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4

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2018 ■ 7:30 P.M.

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND FINE ARTS CENTER CONCERT HALL

JASON VIEAUX RETURNS

SPONSORED BY SAM AND LYNDIE ERSAN

BEETHOVEN

Piano Trio in C Minor, Op. 1, No. 3

Allegro con brio
Andante cantabile con Variazioni
Minuetto. Quasi allegro
Finale. Prestissimo

PIANO: NATALIE ZHU
VIOLIN: HYE-JIN KIM
CELLO: JONATHAN KAROLY

PÄRT

“Fratres” for Violin and Piano

VIOLIN: JULIETTE KANG
PIANO: REIKO UCHIDA

BOCCHERINI

Guitar Quintet No. 4 in D Major, G. 448 “Fandango”

Pastorale
Allegro maestoso
Grave assai
Fandango

GUITAR: JASON VIEAUX
VIOLINS: ZACH DEPUE AND ARA GREGORIAN
VIOLA: CHE-HUNG CHEN
CELLO: RAMAN RAMAKRISHNAN

INTERMISSION

MENDELSSOHN

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

Allegro moderato ma con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo
Presto

VIOLINS: AYANO NINOMIYA, ZACH DEPUE, JULIETTE KANG,
AND ARA GREGORIAN
VIOLAS: MELISSA REARDON AND CHE-HUNG CHEN
CELLOS: CLANCY NEWMAN AND RAMAN RAMAKRISHNAN

*Please join us for a post-concert Q&A with
Artistic Director Natalie Zhu and tonight's artists*

Piano Trio in C Minor, Op. 1, No. 3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Beethoven's early renown in Vienna came from his performances as a pianist, and he no doubt played the Opus 1 trios during his early years there. They would have been performed in the homes of noble patrons, since public concerts of chamber music were still almost unknown. His sometime teacher Haydn heard them before departing for England in January 1794 and apparently advised against the publication of the C-minor trio. It has been claimed that Haydn disliked the work or was offended by its daring, but it is more likely that his advice was intended as friendly, and that he felt the public not yet ready for so audacious a piece. It is indeed full of daring in harmonic plan and dynamic gesture. Beethoven, on the other hand, with a somewhat suspicious nature, felt that Haydn was jealous of the new competition and wanted to suppress the work.

The first movement especially reveals the young Turk demanding the attention of his audience with dramatic offbeat sforzandos and ambiguous harmonies, touching on many keys in passing. Already he builds his movement out of themes that emphasize a few rhythmic motives that constantly urge forward movement. The second movement is a set of variations on a quiet lyrical tune in which each phrase is first presented by the piano, then echoed by the strings over the piano. In each of the five variations Beethoven finds different ways of handling the possible sonorities of his three instruments. The fourth variation sings poignantly in the minor, while the fifth seems about to come to an end when a sudden *sforzando* runs right into a coda that summarizes much of what has gone before.

We know from the study of the sketches that Beethoven's first musical ideas for a piece were often rather bland, but that he worked them up into a truly dynamic character that was immediately striking. The menuetto of the present trio is a case in point. The Menuetto was a court dance still very familiar to his audience (though not much danced at this time) when Beethoven teased his listeners' expectations with unexpected pauses and purling runs in the piano part. For this trio, he turned the piano runs upside-down for another cheerful re-use of his material in an unexpected way.

From the first movement of this piece, Beethoven demonstrates his particular feeling for the key of C minor and his ability to create large harmonic structures with a strong sense of momentum. The finale, too, already has a bit of the driven, intense quality that we know so well from the Fifth Symphony, in the same key. Here, though, his drama is employed in the drawing room as a surprising outburst in polite society. With this work, written while he was still in his early twenties, Beethoven began to attract the notice of the musical public, and he never again lost its attention.

“Fratres” for Violin and Piano

ARVO PÄRT (B. 1935)

Until the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, the little country of Estonia had been under Soviet domination since 1940, ending the short-lived Republic of Estonia established at the end of World War I. Thousands of Estonians emigrated during the war and after, principally to the United States and Canada, as well as to Sweden and elsewhere. Many of them were creative artists who kept their culture alive in self-exile. A more recent emigré who made a considerable splash in the west is Arvo Pärt, born in Estonia during the last years of the

republic. He was educated at the conservatory in Tallinn, graduating in 1963. Already at that time he had been working for some years as a sound director for Estonia radio.

Pärt's early work showed the expected influence of Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but he broadened his stylistic range and scope with two award-winning large-scale works composed while still in conservatory: the children's cantata *Meie aed* (“Our Garden”) and the oratorio *Maailma samm* (“Stride of the World”). He became the first Estonian composer to use the twelve-tone technique (*Necrology*, 1959), then not allowed in countries of the Soviet bloc. He was awarded official prizes for some works, and attacked for others, particularly the *Credo* for piano, chorus, and orchestra, which was banned because it contained the text, “I believe in Jesus Christ.” He composed widely in orchestral, vocal, and chamber forms, his early works often employing serial organization of pitch and rhythm, as well as collage effects.

Pärt's early twelve-tone phase passed into a long period of artistic silence, during which he undertook profound study of Franco-Flemish choral music of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, from Machaut to Josquin. He delved into the ancient liturgical chants, and these unleashed a deep mystical strain in him. (He was by no means the only composer, during the last decade or so of the Soviet hegemony in eastern Europe, to revive artistic mysticism and a religious bent.) In the Third Symphony of 1971 he revived old polyphonic forms and ideas from Gregorian chant. By 1976, Pärt's studies led to his rediscovery of the triad and the possibilities of extreme simplicity. Soon after, he and his family emigrated to Vienna, then moved to Berlin. During the 1980s he produced a growing body of music with liturgical connections.

“Fratres” (the Latin title means “brethren”) is a work to which Pärt has returned a number of times, creating more than a half-dozen versions for different instrumental combinations since 1977. The original version was for ten instruments (five winds and five strings). On the small end of the scale, there are versions for either violin or cello with piano. At the large end, the most recent version calls for orchestral strings plus percussion.

All of the versions have in common a feeling of timelessness created by a basically slow tempo and the slow mathematical rotation of ideas over a sustained open fifth, which itself evokes an antiquity of mysticism in an age of belief. Over this fifth, a hymnlike theme returns a number of times, transposed downward by a minor third or a major third each time, which produces an increasingly rich sonority. The continuity of the sound and the suggestion of chant in the open fifths seems to explain the title's reference to the Medieval monks, whose lives were surrounded and shaped, in part, by the continuous singing of liturgical melodies.

Guitar Quintet No. 4 in D Major, G. 448 “Fandango”

LUIGI BOCCHERINI (1743–1805)

Boccherini was essentially a composer of chamber music, not only in the sense that he wrote more of it than any other kind of music, but also in the sense that it suited his musical approach better. He was a master of elegant detail and not one for the grand style, the long line. Moreover, his life — spent largely in Spain, out of the main European circuit of musical development — almost guaranteed that his music would develop along its own independent course. He wrote more than 100 string quintets, nearly as many string quartets, and yet again as many quintets with four strings and one other instrument.

Twelve of Boccherini's quintets call for guitar, two violins, viola, and cello; these are all arrangements of works originally composed for other instruments, and sometimes they are

pastiches of movements drawn from several earlier works. In making these arrangements, Boccherini implicitly emphasized the contrasting musical worlds of the guitar and the violin family. The guitar, always plucked, and easily capable of producing full harmony, but not of sustaining sound, was an instrument more often associated with popular music-making, even though there was a great deal of interest in it on the part of a number of composers during the decades on either side of 1800. The violin family (of which the string quartet is the classic exemplar) is almost always played with the bow, though it can be plucked, and thus produces a sustained lyrical line beyond the power of the guitar. Boccherini's guitar quintets play with this dichotomy between the participants in delightful ways.

The Quintet in D moves almost systematically from what one might call an elevated, classical style in the opening movement to a lively popular musical style at the close. The quintet begins with a Pastorale that is considerably more sedate, even perhaps more somber than that of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, for example, though it employs all the musical devices that traditionally suggest a carefree country life of shepherds — the lilting rhythm, the long-held pedal-point in the bass, evocative of a shepherd's bagpipe.

The second movement seems to be intent on becoming a majestic march, but as it continues, Boccherini begins playfully creating new and varied textures, particularly for the part that he himself no doubt played — he was a virtuoso cellist.

The finale opens soberly enough, with an extended slow section, mostly preparation for the explosion of the Fandango to follow. Here Boccherini's years of residence in Madrid bear fruit in an astonishing evocation of Spanish gypsies in music that seems bent on capturing the listener with its long stretches that simply alternate two chords with wild decorations in one part or another (did Philip Glass ever hear this piece?), and finally culminating in a surprise that must not be described here so as not to ruin the effect. Boccherini's score covers far more ground than perhaps any chamber music of the 18th century: from the sedate garden shepherdesses in the pretend world of a Versailles to the raucous taverns of Madrid.

Octet in E-flat Major, Op. 20

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

Was there ever so precocious a musical composition as the Mendelssohn Octet? Certainly, Mozart was younger when he started composing, and Schubert was no slouch either, but as brilliantly talented as they were, neither of them had by his 16th year achieved anything as fresh and original as this Octet, composed in 1825. Ludwig Spohr had already written four estimable and well-known works for the same instrumentation, but they usually treated the collection of instruments as two antiphonal string quartets, echoing and re-echoing to the point of stultification. Mendelssohn virtually created a new medium by fusing the two quartets into a single large ensemble that combined the instruments in every possible permutation, thereby producing a vibrancy of color hitherto unknown and rarely matched since. At times the Octet seems about to turn into a small symphony for string orchestra — Mendelssohn already had a dozen of these under his belt, which explains the fluent writing for the string ensemble — but then it breaks up into smaller motives treated contrapuntally and retains the character of pure chamber music.

Mendelssohn addressed the symphonic quality of much of the score quite frankly in his instructions to performers: *This Octet must be played by all the instruments in the symphonic*

orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasized than is usual with pieces of this character.

His remarks may allude to an important change in the character and locale of chamber music performances that was beginning to take place at that time. No longer was chamber music written and performed solely for the private entertainment of the performers or at best a small audience within the family circle. Rather, composers like Beethoven had written works of such technical difficulty that few amateur musicians could do them justice, and they began to be performed before an audience as a public event. If the difficulty of the music in part motivated this trend, the change of venue in performance affected later chamber works by inviting the grand gesture, the overtly dramatic quality, and (as Mendelssohn specified in his instructions), the playing up of the dynamics of a piece as one means of projecting it to a larger audience than might have been expected a few decades earlier.

A “public” gesture opens the Octet: the first violin soars above a curtain of symphonic tremolos and syncopated chords, rather like the start of the Violin Concerto written nearly 20 years later. This violin part was, no doubt, intended for the dedicatee, Eduard Rietz, Mendelssohn's friend and violin teacher. Compositions by young artists tend toward the prolix, but one of the marvels of this piece is its remarkable taut cohesiveness. In the first movement, a sonata form, the violinist's opening idea links phrases almost throughout; the lively staccato sixteenth-note figure arrives soon after, sounding like a brief transitional device, but it recurs frequently and grows in importance; the lyrical secondary theme grows naturally out of a rhythmic motive that first appeared as foil to the sixteenth-note figure; and so it goes. Mendelssohn delights us constantly with new treatments of familiar ideas.

The slow movement, a far-reaching harmonic adventure, begins with a short phrase in the lower strings in C minor, answered immediately in D-flat by the four violins. This precipitates an extended passage *around* the home key with a chromaticism that was advanced for its time, though it never becomes an end in itself.

The *scherzo* has always been the most popular movement of the Octet — to such an extent that Mendelssohn later arranged it for orchestra (with added wind parts) and used it as a substitute third movement for his First Symphony when he conducted it in London in 1829; at that performance, the audience demanded an immediate encore. The headlong rush of pianissimo activities makes it hard to concentrate on details, but we have the statement by the composer's sister Fanny that the movement was inspired by some lines from Goethe's Walpurgis Night episode in *Faust*, a scene of transient visions compounded of clouds and mist, insubstantial and evanescent, appearing and vanishing in an instant.

The finale is a jovial and thoroughly unacademic fugue formed of brilliant contrapuntal technique and musical humor. The light touch with which different thematic ideas are combined and reworked arouses awe along with delight, as even the heavy tread of the fortissimo unison march that follows the opening fugato is lightened later to a textural jest, with each of its individual repeated notes assigned to a different one of the four violins. Throughout his score, the boy Mendelssohn demonstrated his complete mastery of both chamber and symphonic writing for strings, his familiarity with the great masters of the preceding generation, and his own burgeoning originality.