charming music of "turn of the century" Paris. French composers wanted to write music that was enjoyable for the listener, unlike much of the modern music from other places. It was to be "listener-friendly." And these movements are just that. They sound relatively simple and show an unabashed melodic sentimentality that is immediately appealing. The flutes often weave two melodic lines together in a conversational manner. The last movement is in a faster tempo and the conversation grows in tempo and excitement. It ends with a well-prepared musical climax.

Duo Concertante for Violin and Bass

Krzysztof Penderecki
(1933-2020)

During his long career as the leader of avant-garde Polish music, Krzysztof Eugeniusz Penderecki (1933-2020) has made many creative friendships. One of his closest in recent years has been with the German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter. Their collaboration has generated several major works, including this *Duo concertante per violino e contrabbasso*. Mutter's foundation for the encouragement of young string players issued the commission for the *Duo concertante*, which Mutter premiered with one of her scholarship holders, Roman Patkó.

Penderecki adopted the Italian title referring to a piece for two solo performers. His research turned up a single precedent for the odd combination of violin and double bass, an arrangement of a *Gran duo concertante* originally written by the celebrated bassist, Giovanni Bottesini, in 1880 for two double basses and orchestra. In Penderecki's *Duo Concertante for Violin and Bass*, extreme difference in the pitch ranges of the two instruments explains the paucity of repertoire for this pair. Here, Penderecki partially addressed the problem by having the strings of the double bass tuned a whole tone higher than customary.

What resulted is a surprisingly lyrical, rhapsodic, and emotionally rich musical conversation between the two interlocutors. Mostly the players take virtuoso turns in the spotlight, in question-and-answer format, with one instrument providing quiet accompaniment while the other holds the floor. The main theme is a motoric five-note figure tossed back and forth like a hot potato. Special effects abound. At the end, the double bassist strikes the instrument's body with hand and knee before joining the violinist in bowing behind the bridge.

Contrasts

Verbunkos (Recruiting Dance)
Pihenő (Relaxation)
Sebes (Fast Dance)

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Béla Bartók completed this masterpiece in 1938. It had been commissioned by Benny Goodman and the celebrated Hungarian-born violinist, Jozsef Szigeti; these two musicians retained sole performance rights for three years after its completion. Curiously, the first recording of the work found the two commissioners collaborating with the composer on the

piano; Bartók had undoubtedly written the keyboard part for himself to perform with his illustrious colleagues.

Bartók's earlier compositions for chamber ensembles had tended to stress homogeneity of sound. He had already completed five of the six string quartets and had used piano only in collaboration with other solo instruments. Hence, when confronted with three such different instruments as clarinet, violin and piano, he approached the problem by exploiting the disparities, or the "contrasts," from which the work derives its name.

The first movement, *Verbunkos* (recruiting dance), had its origin in a dance used to lure country youths into military service. The last movement, *Sebes* (fast dance), was for the new recruits to do some improvised dancing of their own. The middle movement, *Pihenő* (relaxation), was conceived as an interlude between the strong characters of the outer movements.

The contrasting characters of the three instruments are apparent in the idiomatic styles Bartók uses for each. The clarinet, featured in a cadenza at the end of the first movement, is given rapid arpeggios (broken chords) and scales, melodic passages characteristic of each register, extreme dynamics, and numerous other technical devices which are idiomatic to the instrument. The violin is put to the test with glissandos (sliding the finger of the left hand along the string), multiple stops (playing two strings at once), simultaneously bowed and plucked passages, and even *scordatura* (an irregular tuning that requires the use of two violins in performance). The piano part, written with the composer in mind as performer and in deference to the two virtuosi who commissioned the work, is more reserved. The piano does, however, often participate in the musical fabric in important ways.

Bartók's general musical style is what one would expect from him and not the famous jazz clarinetist with whom the work is so closely associated. It is tonally structured on the dissonant musical interval of the tritone and lacks more traditional tonal relationships. But while its tonal order may seem elusive, its rhythmic excitement, particularly in the last movement, is striking. The strong central European rhythms that are so characteristic of much of Bartók's heritage are here used to build excitement and climax. The middle movement, although apparently an innocuous interlude, is in some ways the gem of the work. Like the ripples that result from a pebble dropped in a pool of water, the clarinet and violin give the movement a concentric, if not palindromic quality of symmetry. It forms a placid and naturalistic centerpiece for the two outer movements.