

JULY 3, 2024

PRE-CONCERT RECITAL

Tanz Suite, Sz. 77

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born: 1881

Died: 1945

Composed: 1925

This pre-concert concert consists of four dances, all of them transcribed for piano from their original form. Bartók composed his Dance Suite for orchestra in 1923—it consists of five dances and a brilliant finale. While all these dances are his own creation, Bartók made clear that their rhythms and shapes came from his researches into Hungarian, Romanian, and Arabic music. Bartók himself made the transcription for piano in 1925.

The Miller's Dance

MANUEL DE FALLA

Born: 1876

Died: 1945

Composed: 1919

Manuel de Falla's ballet *The Three-Cornered Hat* (1919) tells a charming story of romance, intrigue, and comedy. *The Miller's Dance* comes from the second half of the ballet during a party on a warm summer evening in Andalusia. It is a farucca, an ancient dance of vagabond origin. This one is full of rhythmic energy, and the miller dances it to demonstrate his strength.

Tango

ISAAC ALBÉNIZ (ARR. GODOWSKY)

Born: 1860

Died: 1909

Composed: 1890 (arr. in 1921)

Isaac Albeniz's brief *Tango* was originally composed as the second of the eight piano pieces that make up his *Espana*. At this concert it is heard in an arrangement for piano made by pianist Leopold Godowsky. Albeniz's original *Tango* was a sultry little dance, but Godowsky expands it ingeniously, enriching textures, making it more complex rhythmically, and adding colors Albeniz never dreamed of.

Ritual Fire Dance

MANUEL DE FALLA

Born: 1876

Died: 1945

Composed: 1919

Falla's ballet *El Amor Brujo* ("Enchanted Love") tells a story of love and magic. The young vagabond woman Candelas falls in love with Carmelo, but they are haunted by the ghost of her former lover, who thwarts their efforts to exchange "the magic kiss" that will symbolize their love. Now Candelas attempts to exorcise the demon through a dance. Though the *Ritual Fire Dance* fails to chase off the dissolute ghost, it has become famous on its own (it was one of Arthur Rubinstein's favorite encore pieces).

CONCERT

Cello Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op. 102, No. 1

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born: 1770

Died: 1827

Composed: 1815

I. Andante — Allegro vivace

II. Adagio — Tempo d'Andante — Allegro vivace

Beethoven composed the two cello sonatas of his Opus 102 during the summer of 1815. At age 44, he was approaching a critical point in his career. The previous year had seen the Congress of Vienna and Beethoven's triumph before the assembled diplomats with his musically-inferior *Wellington's Victory*. Though financially profitable, such music illustrated dramatically the end of what has been called his "Heroic Style," and now Beethoven plunged into a period of uncertainty. This uncertainty was marked by a sharp decrease in productivity, and over the next five years Beethoven would write very little music. When Beethoven's creative energies returned in full force—in about 1820—he had developed an entirely new style.

When it finally arrived, however, that late style was not a complete surprise, for there had been hints of new directions in the music Beethoven was writing before his creative energies diminished, certainly in the two cellos sonatas composed during the summer of 1815. The Opus 102 sonatas were Beethoven's last for any instrument except piano, and already in this music he was experimenting with sonata form and moving away

from the “Heroic Style” of the previous decade.

The first movement of the Sonata in C Major opens with a slow introduction, and Beethoven’s instructions to both performers are crucial. The cello’s entrance is marked *teneramente* (“tenderly”) and *dolce cantabile*; Beethoven stresses to the pianist *dolce*, and throughout the introduction the marking is *sempre dolce*. This lyric prelude gives way to a vigorous *Allegro vivace* full of dotted rhythms and scurrying triplets.

Beethoven had a great deal of trouble writing slow movements for cello, and in the present sonata the *Adagio* is not a true movement. Only nine measures long, it is merely a florid interlude between the fast outer movements. Of particular interest, though, is the transition between this *Adagio* and the finale, for here Beethoven brings back the gentle theme of the very beginning, and this intimate melody now serves to introduce the blistering *Allegro vivace* that closes the sonata.

Piano Trio in F-sharp minor ARNO BABAJANIAN

Born: 1921

Died: 1983

Composed: 1952

- I. Largo — *Allegro espressivo*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Allegro vivace*

Armenian composer Arno Babajanian’s musical talent was evident very early: he entered the music conservatory in his native city of Yerevan at age seven. After World War II, he went to Moscow, where he trained as both composer and pianist (Shostakovich in particular admired his playing). Babajanian returned to Yerevan to teach at the conservatory from 1950 to 1956 and then devoted himself to composition.

Babajanian’s most famous work is his Piano Trio in F-sharp minor, composed in 1952, shortly after his return to Yerevan. Though it appears to quote no Armenian folksongs, the Trio—with its dramatic expression and rhythmic complexities—is full of that idiom. This is extremely intense music, and it can make a huge and imposing sound, with the strings often in octaves and with a powerful part for the piano. Babajanian was the pianist at the premiere, and the violinist was David Oistrakh, to whom the Trio is dedicated.

The Trio opens with a slow introduction, subdued in

atmosphere and full of a gathering strength. This *Largo* also introduces some of the rhythmic turns that will play so prominent a role over the course of the entire work. The music leaps ahead at the *Allegro espressivo* as the cello sings a long melody that is quickly taken up by the violin, which soars high into its upper register. Piano alone has the second subject, though the movement is dominated by the sound of the stringed instruments, which have the soaring, dramatic extension of these opening ideas. The music rises to a climax marked *Maestoso* (“majestic”), before slowing for a slow recall of the opening *Largo*. Once again, the music boils up to a *Maestoso*, then concludes on an enigmatic *pizzicato* stroke.

The *Andante* begins with an extended solo for the violin over chordal accompaniment from the piano. The violin’s ornate theme, set very high on its E-string, is full of twists and turns that give this music some of its exotic character. Once again, the piano has the second subject before the return of the opening material and a conclusion marked triple piano.

The *Allegro vivace* finale is notable for its brilliance—and for its difficulty. Set in the asymmetric meter of 5/8, the music rushes ahead on some spiky staccato writing for all three instruments. Quickly Babajanian is shifting meters: the fundamental pulse may be 5/8, but soon he is inserting extra measures in 6/8, 4/8, 3/8 and other meters, and on these shifting rhythms the music tumbles forward energetically. The furious energy of the opening always returns, and eventually the movement rises to another *Maestoso* climax. Babajanian recalls themes from the first two movements, and the Trio then powers its way to a superheated conclusion.

String Quintet No. 4 in G minor, K. 516 WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: 1756

Died: 1791

Composed: 1787

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Menuetto. Allegretto*
- III. *Adagio ma non troppo*
- IV. *Adagio — Allegro*

The Quintet in G minor, completed on May 16, 1787, is not just one of Mozart’s finest works—it is one of the greatest pieces of chamber music ever written. In the darkness of its character, the range of its moods, and the compression of the writing, it is often compared to another of Mozart’s great works in G minor, the Symphony No. 40, composed the following year. One

of the distinguishing technical features of the quintet is Mozart's constant chromatic writing, and in particular the falling chromatic lines of much of the melodic material give the music extraordinary emotional power.

The dark, grieving opening theme of the Allegro, establishes a fundamental shape that will give form to the entire movement, climbing and quickly falling back. Mozart's contrasts of sound at the very beginning are remarkable: the opening statement is by the two violins and viola as the second viola and cello sit silent. Within seconds, Mozart repeats the opening theme, but now the violins remain silent as the first viola sings above the accompaniment of the second viola and cello. In just seventeen measures Mozart has created two completely different sound-worlds—a high statement and a repetition by the lower instruments—and that attention to contrasts of sonority will mark the entire quintet. The rising-and-falling melodic motion that shaped the opening theme also gives form to the second subject, again introduced by the first violin. There is something urgent, almost impetuous, about this music: it continues to press forward into darkness, and the movement concludes on two violent chords that remain firmly in G minor.

The cheerful rhythmic spring and open spirit that mark most minuets is utterly absent in this Menuetto, and Mozart evades expectations in many ways. This "minuet" powers forward implacably, and Mozart surprises us by placing violent, explosive attacks on the weak—the third-beat of some of his measures. The trio section lets in a brief brush of sunlight, but—in another surprise—Mozart bases this trio on the closing theme of the minuet, now reshaped and transformed into warm G Major.

The Adagio ma non troppo plunges us into a different world entirely, so unexpected is its sound. Mozart mutes the five instruments throughout this movement, which is remarkable for the variety of its moods as well as its rich sonority. Each of its three themes is radically different, and each generates its own emotional world: the stately hymn-like opening gives way to a grieving second subject (once again based on falling chromatic lines), and this in turn is displaced by an the oddly-dancing—almost carefree—third idea.

Something extraordinary happens at the beginning of the finale: Mozart has just come off a long Adagio, and now he gives us another one. The mutes come off, but we are back in G minor and the mood remains intense as the first violin arches high and falls back over quietly-throbbing accompaniment. In a sense, this three-minute introduction becomes the emotional crest of the entire quintet, revisiting a darkness already expressed in many

ways. And then a complete surprise: it suddenly gives way to a good-natured rondo-finale in G Major, based on a buoyant, dancing theme in 6/8. Many have found this cheerful finale anticlimactic after what has gone before, and Mozart himself was aware of this problem: he made sketches for a finale that remained in G minor, but discarded them. Perhaps he was right to do so. Sustaining the mood that he had established to this point would have brought this quintet to its conclusion in utter darkness, and Mozart was finally unwilling to do that. We should note that even in the midst of this gaiety, the two principal themes of this finale bear some relation to their counterparts in the first movement—Mozart has taken those dark themes and made them dance, reinforcing one more time the sense of compressed intensity that informs the entire quintet.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger