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FRIDAY, JULY 26, 2019 ■ 7:30 P.M.

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND FINE ARTS CENTER CONCERT HALL

DIVERTING CONVERSATIONS

SPONSORED BY THE SOUTH KINGSTOWN LAND TRUST
PAID FOR BY A FRIEND OF THE SKLT AND KCMF

MOZART Piano Trio No.1 (Divertimento), K.254
in B-Flat Major

Allegro assai

Adagio

Rondeaux. Tempo di Menuetto

VIOLIN: STEPHEN KIM

CELLO: SARAH ROMMEL

PIANO: REIKO UCHIDA

GOROSITO/ALBERTO “Arame” for Percussion

PERCUSSION: ARX DUO, GARRETT ARNEY AND MARI YOSHINAGA

WEINBERG “Table Talk” for Percussion

PERCUSSION: ARX DUO, GARRETT ARNEY AND MARI YOSHINAGA

INTERMISSION

BRAHMS String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 111

Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

Adagio

Un poco Allegretto

Vivace ma non troppo presto

VIOLINS: NOAH GELLER, STEPHEN KIM

VIOLAS: BURCHARD TANG, CHE-HUNG CHEN

CELLO: SARAH ROMMEL

Piano Trio No. 1 (Divertimento) K.254, in B-Flat Major

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

In 1776, as revolution was proceeding across the Atlantic, things were relatively peaceful in Europe. Music shops were busy peddling ‘sonatas for harpsichord or fortepiano, with the accompaniment of violin or violoncello,’ so anyone with a keyboard instrument could have amateur string players over after dinner to plod through the most recent offering.

It was in this spirit of keyboard works, with light string parts for friends or amateurs, that Mozart wrote this early Divertimento, actually his first piano trio. Musicologists doubt that Mozart played it at home in Salzburg, where there was only a two-manual harpsichord. It’s known, though, that he played it the next year in Munich at an inn called the Black Eagle, whose owner had a fortepiano. One night, he even played the violin part “as if I were the greatest fiddler in the whole of Europe.” Back home, some visiting musicians played it, with Mozart’s sister Nannerl on the harpsichord.

In our day, calling the recital pianist an accompanist instead of an equal partner is somewhat condescending. Back then, however, the string parts were simply meant to accompany the pianist, who took the leading role while the cello moved with the piano’s bass line and the violin echoed the upper keyboard figures.

The first movement finds the violin shadowing, embellishing, and embroidering the keyboard’s right hand part. As the work goes on, the violin’s role becomes more pronounced in its conversations with the piano, and is nearly equal by the finale.

In the middle adagio, the violin announces the theme, which the piano eventually echoes, though the cello’s role is again a smaller one. The whole movement has the flavor of a sweet lullaby, and it’s easy to imagine Mozart simply improvising with a smile on his face and pleasing himself enough to write it down. Yet in this longest of the three braces, we sense a preview of the emotional depths that Mozart would continue to discover.

The violin leads the way in the finale, with its charming tune leading to a more emphatic rhythmic sequence in the center before its repeat at the conclusion.

The Trio is not a profound piece, not meant to be explored for great depth. It’s the work of a young man, whose energy, endless imagination, and innate sense of expression would develop through fifteen measly remaining years into true genius.

“Arame” for Percussion

LEONARDO GOROSITO (B. 1983) AND RAFAEL ALBERTO (B. 1987)

Arx Duo commissioned this piece in 2014 as one of their first projects. While working with Leonardo Gorosito and Rafael Alberto on other percussion compositions, the duo was inspired to give them the task of creating a work for a limited set up, which would be shared between the players. The Brazilian Percussion duo DESVIO got to work on the project, and decided to use four tom-toms (common at any school) and a shaker created by whomever plays the piece. The piece explores a number of sounds and techniques, both common and uncommon for the tom-toms, that make this piece a magical experience for the ears. From beating drums to using the pitch of wooden implements, this four-hand piece proves unique, exciting, and intellectual.

“Table Talk” for Percussion

ALYSSA WEINBERG (B. 1988)

“Table Talk” was commissioned by Arx Duo in 2016 with the goal of exploring the concept of percussion “four-hands.” Taking the idea of piano four-hand music and applying it to a shared percussion set-up, Ms. Weinberg was inspired to make one more parallel to a technique common to modern piano repertoire, that of “preparing” the instrument. Composed at the Avaloch Farm Music Institute, this piece for prepared vibraphone evolved as an attempt to stretch the idea of what a vibraphone could sound like, from exploiting the subtle timbral shifts of a single note to masking its identity completely through the combinations of other items placed on top of it.

String Quintet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 111

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

It’s hard for us to imagine how, in his early years, Brahms struggled with writing for strings. He claimed he had written twenty string quartets before being satisfied with one; we’re left with only three, with the first two published when he was forty. It must have been intimidating to follow the immense legacy of Beethoven’s mighty quartets; Brahms may have found it easier to compose his two string sextets, a combination Beethoven never used.

For some reason, Brahms didn’t respond to Schubert’s magnificent quintet, which features two cellos. But he always loved the sound of violas, which spurred the creation of his two string quintets, written for string quartet and additional viola, and often called a viola quintet. The first two movements have the ebullience of a young man’s work, though with Brahms’ rhythmic and harmonic complexity always apparent. When a friend mentioned to him that the first movement reminded him of the Prater, the beautiful park in Vienna, Brahms said, “You’ve guessed it! And the beautiful girls there!”

That opening begins with the upper strings playing a cushion to the cello’s urgent first theme statement with playful leaps, followed by a gorgeous melody stated by the viola, with the strings echoing its majesty. The second violin adds another elegant, delicate melody, giving Brahms three themes to sinuously combine in a series of placid, then forceful statements of mostly the first and third melodies. The original cellists had trouble penetrating the textures of the four higher instruments, and Brahms worked on some alterations to lighten the upper voices, but eventually decided to settle on the original version.

The first viola states the second movement’s theme, repeating the slow, plaintive strain three times, with a central outburst, but always in different transformations. This movement was a favorite of the famous violinist Joseph Joachim, who considered it “one of Brahms’s most beautiful things.” Serenity and gracefulness continue in the third movement, with voices echoing each other, and giving a feeling of searching for a more orchestral sound. The finale changes the mood to an almost-jolly, light-hearted spirit, with themes by the first viola, then the first violin, intertwining with a playful, bouncy feel until the brief, final *czardas*, the then-popular Hungarian dance style.

Brahms wrote his publisher that the G Major Quintet, written in 1890 at the Austrian spa town Bad Ischl, would be his last work. Fortunately for us, his clarinet quintet and magnificent solo piano masterworks still lay ahead.