

- July 27 -

PROGRAM

Sonata No. 2 for Horn and String Quartet (1805)
Largo
Allegro moderato

Luigi Cherubini
(1760-1842)

David Jolley, horn
Nancy Bean, violin
Cyrus Beroukhim, violin
Catherine Beeson, viola
Lloyd Smith, cello

String Quartet in F Major (1902-03)
Modéré – Très doux
Asssez vif – Très rythmé
Très lent
Vif et agité

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Cyrus Beroukhim, violin
Nancy Bean, violin
Catherine Beeson, viola
Lloyd Smith, cello

INTERMISSION

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op. 30 (1895)
Introduction: Adagio mesto
Scherzo: Presto
Largo
Finale: Allegro vivace

Sergei Taneyev
(1856-1915)

Nancy Bean, violin
Cyrus Beroukhim, violin
Catherine Beeson, viola
Lloyd Smith, cello
Marcantonio Barone, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

LUIGI CHERUBINI (1760-1842): Sonata No. 2 for Horn and String Quartet (1805)

Born in Florence in 1760, Luigi Cherubini was much admired by the composers of his day. Beethoven himself considered him the greatest of his contemporaries, and admired Cherubini's polyphonic virtuosity and his truly Romantic sense of drama. Cherubini's most significant compositions are operas and sacred music. In fact, it was the psychological depth of his opera "Medée," based on the harrowing tragedy by Euripides that made him famous. His profound Requiem in D minor, first performed in 1836, was also played at his funeral in 1842, according to his wishes.

There is nothing overtly sacred or profound in his second horn sonata, yet drama there certainly is. The quaint piece, barely seven minutes long, is one of the most technically demanding of the horn repertoire. It is the second and more frequently played of the two sonatas Cherubini dedicated to hornist Frédéric Duvernoy. It is a one-movement piece in two sections. First comes a Largo that begins with a long, very low horn note with accompaniment that suggests optimism, yet soon becomes melancholy. The horn enters again with an operatic recitative that stretches into a lively melody, despite its slow tempo.

All this leads into a bouncy Allegro moderato that requires the soloist to pop out short notes almost continually. In addition to the lip trills, the work has several cadenza-like passages that require excellent flexibility and attention to phrasing. In addition, the light, classical style required is often difficult to achieve. The brevity of the piece is deceptive – this is an extremely taxing work that requires both refined strength and control.

– Steve Siegel

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937): String Quartet (1902-03)

While Ravel is usually paired with Debussy as one of the leaders of French Impressionism, he is more accurately characterized as a post-impressionist. He is related to Debussy much as Cézanne is related to Monet. He was wary lest impressionism would end up in a lack of clarity and degenerate into formlessness.

The String Quartet, dedicated to his teacher, Gabriel Fauré, was written while he was still a student but is, nevertheless, regarded as a model of its kind. However, only a few of his contemporaries liked it. In fact, it eliminated him from competing for the coveted Prix de Rome. Debussy was among the few admirers. When Ravel decided to revise the last movement, Debussy wrote to him, "In the name of all the gods of music and for my sake, don't alter anything you have written."

Ravel used traditional formal patterns to unify the quartet. Allusions to old practices are present as e.g., the use of a melody in one of the old church modes (1st movement, 2nd tonal group, Phrygian). Thematic logic is evident. The last two movements quote from the first (Cyclic treatment). Yet, while this is going on, Ravel abandons traditional harmonic treatment. The first movement is a sonata form, the second a vibrant scherzo, the third is lyrical while the last alternates between introspection and agitation.

Ravel's music relies little on the gravitational unifying pull of key. While using some of the same harmonic practices as Debussy, his perfectly lucid formal structures place him well apart from his older contemporary.

Ravel's biographer, Armand Machebey comments, "What captivates in this work is not the originality of form but the presentation: there are no disturbing patches of banality or emptiness; everywhere imagination and richness of ideas are in control, with the perfect balance of proportion, purity and transparency of sound, such as Ravel attained elsewhere in his piano work, Jeux d'eau."

– Hoyle Carpenter

SERGEI TANEYEV: Piano Quintet in G Minor, Op. 30 (1911)

In Russian concert halls, one always finds a bust of Sergei Taneyev alongside those of Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. He was one of Russia's greatest composers and pianists of the early 20th century, and one of its greatest teachers. Yet outside of his homeland, he is perhaps the least known of any great Russian musical artist from the period. Born in 1856 in Vladimir, Russia, Taneyev graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1875, the first student to win a gold medal both in composition and performance. Although a brilliant pianist, he opted for a career as a composer and teacher. He died in Zvenigorod, Russia, in 1915.

Taneyev's G Minor Piano Quintet is a colossal, monumental work, lasting nearly 50 minutes. Its idiom is late Romantic, and is as passionate as anything from the pen of, say, Brahms or César Franck. The first movement, itself twenty minutes long, is somber and anguished in its opening, yet of varied texture and with moments of relief. It owes much of its dark mood to the piano, with a pounding bass line in the coda as the strings cry out. The march-like scherzo is much lighter in mood, with a sparkling percussive nature that gradually becomes slower and more lyrical.

The third movement, a Largo, is essentially a passacaglia with variations. Possibly the first passacaglia in Russian music, its main theme is a tragic tone poem supported by an unvarying ostinato in the cello. Above this ground, Taneyev produces a constantly changing set of images and emotional contrasts.

The huge finale features a vivid theme in jagged rhythms and another with a soaring lyrical line. A quiet passage follows, giving us - and the musicians - a breather before returning to energetic, restless modulations suggesting a search for a conclusion. That finally arrives in a grandiose climax, topped off by a dramatic tintinnabulating affirmation led by the piano.

– Steve Siegel