

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston

Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2019-2020 chamber music season

Chamber series 3: whose fragments we inherit

Saturday, February 29, 2020, 8 PM, First Church in Boston

Sunday, March 1, 2020, 4 PM, First Church in Boston

Program:

Felix Mendelssohn, Variations Concertantes in D Major for cello & piano, Op. 17

Steven Stucky, Serenade for Wind Quintet

Franz Joseph Haydn, Piano Trio No. 39 in G Major Hob. XV:25 “Gypsy”

Alfred Schnittke, *Moz-Art* for two violins

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581

Program notes by Gabriel Langfur

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was born in Hamburg, Germany to an exceptionally cultured and affluent family. His grandfather Moses Mendelssohn was a prominent Enlightenment philosopher, and his intellectual influence was strong in the household. Of Jewish descent, the family converted to Christianity while Felix was a child – not so much to avoid prejudice as to better match their religious beliefs with their philosophical leanings. Felix received an outstanding general education in addition to musical tutelage, and his broad and cultured background was surely an impetus for his many varied contributions to musical culture. He essentially defined the role of the modern conductor while raising the standards of orchestral performance throughout Europe, and was single-handedly responsible for the reintroduction of the music of J.S. Bach in the 19th century. In 1843, he founded the Leipzig Conservatory, forming the model for the modern conservatory as well. He organized the faculty into specialized departments and sought out the most outstanding scholars and performing artists to teach their instruments and other subjects, including Robert and Clara Schumann for composition, score-reading and piano. All the while, Mendelssohn composed steadily, in his personal style, particularly disciplined on Classical models of form, harmony and counterpoint. He maintained a Classical elegance at a time of extreme Romantic excess (he had a particular distaste for the music of Berlioz), but his music has never sounded archaic or unoriginal. He died of a brain hemorrhage just three months before his 39th birthday, in a state of acute mourning for the tragic death of his beloved sister Fanny.

Felix’s younger brother Paul, though he chose to follow their father into the banking business, was a highly accomplished cellist, and the Variations Concertantes, Op. 17, was composed for the siblings to play together. The first performance took place in London in April of 1829 when Felix had just turned twenty and Paul was only sixteen. Following the lead of Beethoven, who had emancipated the cello from an exclusively supporting role reinforcing the bass notes of the piano, Mendelssohn’s tag-team construction of variations alternates which instrument takes the lead, showcasing the virtuosic abilities of both performers.

Steven Stucky (1949-2016) was born in Hutchinson, Kansas and moved with his family to Abilene, Texas when he was nine. He studied the viola, composition, and conducting as a teenager, and attended Baylor and Cornell Universities. The recipient of a Pulitzer Prize in 2005 for his Second Concerto for Orchestra, Stucky received commissions from many of the major orchestras in the United States, and from 1988 until 2009 was composer in residence with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the longest such appointment with an American orchestra. He worked closely with music director Esa-Pekka Salonen not only on his own music but on contemporary music programming in general, the awarding of commissions, educational projects for school children, and programming for nontraditional audiences. Stucky taught at Cornell University from 1980 until 2014, when he joined the faculty of the Juilliard School. In addition to composing and teaching, he was a world-renowned scholar on the music of Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski, and also maintained a career as a conductor, appearing frequently with the LA Philharmonic New Music Group and Ensemble X, which he co-founded in 1997. He passed away in 2016 after a brief battle with an aggressive form of brain cancer.

Composer's program note:

The Serenade for Wind Quintet was commissioned by and is dedicated to The Pennsylvania Quintet, in residence at Penn State University. The request from this ensemble for a new composition gave me a welcome opportunity to return to chamber music for the first time since 1985 (*Boston Fancies*), after a period of five years devoted exclusively to the symphony orchestra. Indeed, I was interested in part precisely because I knew that in a work for only five players there would be no easy refuge in the elaborate textures which an orchestral composer can find habit-forming.

The work is laid out as a suite of five short, aphoristic pieces, each of them a vividly colored "musical moment." The movements are not related; each contrasts strongly with the next. The sound world of these pieces depends above all on fresh, unexpected sonorities combining the individual timbres of the five instruments and on the use of extreme registers, especially very low flute and very high bassoon. (On the other hand, there are no extended techniques such as multiphonics or key clicks, only the traditional playing methods.)

Although "Serenade" originally described music to be played outdoors for evening entertainment, the term long ago detached itself from these origins, and such composers as Mozart, Brahms, and Schoenberg have written serious concert works under this title. Likewise my Serenade—though of course I hope it will entertain and delight the ear—is a serious work in which the first four movements, however slight, are musically concentrated. Only the last movement, despite its moments of bluster, turns playful. The work was sketched mostly in Los Angeles in fall 1989, and the score was completed in Ithaca, New York, in July and August 1990. The first performance took place at Penn State University on 10 October 1990.

Franz Joseph Haydn's long life (1732-1809) spanned the late Austrian Baroque, the Classical

period of the late 18th century, and the beginning of the Romantic era in the 19th. He was born while Johann Sebastian Bach was still alive and died during the ascendancy of Beethoven. Not only did Haydn's music, along with Mozart's, define what we call the Classical (with a capital C) Era in music, the arc of his career began in the traditional patronage system of the Baroque and ended with international renown, helping to establish the Romantic ideal of an independent artist.

Unlike his younger friend and colleague, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Haydn was not celebrated as a child prodigy, though in different circumstances he might have been. His father was a master wheelwright and his mother had been a cook before marriage, but both were enthusiastic amateur musicians and all three of their sons became professionals. Joseph's early talents were exceptional, with an uncanny musical memory and affinity for the violin and keyboard. He was offered a choir school education in Vienna, which included a thorough non-musical education as well as singing, violin, and harpsichord. As was typical, Haydn left the choir school when his voice broke and spent more than a decade scraping by as a freelance musician in much the same way freelance musicians do now: performing casual jobs, teaching lessons, etc. In 1753 he was fortunate to meet the Italian opera composer and singing teacher Nicola Porpora and serve as his assistant. Porpora had him study counterpoint and harmony from the traditional texts, Mattheson and Fux, in order to develop the skills he would need to establish a reputation as a composer.

In 1761 Haydn was employed by the Esterházy, the most wealthy and influential family of the Hungarian nobility. Initially his position was vice-Kapellmeister in deference to the aging Kapellmeister Gregor Joseph Werner, but Haydn was immediately put in charge of nearly all aspects of the court's musical activities. He oversaw an ensemble of 13-15 musicians that provided music for many different kinds of events, and he was expected to compose music at the request of the family patriarch. Beginning in 1762 that was Nicolaus Esterházy, an enthusiastic musician himself who primarily played the baryton, a relative of the viol that was both plucked and bowed, which is why Haydn wrote so many trios including the otherwise obscure instrument. The two men became personally close by performing together, which helped Haydn tremendously in navigating the waters of palace intrigue, as in the event of the court's flutist, Franz Sigl, accidentally burning down a house. Haydn was able to reduce Sigl's punishment to simply being dismissed and was later able to rehire him.

In 1766 Werner passed away, leaving Haydn as sole Kapellmeister, a position he would hold at least in name for the rest of his life. Over the course of Haydn's employment by the Esterházy he of course had to comply with their requests, but both his compensation and his ensemble grew as Nicolaus became more interested in opera and larger symphonies. The steady demand for new works, as well as the excellent, hand-picked professional ensemble at his disposal – not to mention his truly appreciative patron – can't be discounted in Haydn's development as a composer.

Haydn's initial contractual obligation to provide music only for the court and nobody else loosened over time, and in 1779 he began a lucrative side career of publishing instrumental works. Music printing and publishing for a larger audience was a new development, and the very idea of copyright was in its infancy. Haydn took advantage of every opportunity to maximize his income, even engaging in what would now be considered fraud as he sold multiple publishing

rights for the same piece to publishers in different countries, even as he was selling individual subscriptions to those same pieces privately. In the years to come, he was generous with the practical knowledge he amassed regarding making a living as a composer independent of patronage, giving invaluable advice to Beethoven and others. Even as he prospered under the patronage system, Haydn paved the way for the next generation of composers to do their work more independently of the demands of the church and the nobility.

At the same time, he transformed his excellent reputation into genuine international popularity, publishing a steady stream of instrumental music and songs for performance in the home and receiving commissions for symphonies and other larger works to be performed in Paris and London. This became extremely important when Nicolaus Esterházy died in 1790; his son Anton disbanded the court ensemble and ceased musical activities immediately. Haydn was still officially employed by the family but with a reduced salary and no official ongoing duties, and he also received a stipend from Nicolaus' estate.

Johann Peter Salomon, a German-born concert producer living in London, invited Haydn there right away, with a contract for the 1791 season including an opera, six symphonies, some 20 other works, publishing rights, and concerts. He spent most of his time in London for the next four years, adding significantly to both his fame and his wealth.

From 1795 on, Haydn lived in Vienna, known widely by his nickname "Papa Haydn," owing to his advancing age and the universal acclaim he held as the greatest living composer. For a time he continued to compose some instrumental works, chiefly string quartets, but most of his energy was taken up by sacred choral works, including the two famous cantatas *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. Following several years of declining health, he passed away on May 31st, 1809. The war prevented a large funeral, but a memorial service – at which Mozart's Requiem was performed – was held two weeks later.

During Haydn's first visit to London he received a letter from a wealthy 40-year-old widow named Rebecca Schroeter, asking for music lessons. Over time their relationship became very close, and her letters to him indicated increasing affection. When he sent copies to his biographer, he described them as "letters from an English widow in London who loved me. Though I was 60 years old, she was still loving and amiable, and in all likelihood I would have married her if I had been single."

His Piano Trio No. 39 was one of three dedicated to her, composed during his second London stay. The nickname "Gypsy" is derived from the final movement, a rousing Rondo inspired by the music of Hungarian Gypsies he had heard in Vienna. Haydn was the first major German-speaking composer to appropriate Gypsy music, and he was far from the last, with Brahms making it a central part of his language.

For the most part, Haydn followed the conventions of the time for the piano trio, which held the piano in the leading role; in fact, he and his publishers called them "sonatas for pianoforte with violin and cello accompaniment," but while the cello was still almost exclusively relegated to the role of doubling the piano's bass line, he used the violin in an increasingly independent role. In the "Gypsy" Trio, the violin takes the lead at several key points. In addition, the piano trio genre

remained “chamber music” in the Classical sense, meaning that it was not intended for public performance but rather for enjoyment at home by music-loving amateurs. The amateurs in Haydn’s circle, however, were generally quite sophisticated musicians, and he was free to write imaginative, always delightful, even virtuosic, music for them.

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) was born in the Soviet Union in the German-speaking city of Engels, on the Volga River. In 1946, his family moved to Vienna, where he began to study music and “a certain Mozart-Schubert sound” ingrained itself in his ear. Two years later, his family again relocated to Moscow, where his musical studies continued. He eventually joined the faculty of the Moscow Conservatory, teaching composition, counterpoint and instrumentation. Several years of film scoring followed and became, in fact, the main source of Schnittke’s income because of the official proscription of performances of his concert music. However, Schnittke’s movie scores are enormously imaginative and indeed wholly integrated into the cinematography. His music began to come to the attention of the West around the mid-seventies, with steadily increasing international acclaim. He relocated to Hamburg in 1990, and, after a series of strokes, died there in 1998. Schnittke’s music is most often characterized using the term polystylistic, which describes the incredible fluency with which he was able to deploy various trends in 20th century music, intertwining them for music of especially direct emotional impact.

Composed in 1976, *Moz-Art* for two violins is the first of a series of four “Moz-Art” pieces based on an unfinished pantomime by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart titled *Pantalon und Columbine*. The other three are *Moz-Art a la Haydn* (1977) for two violins and small string orchestra, *Moz-Art* (1980) for oboe, harpsichord, harp, violin, cello and double bass, and *Moz-Art a la Mozart* (1990), for eight flutes and harp. Only the first violin part of the original piece exists, and Schnittke uses melodic fragments from it, transforming them and superimposing them together and with other snippets of music for humorous, even grotesque effects. The four “Moz-Art” pieces are perfect examples of Schnittke’s polystylism and direct, sometimes funny, sometimes shocking, mode of communication.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) is a more familiar figure to the general public than most composers, if nothing else from the movie *Amadeus* – exaggerated though it may be. Born in Salzburg, Austria to Leopold Mozart, a well-respected musician himself, he was the most prodigious of child prodigies, coming to the attention of Europe’s musical elite both as a performer and a composer well before his tenth birthday. He of course had to struggle to earn a decent living, serving as concertmaster in the orchestra and then organist for the Archbishop of Salzburg before moving to Vienna, where he eventually attained the position of composer of the Imperial and Royal Chamber. Somehow, even with a busy performing schedule, he managed to write an absolutely staggering amount of music in his short life; his catalog includes 21 stage and opera works, 15 Masses, over 50 symphonies, 25 piano concerti, 12 violin concertos, 27 concert arias, 17 piano sonatas, 26 string quartets, and many other pieces. Mozart died of rheumatic fever just short of his 36th birthday.

Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet was written in 1789 for the great virtuoso Anton Stadler, a close friend and a true pioneer of the instrument. In fact, Stadler performed on a bassett horn – essentially a

clarinet with an extended low register – an instrument he claimed to have invented (though he had a reputation for not being completely honest). At the time, the clarinet was not yet a standard member of the orchestra, and Mozart's advocacy, inspired of course by his friend's artistry, helped bring it into the fold. Stadler was featured prominently in the premiere performances of *La clemenza di Tito*, with obbligato passages in duet with singers in two major arias, and Mozart's final instrumental piece, the Clarinet Concerto, was composed for him.

One of Mozart's most celebrated and well-loved works, the Quintet is arranged in a conventional four-movement structure: sonata form first movement, achingly beautiful Larghetto second movement, a set of dances for the third, and a wonderfully varied and dramatic set of theme and variations for the finale. All five musicians are given ample opportunity to shine, but the star of the show is clearly the clarinet, which is called on for everything from virtuoso fireworks to soulful singing. Mozart and Stadler could not have made a better case for the instrument they both loved and championed.

- *Gabriel Langfur*

Stucky biography and note provided by the composer, edited by Gabriel Langfur

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