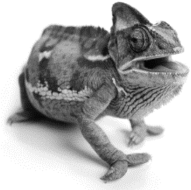

Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston
Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2023-2024 chamber music season
chamber series 4: Shadows, Canons, Veils

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 8 PM at First Church in Boston
Sunday, April 21, 2024, 4 PM at First Church in Boston

Program:
Rebecca Clarke, *Midsummer Moon* for violin & piano
Serge Arcuri, *Les Furieuses enluminures* for flute, clarinet, piano & string quartet
Ludwig van Beethoven, Quintet in E-flat Major for piano & winds, Op. 16
Thomas Adès, *Les baricades mistérieuses* for clarinet, bass clarinet, viola, cello & double bass
Dmitri Shostakovich, Piano Quintet in g minor, Op. 57

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) was born in England to an American father and German mother. She enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 1903 to study violin but left abruptly when one of her professors made an unwelcome marriage proposal. Two years later she began a composition course at the Royal College of Music, where she was the first woman to study with Charles Villiers Stanford, also the teacher of Holst, Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge and others. She was once again unable to finish, this time because her father – described in her memoir as a physically abusive authoritarian – banished her from their home.

Clarke set out on a performing career as a violist, and in 1912 was among a small group of women appointed by Henry Wood to the previously all-male Queen's Hall orchestra. Between 1916 and 1924 she toured extensively while living mostly in the United States and met the new music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge at her Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music in 1918. Coolidge encouraged her to enter the festival's composition contest – which was judged anonymously – and she was runner-up in both 1919 and 1921, for the Viola Sonata and Piano Trio respectively. For the 1923 Festival Mrs. Coolidge commissioned Clarke directly: $1000 for the Rhapsody for Cello and Piano, the only commission she ever awarded a woman. Clarke recalled this high point in her composition career many years later in a radio interview with some amused self-deprecation that to our modern sensibilities seems incredibly sad:

> And when I had that one little whiff of success that I've had in my life, with the Viola

> Sonata, the rumor went around, I hear, that I hadn't written the stuff myself, that somebody had done it for me. And I even got one or two little bits of…press clippings saying that it was impossible, that I couldn't have written it myself. And the funniest of all was that I had a clipping once which said that I didn't exist, there wasn't any such person as Rebecca Clarke, that it was a pseudonym…for Ernest Bloch! Now these people have got it most beautifully mixed – I thought to myself what a funny idea that when he writes his very much lesser works that he should take a pseudonym of a girl, that anyone should consider this possible!

The truth was that her Viola Sonata was not at all a "very much lesser work." In fact, the committee, judging the works without knowing anything about the composers, had been tied between her piece and Bloch's Suite for Viola, and one of them guessed that she was Ravel. Mrs. Coolidge had broken the tie with her own vote in favor of Bloch.

In 1924 Clarke settled back in London and began performing as a soloist and in chamber music with Myra Hess and others, and formed an all-female piano quartet called the English Ensemble. With the onset of World War II she returned once again to the United States, living with her two brothers and their families and even finding herself taking non-musical employment as a nanny. Her written records make it clear that this was a low point, but she soon became reacquainted with a school friend, pianist James Friskin, who had joined the Juilliard faculty. They were married in 1944. Her compositional activity was limited for the rest of her life to just a handful of works and revisions of earlier scores.

Midsummer Moon was composed in 1924 and dedicated to her close friend, the Hungarian violinist Adila Fachiri. In the 1920s and 30s Clarke played in a string quartet with Fachiri, her sister Jelly d'Aranyi (the dedicatee of works by Bartók and others), and the cellist Guilhermina Suggia. The title is a reference to the superstition around the temporary madness that comes with the full moon in summertime, evidenced by the atmosphere of still "night music" punctuated with unexpected trills and tremolos. Clarke added the title after the work's completion; as she wrote in her diary, "April 14 1924: Worked hard again all day, and got my piece finished after tea. I'm calling it 'Midsummer Moon,' which is the best title I can find that describes it."

Serge Arcuri was born in 1954 near Montréal. Following studies in composition and analysis at the Conservatoire de musique du Québec à Montréal with Gilles Tremblay, he studied electroacoustic music at the University of Montréal. He quickly received recognition for both his electronic and acoustic music, winning the Sir Ernest MacMillan Award from the Composers, Authors and Publishers Association of Canada for his orchestral work *Agrégats* (1979) and awards in two categories in the 1984 CBC National Radio Competition for Young Composers, for *Résurgence* (1982) for tape and *Résonances* (1982) for harp solo. One of Canada's leading composers, Arcuri composes for theater, film, and television as well as the concert hall. He is a member of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community and the Canadian League of Composers and an associate of the Canadian Music Centre.

Arcuri strives for visceral impact in his music, and he is fascinated by the mysterious and mythical and where they intersect with the real world. He has long kept records of his dreams

and used them as inspiration for his compositional process. He embraces an intuitive approach, commenting about *Fragments*, a work for solo piano, ". . . I do not fully understand [the work] but recognize [it] as a certain kind of resonance."

Composer's program note:

> *Les Furieuses enluminures* (The Fierce Illuminations) for flute, clarinet, piano, and string quartet was commissioned by the Musica Camerata ensemble. The tradition of the medieval miniaturists was to decorate manuscripts by painting illuminations around the first letters of texts. These paintings usually illustrated allegorical scenes ranging from biblical stories to fantastic dragons and mythological monsters. When I rediscovered the marvelous fresco on the ceiling of the Baptistery in Florence, I saw it as an illumination illustrating all creation. A part of the piece I wrote, loosely based on the Gregorian chant *Veni Creator Spiritus*, was included in the immense collective work *Symphonie du millénaire*, which was performed in Montreal on June 3, 2000.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was the son and grandson of professional musicians, both employed in Bonn, Germany at the court of the Electorate of Cologne. Surprisingly few details of his early years are known, but he displayed enough talent performing on both the violin and piano that he was compared to the young Mozart by a visiting teacher. He visited Vienna in 1787 and probably met and had one or more lessons with Mozart, but only stayed for two weeks due to the fatal illness of his mother. In 1789 Beethoven effectively took over the care of his family, petitioning the court for half of his alcoholic father's salary. In 1790 he met Haydn, and with the help of the Electorate of Cologne moved to Vienna to study with him beginning in November 1792. The relationship, though cordial, was not entirely happy, and – likely to Beethoven's relief – Haydn left in early 1794 to London for one of his extended stays. Beethoven now sought instruction from Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, a master of contrapuntal techniques, and also studied for a time with Antonio Salieri, particularly regarding setting Italian texts to music. By 1796, he had established a renowned career as Vienna's leading virtuoso pianist and was beginning to travel on concert tours, playing his own music and that of others, and often improvising to great acclaim.

But all would not continue happily; as early as 1801 he began to share the information of his increasing deafness, and he suffered to the point of despair with the condition for the rest of his life. Beethoven's individualistic, headstrong, often rebellious nature was only heightened by the social isolation of deafness, and his personal relationships were never smooth. Family troubles continued as well, and in 1813 he became guardian of his nephew Karl despite protracted legal battles with the boy's mother. The relationship with Karl was perpetually marked by drama, taking enormous amounts of time and energy. In 1814, at the height of his fame, Beethoven gave his last public performance as a pianist; he could no longer function as a performer, and his loneliness and isolation only increased. As his personal struggles intensified, however, his music only reached deeper and deeper into his own soul, and plumbed further the extreme, sometimes violent, sometimes almost divine emotions of the individual human life. His great achievement as a composer can be summed up as the appropriation of the classical forms of Haydn and Mozart's generation for the new age of Romanticism, showing the world how the expression of

the intensely personal can become the expression of the universal.

The Quintet for Piano and Winds is an early work, probably composed in 1796 (the original score was lost) and premiered on April 6, 1797 in Vienna. There's no question that it was inspired by Mozart's quintet for the same instrumentation in the same key. However, where Mozart interweaves the piano and winds, Beethoven sets them mostly in opposition, almost in the form of a chamber concerto for piano with wind accompaniment. An amusing firsthand account of an early performance was recorded by Beethoven's friend and pupil Ferdinand Ries:

> That evening Beethoven played his Piano Quintet with wind instruments; the celebrated oboist Ram (Friedrich Ramm) from Munich also played and accompanied Beethoven in the quintet. In the last Allegro a pause occurs several times before the theme returns; on one of these occasions B. began to improvise, taking the Rondo as his theme, pleasing himself and those listening for a considerable time, but not pleasing the other players. They were annoyed, and Herr Ram even enraged. It really looked highly comical when these gentlemen, expecting the movement to be resumed at any moment, kept putting their instruments to their mouths, but then had to put them down again without playing a note. At length Beethoven was satisfied and started up the Rondo again. The whole assembly was delighted.

Thomas Adès was born in London in 1971. Renowned as both composer and performer, he works regularly with the world's leading orchestras, opera companies and festivals. His compositions include three operas: the most recent of which *The Exterminating Angel* premiered at the 2016 Salzburg Festival and subsequently has been performed at the Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Opera House, London all conducted by the composer; *The Tempest* (Royal Opera House and Metropolitan Opera); and *Powder Her Face*. His orchestral works include *Asyla* (1997), *Tevot* (2007), *Polaris* (2011), Violin Concerto *Concentric Paths* (2005), *In Seven Days* (2008), *Totentanz* for mezzo-soprano, baritone, and orchestra (2013), and Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (2019).

Adès has been an Artistic Partner of the Boston Symphony Orchestra since 2016 and has conducted the orchestra in Boston and at Tanglewood, performed chamber music with the orchestra players, and led the summer Festival of Contemporary Music. He coaches Piano and Chamber Music annually at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove.

As a conductor, Adès appears regularly with the Los Angeles, San Francisco and London Philharmonic orchestras, the Boston, London, BBC, and City of Birmingham Symphony orchestras, the Royal Concertgebouworkest, Leipzig Gewandhaus and the Czech Philharmonic. In opera, in addition to *The Exterminating Angel*, he has conducted *The Rake's Progress* at the Royal Opera House and the Zürich Opera, *The Tempest* at the Metropolitan Opera and Vienna State Opera, and Gerald Barry's latest opera A*lice's Adventures Under Ground* in Los Angeles (world premiere) and in London (European premiere).

His piano engagements include solo recitals at Carnegie Hall (Stern Auditorium), New York and the Wigmore Hall in London, and concerto appearances with the New York Philharmonic. His

many awards include the Grawemeyer Award for *Asyla* (1999); Royal Philharmonic Society large-scale composition awards for *Asyla*, *The Tempest,* and *Tevot*; and Ernst von Siemens Composers prize for *Arcadiana*; British Composer Award for The *Four Quarters*. His CD recording of *The Tempest* from the Royal Opera House (EMI) won the Contemporary category of the 2010 Gramophone Awards; his DVD of the production from the Metropolitan Opera was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année (2013), Best Opera recording (2014 Grammy Awards) and Music DVD Recording of the Year (2014 ECHO Klassik Awards); and *The Exterminating Angel* won the World Premiere of the Year at the International Opera Awards (2017). In 2015 he was awarded the prestigious Léonie Sonning Music Prize.

Adès' source for *Les baricades mistérieuses* is a brief harpsichord piece from the Sixiéme Ordre of François Couperin's *Pièces pour Clavecin*, published in 1716–17. He made this arrangement for the Composers Ensemble, to be performed at the Dartington International Summer School in August 1994 and celebrating the 80th birthday of musicologist and Couperin scholar Wilfrid Mellers. According to *The Guardian*, Adès has described the piece as "a better composition lesson than any he'd received from his teachers, an object lesson in how to generate melody from harmony and vice versa."

Simultaneously inevitable and surprising, this little piece has been a fascination, a mystery, even an obsession for generations of musicians. Adès is far from the first to arrange it for other instruments; search the title on YouTube and you will find countless performances on harpsichord of course, but also organ, modern piano, theorbo, solo guitar, marimba, harp, arrangements for guitar quartet, harpsichord plus archlute, saxophone quartet, and even one for six trombones written by the author of these notes.

What makes *Les baricades* so endlessly intriguing? For one thing, nobody knows why Couperin chose the title. Speculations range from something about masks (masques?) to Freemasonry to a symbol of the harmonic and formal structure of the piece, which is a fairly straightforward Rondo form – a recurring theme with contrasting episodes between each iteration – other than the fact that each episode is a different and unusual length. Ultimately, it's probably simply the fact that it's a near-perfect earworm; we challenge you to walk away without it completely invading your consciousness.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) was born in St. Petersburg to comfortable circumstances. His father, an amateur singer, was a senior inspector at the Palace of Weights and Measures, and his mother was a conservatory-trained pianist. He and his two sisters were well-educated, and the family employed servants and a nanny. Music was played in the house constantly, and it soon became apparent that the young Dmitri had prodigious gifts, including absolute pitch and a remarkable musical memory. He enrolled at the Petrograd Conservatory in 1919, studying both composition and piano, with further studies in conducting and violin. As his studies progressed, Shostakovich sometimes pushed against the conservative musical culture of the Conservatory, but ultimately, he thrived under the strict demands for technical skill in harmony and counterpoint, and his mastery of compositional craft freed him to write not only highly creative and expressive music, but also to easily earn money when necessary, with incidental film music, patriotic choruses, and the like.

In 1925, before his 20th birthday, Shostakovich completed his first symphony. Critical response was moderate, but it became immediately popular throughout the world, with performances by, among others, Walter, Toscanini, Klemperer, and Stokowski. He received letters of congratulation from Alban Berg and Darius Milhaud. The next two symphonies were also received well, as was an opera (*The Nose*) and numerous other works. In 1930, he began work on another opera, *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk*, and by 1936 it had received nearly two hundred performances in Moscow and Leningrad and had been heard in London, Zurich, Stockholm, Copenhagen and New York. In January of 1936, however, *Pravda* published a startling article denouncing the opera as “fidgety, screaming, neurotic, coarse, primitive and vulgar.” The warning was clear: such modernism would no longer be tolerated. Shostakovich completed but then withdrew his Fourth Symphony and set to work on the Fifth, widely considered to be his reply to the criticism of the authorities. Its unqualified success rescued his reputation, leading to teaching positions at the Leningrad and then Moscow Conservatories and greater – though still limited – artistic freedom.

The Seventh Symphony, begun during the siege of Leningrad by Nazi Germany and depicting its events, created another international sensation, and it seemed that Shostakovich’s place as the leader of Soviet musical culture was assured. A Party Decree issued on February 10, 1948, however, denounced his music and others’ for leading the culture astray with “formalism.” In a crushing blow, he was stripped of his teaching positions and his music was effectively blacklisted. Once again, Shostakovich was faced with the necessity to rehabilitate himself, which he did by offering his services to compose for patriotic choruses and propaganda films. In private he drank and smoked heavily, played cards and watched sporting events, and aged noticeably.

To add insult to injury, Stalin sent him abroad as a cultural envoy, tasked with delivering the message of the Soviet Union’s humanitarianism and social progress. In return, his concert music would be removed from the blacklist. Even so, such masterpieces as the 24 Preludes and Fugues for solo piano and the Tenth Symphony had to undergo hostile examination by a panel from the Composers’ Union before they could be released.

Stalin’s death in 1953 was followed by a softening of the cultural hardline, usually referred to as “the thaw.” Shostakovich’s rightful place as a leader of Soviet musical culture returned gradually, though not without difficulty. In 1960, succumbing to pressure, he joined the Communist Party. The tortured Eighth String Quartet, widely considered an obituary for himself, was composed around this time. He was invited back to teach at the Leningrad Conservatory in 1961.

Until his death in 1975, Shostakovich was relatively free to compose as he wished. Despite gradually failing health, he travelled widely within the Soviet Union and abroad, fulfilling the expectations placed on him as his country’s most famous composer. Even some of his earliest music, including the opera *The Nose*, was revisited despite having been banned for decades. It is impossible to know how much solace Shostakovich took in the recognition he received during his last years. He was painfully careful to present a face to the world that betrayed no ill feelings towards the Soviet authorities, but the controversial book *Testimony*, published in 1979 by Solomon Volkov, presented a very different picture in the form of a memoir. The authenticity of Volkov’s work is disputed, but the overall story of a man oppressed by a cruel authoritarian

regime, forced to walk a creative tightrope as his works fell in and out of favor with the capricious tastes of a dictator, matches the historical record. Further, many of Shostakovich's friends and family, including his son Maxim, support Volkov and confirm the accuracy of the portrayal in the book.

Shostakovich's great legacy is inseparable from his circumstance. Forged in the furnace of great personal and political suffering, his music necessarily contained multiple meanings and layer upon layer of emotional complexity. His is work of devastating impact, always expressed with flawless craft.

The Piano Quintet in g minor was composed in 1940, in fulfillment of a request from the Beethoven Quartet for a piece they could perform with the composer. Counterpoint in the model of Bach was proving to be a safe mode of expression under the Stalinist microscope, and the Quintet begins with a large prelude and fugue, continuing in the manner of a large Baroque Suite. The engaging structure, clear textures, and direct themes all garnered amazing popular response. According to Rostislav Dubinsky, violinist with the Borodin Quartet, the piece was so popular it was sung in the streets and discussed by average people on public transportation. The Quintet even replaced sporting events for a time as a subject of conversation, and its combination of obvious quality and popular appeal earned Shostakovich the Stalin Prize in 1941, cementing his rehabilitation in the eyes of the Communist Party. The fact that he donated the 100,000 ruble prize to the poor of Moscow made it virtually impossible for Shostakovich to be considered anything but a national hero.

- Gabriel Rice

Adès biography provided by the composer, edited by Gabriel Rice

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