

COLORADO COLLEGE



Program Notes
by
Michael Grace

FESTIVAL ARTISTS CONCERT

Thursday June 26, 2025

7:00 PM

Packard Hall

Fantasia et Fuga in G minor, BWV 542

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)
arr. A.R. Kay

Johann Sebastian Bach's *Fantasia et Fuga* in G minor is one of his most famous organ works. We might note that it is not certain that he composed the two movements as a single work because often separate preludes and fugues were brought together later and even by a different composer. On the other hand, these two movements do exemplify the principal of musical aesthetic contrasts.

The *Fantasia* is a free-flowing movement that seems to progress according to the whims of the composer, almost as if he is improvising. This fantasia begins with long held chords in the bass while the upper voices weave free scale-like patterns above. It is full of expressive dissonances that are followed by satisfying resolutions. The *Fuga*, on the other hand, demonstrates the normal strict conventions of that genre; there is usually a melody (the subject) that is introduced in one voice then imitated by the others. This fugue begins with a fast subject heard first in the clarinet then imitated by most of the other instruments. There is a kind of aesthetic pleasure in hearing this subject get passed from one instrument to another, somewhat like a game of "hot potato!"

Herbstlied (Autumn Song) **for clarinet and string quartet**

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)
arr. Tōro Takemitsu

In 1876, Tchaikovsky was commissioned to compose a series of 12 character pieces for piano. There was to be one per month for a year. At the end of the year the cycle could be published in its entirety and titled "The Seasons." It was hoped that these works would represent the best of Russian piano music at the

time. However, the music was so appealing that various artists wanted them arranged for other soloists or ensembles. The arrangement on this program was made by the celebrated Japanese composer Tōro Takemitsu. It is often performed by a string quartet and a soloist.

The work itself has great appeal, especially when the listener understands what the music is about. The title *Herbstlied* translates “Autumn Song” and the work represents the 10th month – October – in the 12-month series. This was a month of harvest and rest, and without saying much more, we know what autumnal rest represents. As one commentator has noted, *Herbstlied* is known for its gentle, flowing quality and its ability to evoke a sense of quiet reflection, fitting for the season of falling leaves and fading sunlight. The piece is characterized by its lyrical melody and flowing, arpeggiated accompaniment, capturing the essence of a cool, crisp autumn day. The tripartite form begins with a sublime melody, then turns to a more energetic middle section, perhaps reminding us of all the hard work that produced harvest or celebratory dancing and then looking forward to winter’s deep sleep.

Sonata for violin and piano in C minor, Op. 45

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)

Allegro molto ed appassionato
Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza
Allegro animato

Edvard Grieg was born in Bergen, Norway, and although he spent some time in Denmark, he remained a passionate Norwegian nationalist all his life. His musical studies began at age six with his mother, a piano teacher. A rather colorful Norwegian violinist, named Ole Bull, was a friend of the family and arranged for him to continue his studies in Germany at the Leipzig Conservatory where he focused on piano but also studied composition with the then-celebrated German composer Carl Reinecke. When he returned to Norway, accomplished in the cosmopolitan European styles, he rekindled a strong love for his homeland and this remained a major factor in his compositions. In fact, many of his later works are based on Norwegian stories and folktales. The most famous of these were piano pieces he wrote for Ibsen’s play *Peer Gynt* (some of these were turned into an orchestral suite which is standard in the orchestra repertoire).

Grieg first got the inspiration to write his third violin sonata during a visit by a 19-year-old Italian violinist, Teresina Tua, to his home in 1886. Referring to her as “the little fiddle-fairy on my troll-hill,” her playing enthralled the older composer. “If ever I again compose anything for the violin, she will be to blame,”

he wrote to his publisher. How fortunate we are that the visit took place, for it resulted in one of Grieg's finest works. Still, we might put the work in context. Grieg generally preferred to write shorter compositions and generally had difficulty with large-scale, multi-movement works. Yet this sonata is just such a work. It is in three movements and each is a major undertaking in its own way.

The first movement, *Allegro molto ed appassionato*, opens with an intense theme that unfolds in short phrases in the violin with brief answers in the piano. The second part of this theme is more lyrical. Soon, there is a genuine second theme, marked *cantabile*, heard first in the violin and then in the piano. The development is ushered in with a beautiful floating high melody for the violin with rippling arpeggios in the piano that might make the listener think of a nature scene with gurgling streams. However, such placidity is soon lost in the intense development that follows. After a recapitulation of the earlier themes, the movement closes with a broad, dark and powerful coda.

The second movement, *Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza*, is a gem. The piano opens it with a melody of folk-like simplicity which is then sung by the violin. There is a middle section that sounds like a village dance melody with short often-repeated phrases. The "romanza" melody with which the movement began returns to close it out, only here it ends with the violin ascending to a gorgeous very high E achieved by using a harmonic.

The third movement, *Allegro animato*, opens with a folk-like melody characterized by strong rhythmic motives and curious gaps, or leaps. Although first heard in the violin, snippets of it are passed back and forth between the two players. A slower and more comforting melody unfolds in the low range of the violin, again soon to be shared with the piano. Both of these melodies are recapitulated with increased intensity and excitement until the sonata ends with a triumphant coda (marked *Doppio movimento* – meaning to double the speed!) whose key of C major banishes all the C minor gloom that had preceded it!

Grand Sextet in E-flat Major

Allegro; Maestoso

Andante

Finale: Allegro con spirito

Mikhail Glinka
(1804-1857)

Mikhail Glinka experienced the world first through the senses of a romantic. He was living at the time of Schubert and Beethoven who both exhibited early romantic tendencies. Fortunately, many of Glinka's romantic sentiments were

transmitted to younger Russian composers and inspired a strong romantic nationalist movement that flourished during the second half of the 19th century. His students and mentees included such major figures as Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov and others who formed a pro-Russian group nicknamed "The Mighty Five." But Glinka's musical personality was more than just Russian. In the 1830s health issues forced him to move to the warmer climate of Italy. He settled in Milan where he became enamored with Italian opera, particularly the music of Donizetti. He never lost his love of the Russian folk music he had learned as a youth, only now it had to make room in his musical psyche for a new music stepsister derived from Italian opera. And perhaps key to his greatness was his ability to merge the best elements of both his Russian heritage and his love for Italian opera in one unified musical language.

The *Grand Sextet* dates from 1832 during his sojourn in Milan. At that time, he had fallen romantically for the daughter of his physician who happened to be an excellent pianist. Of course, there were rumors that the composition was for her, and the brilliant writing and sparkling technique would have been fitting tributes. The first movement, marked *Allegro*, opens with a bold theme heard in piano chords. After this is developed for a while, there is a second theme of a very different character. It is introduced by the solo cello and could be an emotional aria from an Italian opera. Was he daydreaming about his Italian innamorata?

The second movement, a slow *Andante*, is another love aria, with Italian charm. This one is for solo cello and violin. After a brief middle section duet for violins, the opening music returns to prepare the listener for the finale marked *Allegro con spirito*. This last movement begins without pause. After some rumblings in the bass instruments, a series of several lyrical melodies ensue that together bring the listener to a satisfying conclusion. Several critics have commented that this final conglomeration of melodies has a distinct Russian character.

UPCOMING SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL EVENTS

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Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 27, Packard Hall, free

Festival Orchestra Concert

Scott Yoo, *conducting*

7:00 p.m. June 27, Celeste Theatre, ticketed event

Pre-Concert Lecture with Michael Grace begins at 5:45 p.m. in the CAC Screening Room

