

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): Duo for Violin and Viola in B-Flat, K.424 (1783)

Among his peers from whom Mozart learned much about his art were Josef Haydn and his lesser-known younger brother, Michael, who was the director of the archiepiscopal orchestra and organist at the cathedral in Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace. Mozart's family did not approve of Michael's private life—his fondness for beer and wine and his wife's tendency to fall into debt. However, both Wolfgang and his father Leopold (another fine musician) had the highest respect for him as a composer and performer.

It was in July of 1783 that Mozart brought his wife, Constanze, to Salzburg to meet his family, who did not wholly approve of her. However, Leopold got to see his grandson for the first time, and, presumably, they got along reasonably well.

During this visit, Haydn was ill and could not finish an assignment to compose a series of six duos that the archbishop had ordered. He needed two more. Mozart visited the sick man every day and when he learned that the archbishop was withholding his salary as the surest way of receiving the full complement, he went home. Then two days later, he returned with two fully written duos. All that was needed was the name Michael Haydn on the first page. Mozart even imitated Haydn's musical style, e.g., the slow introduction – a feature seldom found in Mozart's music, the use of extended codas and the dreamy character of the middle movement.

The duos reveal great skill in creating music out of limited means. Alfred Einstein comments on them in his book on Mozart: "These instrumental duos are a curious form that goes back deep into the sixteenth century: curious in their mixture of virtuosity, a didactic étude-like air, and occasional strict, 'learned' moments. Mozart conserved all this, the virtuosity, the instructiveness, the 'strictness' – how delightful the canon in the development section of the first movement of Duo No. 1! —and yet created art-works of the finest sort, of a freshness, a humor, and an appropriateness for the instruments that makes these works unique of their kind."

Michael treasured these two duos both as a token of friendship and as music of a high order.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Arnold Bax (1883-1953): Piano Quartet in One Movement (1922)

Born in London in 1883, Arnold Bax is mostly known as a master of the Romantic orchestra. Yet he wrote a great deal of chamber music - his first work for chamber ensemble in 1903 (a student string quartet), and his last in 1945 (his piano trio). British music critic Andrew Burn points out how Bax subjects a myriad of musical material to "a constant process of evolution as he exploits all manner of harmonic and instrumental colours to superb effect."

That's certainly true of the Piano Quartet in One Movement. Although conceived an ocean away and a century ago, there is something frighteningly contemporary about the piece. Written in the aftermath of the 1918 flu pandemic and the First World War, it feels right up to date as pandemic fears still linger, and war on a global scale still haunts us. Bax had been especially shaken by the Easter Rising insurrection of 1916. On top of all that, his marriage was falling apart. All of this emotional turmoil is deeply infused in this work of approximately 12-minute duration.

A palpable sense of despair and trauma pervades the piece, with the strings coming in sharp, articulated bursts as the piano pounds away like heavy artillery. As the work marches forward, it becomes increasingly more agitated and frantic. Gradually the piano mellows out, the strings slow down, and we get some lyrical sounding comfort toward the middle of the piece. The work closes on what might be some sort of resolution, yet a sense of loss still lingers.

-Steve Siegel

Franz Schubert (1797-1828): Piano Quintet "The Trout", Op. 114, (1819)

In the summer of 1819, Schubert went for a walking tour in Upper Austria with his friend Johann Vogl, the singer for whom so many of his songs were composed. They stayed some time in Steyr, Vogl's native town, where he was in the habit of spending his holidays when the Viennese opera was closed. Schubert lodged with Dr. Albert Schellman, one of whose neighbors was Sylvester Paumgartner, a prosperous mining engineer and amateur cellist. Frequent concerts of chamber music were given in Paumgartner's music room, and it seems natural that he should call upon the visiting composer for a work. The tradition is that he suggested a composition based on the song, The Trout, written two years earlier. He asked that the work be a quintet for the same group of instruments as the quintet by Hummel that was, presumably, to be played on the same occasion.

If the song was the starting point of the work, it is, nevertheless, an insertion between the third and fourth movements of a normal four-movement work. However, it should be pointed out that the key structure of the quintet would almost certainly have been different if the “Trout” movement were not there.

The bass is not a mere reinforcement of the cello but is an independent voice with its own share of melodic responsibility. The presence of the bass probably had an influence on the piano writing. The piano part is much like the primo part of a piano duet. There is much writing in octaves and very little use is made of the deeper registers. Schubert probably wished to avoid too thick a texture that the bass and piano would create if they were playing in the same range.

The first movement is a sonata form. Instead of starting with the first theme proper, he gradually shapes it during the first 26 measures before using it as a connected melody. The following Andante uses three song-like themes. It begins in F major. Note the poignant entrance of the second theme in F-sharp minor. The Scherzo is a fast movement in A that starts with a hint of stormy mood but subsides into a Trio that recalls catchy Austrian dance patterns. The fourth movement is a theme and variations on the title song. The Finale is a lighthearted piece using Hungarian rhythms. The mood of the work is optimistic and carefree. It is in Schubert’s finest romantic vein.

-Hoyle Carpenter

Musicians:

Katie Hyun, violin – Katie has performed as soloist with the Houston Symphony, Dallas Chamber Orchestra, the Columbia Festival Orchestra as well as the Busan Sinfonietta and Incheon Philharmonic Orchestra in South Korea. She is founder and director of the Quodlibet Ensemble and founding member of the award-winning Amphion String Quartet which was a member of Lincoln Center’s CMS Two. On Baroque violin, she frequently appears with Trinity Baroque Orchestra, the Sebastians and New York Baroque. She holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music, SUNY Stonybrook and the Yale School of Music.

Caeli Smith, viola – Called “intense, precise, and full of personality” after appearing as concerto soloist with The Juilliard Orchestra at Alice Tully Hall. Caeli Smith is an award-winning chamber musician, educator and facilitator. She has performed across the United States, Europe and Asia with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, The Knights, Sejong Soloists, Jordi Savall and the Verbier Chamber Orchestra. Caeli is an alum of Carnegie Hall’s Ensemble Connect, the post-graduate performance, education and leadership program of Carnegie Hall and The Juilliard School.

Alberto Parrini, cello - Born in Italy, Alberto Parrini has been principal cellist of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic since 2007 and a member of the American Symphony since 2010; he also performs regularly with the New York Philharmonic and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. In 2008, 2010 and 2011 he toured Japan as principal cellist of the New York Symphonic Ensemble. He performed throughout the U.S. with the American Chamber Players and with the St. Lawrence String Quartet. He toured with the White Oak Dance Project and performed with Continuum, Proteus Ensemble, New Jersey Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra and Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra. He teaches at Princeton University.

Stephen Sas, double bass – As one of New York City’s in demand double bassists, Stephen Sas performs with the the New York Philharmonic, the New York City Ballet, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Sejong Soloists, the New Jersey Symphony and others. He has toured extensively in Europe, Asia, South America and across the USA. He received the Doctor of Music degree from The Juilliard School.

Marcantonio Barone, piano – Marcantonio Barone has performed with major orchestras on four continents and has given solo recitals at the Wigmore Hall in London, the Great Hall of the Saint Petersburg Filarmoniya, Weill Recital Hall in New York, and the National Gallery in Washington, and on the recital series of the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. He has been a member of the Lenape Chamber Ensemble since 1987, and he performs annually as a member of 1807 and Friends and the Craftsbury Chamber Players. He teaches at the Bryn Mawr Conservatory of Music and at Swarthmore College. His recordings are available on the Albany, Bridge, Centaur, and Innova labels. Mr. Barone is a Steinway Artist.

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