

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston

Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2019-2020 chamber music season

Up Close 1: Deborah Boldin, flute; Scott Woolweaver, viola & Franziska Huhn, harp

Sunday, February 9, 2020, 4 PM, Old South Church

Program:

Arthur Foote, *At Dusk* (1920)

Jean-Philippe Rameau, Pièces de clavecin en concerts No. 5 in d minor

Maurice Ravel, Sonatine en Trio for flute, viola & harp

Sofia Gubaidulina, *Garden of Joy and Sorrow*

Claude Debussy, Sonata for flute, viola & harp, L. 137

Program notes by Gabriel Langfur

Salem native **Arthur Foote** (1853-1937) was a prominent figure in Boston's musical culture during his 32-year tenure as organist and choirmaster of the First Unitarian Church in Boston. He studied at New England Conservatory and Harvard, where he received the first Master's degree in music awarded by an American university. Starting with a summer spent at the Bayreuth Festival in 1876, Foote made numerous trips to Europe, where he soaked in the influence of Germanic musical culture. Many of his compositions, which reflect the strong influence of Wagner, were premiered by the Boston Symphony and at chamber music concerts he organized. Foote was active in the Harvard Musical Association for many years, a founding member and president of the American Guild of Organists, published widely-used textbooks in theory and piano pedagogy, and taught piano at New England Conservatory for sixteen years.

Composed in 1920, *At Dusk* is one of several works from this time in which Foote was exploring the sonic revolutions of Debussy. While we don't know for sure that he knew the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp, the transparency and beauty of this particular combination (Foote originally used cello, but viola also works beautifully) is clearly at the service of that goal. This chamber music gem went unpublished for many years until the autograph score was found in the Spaulding Library at New England Conservatory.

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) was the son of Jean Rameau, a well-respected organist in Dijon, France. Jean-Philippe, his brother Claude, sister Catherine, Claude's son Jean-François (who would be immortalized as the eccentric "neveu de Rameau" of Diderot's novel), and Jean-François's half-brother Lazare all gained renown as keyboard players.

For the first part of his career, Rameau worked as an organist in the provinces of France, including succeeding his father at Notre Dame in Dijon, and two appointments at Clermont Cathedral separated by thirteen years. In 1722 he moved permanently to Paris; the initial reason was to supervise the publication of his *Traité de l'harmonie*, which would immediately earn him a considerable reputation as a theorist. The publication of his *Nouveau système de musique*

théorique just four years later put him at the top of the field.

Rameau's quick rise to prominence as a theorist, as well as his reportedly thorny personality, led to a great deal of professional jealousy and a slow road to being as well-respected as a composer. Over time, however, it was inevitable that he would become one of the most important figures in Parisian musical life. He had significant success as a composer of keyboard music and opera, and by 1745 was receiving a royal pension. In his final years, Rameau returned to theoretical writings and teaching.

The *Pièces de clavecin en concerts*, completed in 1741, were intended originally as works for violin, viola da gamba, and harpsichord emphasizing both the virtuosity of individual players and interplay between them so complex that Rameau strongly suggested performing from full scores rather than separate parts. Instead of organizing each of the suites contained in the larger work as a set of dances, as was the custom, Rameau gave the movements titles of varying inspiration. Some are dances, but many commemorate specific people, either contemporary or historical. Some are descriptive ideas such as "L'Agaçante," derived from the French verb "to irritate," and some represent places such as "Le Vézinet" in the countryside outside Paris.

The *Cinquième concert* performed today consists of three portraits. *La Forqueray* honors the viol players Antoine Forqueray (c. 1671-1745) and his son Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (1699-1782). Jean-Baptiste Forqueray had recently remarried – to a harpsichordist – and this may have been their wedding present. *La Cupis* refers to Marie-Anne Cupis (1710-1770), known as "La Camargo," a celebrated dancer and the sister of violinist and composer François Cupis de Camargo. *La Marais* commemorates the virtuoso viol player Marin Marais (1656-1728) or possibly Roland Marais, one of his sons, who had published two viol books in 1735 and 1738.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) came of age in a life of Parisian culture and privilege, though his father was Swiss and his mother Basque. His musical interest was supported from the very beginning, and he entered the Paris Conservatory's preparatory piano department at age 14, winning prizes and admission to the full Conservatory two years later. His career there was difficult, however, and he left without prizes. He returned in 1897 to study composition, finding a sympathetic teacher in Fauré, but was again denied the prizes that would lead to a diploma because of his inability (or unwillingness) to demonstrate mastery of traditional counterpoint.

Like many innovative French composers before him (notably Berlioz), Ravel essentially ignored the criticisms of the reactionary Parisian musical establishment and continued on his path, eventually gaining renown on the merits of his work. When it became clear to the musical public that he should be awarded the *Prix de Rome*, the highest state prize for a French composer, he was denied five years in a row. It soon emerged that all of the finalists were students of Charles-Ferdinand Lenepveu, a member of the jury. The ensuing scandal led to the resignation of the director of the Paris Conservatory and the installation of Fauré, but by then Ravel was officially too old for the award.

Ravel was proudly French, volunteering for service in World War I (his health was not good enough to be a pilot as he hoped, but he was eventually able to serve as a driver), but he never

subscribed to blind nationalism and even refused the *Légion d'Honneur* when it was offered. He also declined membership in an association of French musicians because he could not agree with their aims of elevating French music above all others and boycotting recently composed music from Germany. He believed that musical inspiration should come from all sources: Spanish music is evident in much of his output; he was for a time a close friend of Stravinsky and loved Russian music; he had a thorough knowledge of the Germanic and Austrian traditions; and he shared Debussy's fascination with the Javanese Gamelan and other Eastern music. In 1909 he took a leading role in the formation of the *Société Musicale Indépendante*, dedicated to performing music of interest regardless of nationality, genre, or style.

Ravel's war service was cut short by dysentery in 1916, and his mother – the closest emotional attachment of his life – died suddenly in 1917. He moved away from Paris, to "Le belvedere" in Montfort-l'Amaury, where he would remain for the last two decades of his life. Even though his own creative work slowed during this time, Debussy's passing in 1918 elevated Ravel in the eyes of many to the standing of France's leading musician.

In 1903 Ravel entered a competition for the first movement of a piano sonata, sponsored by an Anglo-French arts magazine called the *Weekly Critical Review*. As the only entrant, Ravel would almost certainly have won (even though his submission was a few measures longer than the published limit), but the magazine went out of business and cancelled the competition. In any case, by 1905 he had added two more movements and published the work under the title *Sonatine*. The great harpist Carlos Salzedo, always on the hunt for repertoire, arranged the work for harp, flute, and cello or viola; Ravel approved of the arrangement enthusiastically.

Sofia Gubaidulina (born 1931) came to the attention of Western audiences in 1985, the first time she was allowed to travel outside the Soviet Union. Originally from the Tatar Republic, she was trained at the Kazan and Moscow Conservatories, and since 1992 has lived in Germany outside Hamburg. Raised in the strictly controlled musical culture of the former Soviet Union, she somehow managed to preserve a strongly personal style. Shostakovich, after hearing her graduation exam at the Moscow Conservatory, told her "I want you to continue along your mistaken path." Along with Schnittke, Denisov, and Silvestrov, she is now seen to be one of the leading representatives of new music from the former Soviet Union. Among her recent compositions are *Light of the End* (2003) for the Boston Symphony; *Feast During a Plague* (2005), jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Pittsburgh Symphony; *In Tempus Praesens* for the Berlin Philharmonic; *Glorious Percussion*, a concerto for five solo percussionists and orchestra premiered in 2008 by Gustavo Dudamel and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra; and *Pilgrims* for violin, double bass, piano, and two percussionists (2015) for Chicago's Contempo Ensemble.

Her music is strongly intuitive, and she admits to working very hard at the intellectual side of composition in order to keep balance in her work. She often finds inspiration for her work in poetic and spiritual, even religious, ideas, and draws energy from the meeting of eastern and western cultures. Much of her recent work also reflects her fascination with ancient principles of proportion. About her style, she notes "To my mind the ideal relationship to tradition and to new compositional techniques is the one in which the artist has mastered both the old and the new,

though in a way which makes it seem that he is taking note of neither the one nor the other. There are composers who construct their works very consciously; I am one of those who ‘cultivate’ them. And for this reason everything I have assimilated forms as it were the roots of a tree, and the work its branches and leaves. One can indeed describe them as being new, but they are leaves nonetheless, and seen in this way they are always traditional and old. Dmitry Shostakovich and Anton Webern have had the greatest influence on my work. Although my music bears no apparent traces of it, these two composers taught me the most important lesson of all: to be myself.”

Composer’s program note:

The Garden of Joy and Sorrow (1980) is a one-movement piece for harp, flute and viola. It was conceived under the strong influence of two directly contradictory literary phenomena: 1) the work “Sayat-Nova” by Iv Oganov (Moscow), about the famous Eastern story-teller and singer, and 2) verses by the 20th century German poet Francisco Tanzer. Vivid Eastern color was counterposed to a typically Western consciousness. But both of these works had significant inner similarities: their contemplativeness and refinement. Such phrases in Iv Oganov – “the ordeal of a flower’s pain,” “...the peal of the singing garden grew...”, “...the revelation of the rose...”, “...the lotus was set aflame by music,” “...the white garden began to ring again with diamond borders...” – impelled me to a concrete aural perception of this garden.

And, on the other hand, all this ecstatic flowering of the garden was expressed naturally in the sum reflections of Tanzer about the world and its wholeness. At the basis of the musical rendering of the form of this piece is the opposition of the bright, major coloration of the sphere of natural harmonics against the expression of the intervals of minor second and minor third.

Wann ist es wirklich aus?
Was ist das wahre Ende?
Alle Grenzen sind
wie it einem Stück Holz
oder einem Schuhabsatz
in die Erde gezogen.

When is it really over?
What is the true ending?
All the borders are like a line drawn
with a stick of wood
or the heel of a shoe
in the sand.

Bis dahin...,
hier ist die Grenze.
Alles das ist künstlich.
Morgen spielen wir
Ein anderes Spiel.

Up to here...,
there’s the borderline.
All this is artificial.
Tomorrow we play
another game.

- from the diary of Francisco Tanzer

- translation by Laurel Fay

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was from a family of Burgundian peasants settled near Paris around 1800. Childhood piano lessons led to admission in the Paris Conservatoire in 1872. His record there was not particularly distinguished, earning him a *premier prix* only in

accompaniment, but his talents for composition became much more apparent outside the academic halls. He was hired in the summer of 1880 by Tchaikovsky's patron, Nadezhda von Meck, to teach her children and play duets. She took him to Florence and Arachon, and then the following two summers to Russia and Vienna. In 1884 he won the *Prix de Rome* and spent the next two years there at the Villa Medici. Debussy continued his cosmopolitan cultural education over the next several years, cultivating friendships with poets – particularly the symbolists – and painters in the Paris cafés, searching out non-Western musical traditions such as the Javanese Gamelan, and visiting Bayreuth in 1888 and 1889. The Wagnerian influence remained strong for the rest of his life, even if it was often manifested in opposition. He never lost admiration for *Parsifal* and *Tristan und Isolde*, and Wagner's general conception of music-drama was central to Debussy's overall aesthetic. The influence of poetry and visual arts may have been even greater than that of Wagner or any other musician, however. Although Debussy has often been given the label Impressionist, his aesthetic is much better described in relationship to symbolism, the short-lived French literary movement characterized by rejection of realism, naturalism and clear-cut forms, and a taste for the esoteric and mysterious.

Debussy's music, of course, achieved much more than simply rejection of previous modes of communication, finding increasingly subtle ways of writing evocative, affecting, moving music. He became the pre-eminent French composer of his time, revolutionizing harmonic language and formal considerations. In a sense, however, the underlying philosophy of his music was not so far from the world of earlier French musicians such as Rameau and Couperin, who had always been concerned with the portrayal of visual and emotional images through innovative instrumental writing. Among Debussy's last works were the pieces published together as "Six Sonatas for Various Instruments, Composed by Claude Debussy, French Musician." The title of this collection has been widely interpreted as Debussy's inheritance claim to the rich tradition of the French Baroque. Debussy's stress on his nationality was prompted by an increasing desire to assert the greatness of his nation, in view of the menace coming from across the Rhine (the First World War was in its full swing). Only three of the planned pieces were completed before his death: the Cello Sonata in the summer of 1915, the Sonata for flute, viola and harp in the fall of the same year, and the Violin Sonata in March 1917 while in the grips of the colon cancer which would prove fatal. The fourth was to have been scored for oboe, horn and harpsichord.

Debussy wrote of the Sonata for flute, viola and harp in a letter to Godot in December 1916: "The sound of it is not so bad, though it is not for me to speak to you of the music. I could do so, however, without embarrassment for it is the music of a Debussy whom I no longer know. It is frightfully mournful and I don't know whether one should laugh or cry – perhaps both?" Debussy's faint praise of his own work notwithstanding, the Sonata is a powerful, even revolutionary work; a peek beneath its ethereal surface revealing a tightly unified structure of motivic relationships, every note serving to move the dramatic tension forward. Furthermore, Debussy singlehandedly created a genre with his innovative choice of instrumentation. The uniquely expressive timbral possibilities of the ensemble have inspired countless other composers to follow suit, and just over a century later flutists, violists, and harpists can partner together for a rich and varied repertoire.

- Gabriel Langfur

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