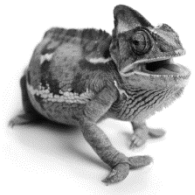

Chameleon
Arts Ensemble
of Boston

PROGRAM NOTES

Chameleon Arts Ensemble of Boston
Deborah Boldin, Artistic Director

2024-2025 chamber music season
chamber series 3: Between Two Worlds

Saturday, February 22, 2025, 7:30 PM at First Church in Boston
Sunday, February 23, 2025, 4 PM at First Church in Boston

Program:
Pavel Haas, Wind Quintet, Op. 10
Alban Berg, Adagio from *Kammerkonzert* for violin, clarinet & piano
Darius Milhaud, *La création du monde* – Suite de concert pour piano et quatour à cordes, Op. 81b
George Rochberg, *Between Two Worlds* (Ukiyo-e III) for flute & piano
Erich Korngold, Suite for two violins, cello & piano left-hand, Op. 23

Program notes by Gabriel Rice

Pavel Haas (1899-1944) was born to a wealthy Moravian-Jewish family in the city of Brno, the capital of the Moravian region of Czechoslovakia. He studied at the Brno Conservatory, eventually joining the composition masterclass of Leoš Janáček, who was a major influence on his style. Haas was a skilled and accomplished composer by his early 20s, busy with scores for the stage and for the thriving Czech cinema, in which his brother Hugo was a prominent actor. In the 1930s he composed several important works, including the opera *The Charlatan* and the second and third string quartets, and began work on a symphony. As the Nazi occupation became inevitable, Haas divorced his wife in the hopes of sparing her and their young daughter from persecution, and in 1941 he was deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp at Terezín.

Haas arrived to Terezín ill and depressed, and it was only because of the community of musicians he found himself in, including Viktor Ullmann, Hans Krása, and Karel Ančerl, and specifically because of the persistent encouragement of Gideon Klein, that he began composing again. Among the works completed at Theresienstadt were the *Four Songs on Chinese Poetry* for baritone and piano, a work for men's choir titled "Al s'fod" (his only work in Hebrew), and the *Study for String Orchestra*, which was premiered with Ančerl at the podium.

The Nazi regime presented Theresienstadt to the world as a model for their vision of a separate society, creating a ghetto of prominent Jewish artists and intellectuals and allowing them to put on concerts and the like. They even filmed some of these events for propaganda, but in reality the living conditions were brutal and the camp was a way station for their murder facilities

elsewhere. In 1944, after the propaganda was no longer useful, the Nazis sent 18,000 prisoners, including Pavel Haas, to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Much of the musical history of Theresienstadt is only known to us now because Karel Ančerl was spared execution; according to his account, the severely ill Haas was standing next to him and began to cough uncontrollably, leading Mengele to choose him instead.

Haas' Wind Quintet Op. 10 was among the first of his works to gain international attention. It was composed in 1929 and published in 1934, but very few copies survived the war, and it was not until 1991 that Lubomir Peduzzi, a former student and champion of Haas', created a modern edition after finding a copy in the Moravian Museum in Brno. The 1920s was the seminal era for the development of the modern woodwind quintet; Hindemith's *Kleine Kammermusik* and Haas' teacher Leoš Janáček's *Mládi* (actually a sextet with bass clarinet) were premiered 1924, Arnold Schoenberg's Quintet in 1925, and the *Quintette en Forme de Choros* by Heitor Villa-Lobos and Carl Nielsen's Quintet in 1928. Haas' contribution, with its grounding in Jewish liturgical music, Moravian folk melodies, and the quirky, unpredictable rhythmic style associated with Janáček, clearly deserves a place with them in the heart of the woodwind repertoire.

Alban Berg (1885-1935) along with Anton von Webern and their teacher Arnold Schoenberg comprised what is now known as the Second Viennese School. From a formerly wealthy and highly cultured family, Berg was initially more interested in literature and had very little musical training before seeking out Schoenberg, with whom he studied intensely for six years from 1905 to 1911 and then had a lifelong, if sometimes strained, relationship.

The Second Viennese School sought to extend the highly chromatic musical vocabulary of their German and Austrian predecessors, particularly Wagner and Mahler, to a true atonality, in which the primacy of key functions and tonal relationships would give way to an equality of all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. In order to accomplish this goal, they codified a number of compositional devices which would replace the classical forms of repetition and variation of thematic material. Serialism, as their method came to be known, proved to be the most influential musical innovation of the twentieth century, and no composer of Western art music who followed them could entirely ignore their system. Even such stalwarts as Hindemith, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, who continued to keep tonality as the basis of their voices, would eventually compose pieces based on twelve-note themes in which the full chromatic scale was represented.

While serialism has often been thought of as a revolutionary departure from tradition, Schoenberg and his circle actually considered it to be the logical and inevitable progression from the methods of Brahms, the master of what Schoenberg called "developing variation," or the generation of large-scale dramatic structures from the smallest of musical materials, sometimes consisting of just two or three notes. The techniques they used, however, are so intellectually derived as to be difficult, if not impossible, for general concert audiences to comprehend on one hearing, and without the familiar scaffolding of tonality – as in the music of Brahms – many have found it to be alienating to listen to. The gulf between audiences and composers that grew throughout the twentieth century was due largely to the prevalence of the serial method and the perception that the form and intellectual aspects of musical composition had overtaken the expression or human content. The best music composed with the twelve-tone method, however,

has had the same aim of expressing the intangible as music composed using tonal language in traditional forms, and hopefully we can now appreciate some of the earlier works with ears more accustomed to the expressive use of dissonance.

In many ways, Alban Berg was the most personable of the Second Viennese School. He had a great deal more social grace and sensitivity than the often uncompromising Schoenberg, and he was more worldly than Webern. His music nearly always had more lyricism and directly emotional expressiveness than either of the other two, particularly since he was much more inclined to mix the serial techniques with other compositional models. His two operas, *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, as well as his Violin Concerto, found places in the repertory well before the works of Schoenberg and Webern, largely because they are easier to hear and understand as directly expressive pieces of music that make reference to music of the past.

Much of the more popular music that came out of the Second Viennese School was written before Schoenberg had fully developed the serial method; his masterpiece *Pierrot Lunaire* was a more or less freely composed atonal piece, with pitch relationships largely determined intuitively. Berg's Chamber Concerto of 1923-1925, from which tonight's Adagio was arranged (it was a common practice of Berg and his circle to arrange large pieces for smaller ensembles, to be performed at their private gatherings), came from the next period, in which the tools of serialism were being developed: manipulations of a twelve-note theme, or row, including inversion, retrograde, and retrograde inversion. The Chamber Concerto is not yet serial, since these manipulations do not form the unifying logic of the work but only provide ways of developing the material in a more traditional setting. Berg's pitch materials were derived from the names Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern, and multiples of the number 3 provide the lengths of sections and movements and even the metronome markings. In fact, extra-musical "secret programs" like this became a feature of all of Berg's work from this point on. The middle movement Adagio, which we will hear today, is structured in two halves. The first is an ABA form in which the two A sections are inversions (the second is an upside-down version of the first), and the second half is identical to the first half but in retrograde (backwards). In other words, the entire movement is a palindrome.

Is this audible to the listener who is not prepared by intensive score study? Probably not, but it is a perfect example of how Berg's fascination with numerical and intellectual methods, and the patience and determination to perfect his craft, produced music of rare, precious beauty.

Darius Milhaud (1892-1974) grew up in Aix-en-Provence, the son of a successful almond dealer. He was surrounded throughout his childhood by the near-constant sounds of the business, including the "soft sound of fruit falling into the baskets and the monotonous and soothing drone of the machines," as well as the Provençal airs and popular songs sung by the women who sorted the almonds. He later attributed his penchant for polytonality and density of compositional texture to both his childhood aural environment and the widely contrasting landscape and weather of Provence.

Both of Milhaud's parents were excellent amateur musicians, and by the age of thirteen he was an accomplished violinist, playing in his teacher's quartet. At this time, he also began to study

harmony and decided to focus his energies toward composition. He attended the Paris Conservatory from 1909 to 1915. In 1912 Milhaud met and became very close friends with noted playwright, poet and diplomat Paul Claudel, who took him to Brazil as an assistant on his diplomatic mission. Milhaud's responsibilities included organizing concerts and other events for the Red Cross, and he became familiar with Brazilian popular music and the sounds of another extreme climate, the tropical rainforest.

In the 1920s and 30s Milhaud immersed himself in Parisian culture, became involved with the group of composers that would become known as Les Six, and steadily increased his reputation as a composer and performer. He gave numerous concerts as a pianist and conducted the French premiere of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire.* He also traveled throughout Europe, hearing jazz for the first time in London and, with Poulenc, meeting Schoenberg, Webern and Berg in Vienna. Unfortunately, along with professional success came increasingly frequent attacks of rheumatoid arthritis, and by 1948 he was confined to a wheelchair.

As one of France's leading Jewish artists, Milhaud was forced to emigrate to the United States in 1940. He was immediately offered a teaching post at Mills College in Oakland, CA. After the end of the war, he was also offered a professorship at the Paris Conservatory and split time between the two schools until 1971. Among his many remarkable and diverse students were Xenakis, Stockhausen, William Bolcolm, Steve Reich, Morton Subotnick, Burt Bacharach, and Dave Brubeck.

Milhaud heard Billy Arnold's Novelty Jazz Band in London in 1920 and was immediately captivated by the expressive energy of the rhythmic activity: "Their constant use of syncopation in the melody was done with such contrapuntal freedom as to create the impression of an almost chaotic improvisation, whereas in fact, it was something remarkably precise." While on a series of conducting and performing engagements in New York, Philadelphia and Boston two years later, he immersed himself in more American Jazz, frequently visiting Harlem to hear the most authentic New Orleans-style music played by African American musicians.

The art world in 1920s Paris was crazy for what it called "Primitivism," and a 1923 commission from Rolf de Maré's Swedish ballet was the perfect opportunity to incorporate the syncopated rhythms and blues-based harmonies of Jazz. Along with choreographer Jean Borlin, set designer Fernand Léger, and poet Blaise Cendrars, Milhaud set out to portray African myths about the creation of the world, based on Cendrars' recently published *Anthologie negre*. "At last in *La création du monde*, I had the opportunity I had been waiting for," Milhaud wrote in his autobiography. "I could now use all those elements of jazz I had been studying so hard. I adopted the same orchestra as used in Harlem – 17 solo instruments – and I made wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling." This arrangement for Piano Quintet (Op. 81b) is the composer's own.

As with Stravinsky's "primitivist" *Le Sacre du Printemps* a few years earlier, there was the expected (and quite likely hoped-for) scandal following the premiere. The ballet was described as frivolous and the music better suited to a dance hall than a theater, but much to Milhaud's satisfaction, "Ten years later, the selfsame critics were discussing the philosophy of jazz and learnedly demonstrating that *La création* was the best of my works."

George Rochberg was born on July 5, 1918 in Paterson, New Jersey. His studies at the Mannes College of Music were interrupted by service in the war, but after his return he attended the Curtis Institute. He served on the faculties of Curtis and the University of Pennsylvania, where he was Emeritus Annenberg Professor of the Humanities until his death on May 29, 2005. Rochberg's early mature work was in the Schoenbergian serialist model. In fact, he was one of the most influential serial composers of his generation and wrote *The Hexachord and its Relation to the Twelve-Tone Row*, articulating some of the important theoretical ideas behind the method. After his Piano Trio of 1963, however, Rochberg embraced tonality and wrote no more serial music. Some have attributed his change of heart to the sudden death of his 20-year-old son. In a 1971 program note he wrote "the overintense manner of serialism and its tendency to inhibit physical pulse and rhythm led me to question a style which made it virtually impossible to express serenity, tranquility, grace, wit, energy…it was time to move on." In the academic music world Rochberg's turn away from serialism was practically revolutionary at the time, and he deserves credit for expanding the perception of what contemporary classical music could be. "Everyone must find his own voice," he said. "I reserve the right to compose 12-tone music in the future -- or any other music I choose. I've tried very hard to rid myself of that stultifying conception of historical line, and if I want to contrast dissonant chromaticism cheek by jowl with a more accessibly tonal style, I will do so. All human gestures are available to all human beings at any time."

Between Two Worlds for flute and piano was composed in 1982 and subtitled *Ukiyo-e III*, the third of a series of three pieces referring, according to the composer, "to a traditional school of Japanese painting whose great beauty and often piercing charm lies in its power to image the world not as static, fixed forms of reality but as floating pictures of radiant qualities, which range from states of forlornness and emptiness to quiet or ecstatic joy…It inhabits a totally different world, one which balances, for me, the more strenuous world of Western traditions with other ways of thinking and making music." He elaborates that "*Between Two Worlds* suggests not only the realms of nature and culture between which we find ourselves tenuously situated but also the strong feelings that I experienced while living briefly in the strife-torn Middle East."

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) was also a native of Brno, the son of the eminent music critic Julius Korngold. As such, his obviously prodigious talent was recognized before his age reached double digits. Gustav Mahler pronounced him a genius and recommended that he be sent to Alexander von Zemlinsky for instruction. By the time he was thirteen he'd had a ballet performed at the Vienna Court Opera, and his second piano sonata had no less a champion than Artur Schnabel. The peak of Korngold's early fame came with his opera *Die tote Stadt*, completed when he was just 23 and premiered to rave reviews in Hamburg and Cologne. Nicolas Slonimsky proclaimed him to be "the very last breath of the romantic spirit of Vienna." Early success came with certain difficulties, however; Julius Korngold's obvious and outspoken bias towards his son caused conflicts with more established composers such as Strauss and Schoenberg, even at times alienating the larger musical community.

In part to establish himself separately from his father, Korngold accepted an invitation to conduct

and arrange music at the Vienna State Theater, where he met and collaborated with Max Reinhardt. Reinhardt soon invited him to Hollywood to work on his famous film of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and he worked steadily there for several years, establishing the standard for the symphonic film score with *Captain Blood*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and Anthony Adverse (his first Academy Award). He went home to Vienna in 1937, but the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany in 1938 forced him back to Hollywood, where he resumed writing film scores that stand today among the finest ever produced, including *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, for which he was awarded another Oscar.

Korngold exerted a profound influence on film composers for generations to follow by treating each score as, in his words, "an opera without singing," with a leitmotif for each major character. He fully intended that his densely contrapuntal, richly romantic scores would be able to stand on their own in the concert hall. After the war he returned again to Austria but received a chilly reception from the musical community, in part because of his success in American films, and in part because his style, deeply rooted in late Romanticism, was so far out of fashion. Even his father berated him, accusing him of having sought commercial success over artistic integrity. Once again, he went back to California, where he died at the age of 60, believing himself forgotten. Fortunately for us, over the last couple of decades more and more musicians have discovered the high quality and unique character of Korngold's concert music, and his rightful place on concert stages is being restored.

Early in his career Korngold had the fortune to meet the pianist Paul Wittgenstein, the son of a noble family in Austria that had long been patrons of music. Brahms, Clara Schumann, Joachim, Mahler and Bruno Walter were among the musicians who enjoyed their friendship and played at their castle. It seems that the entire family played instruments and enjoyed playing chamber music together, but Paul was clearly the most talented. He made his professional debut in 1913, but the outbreak of World War I interrupted his plans. He joined the military in 1914 and within a month had lost his right arm. Upon returning home to Vienna he set out to establish a career with only his left hand. Wittgenstein wasn't the first pianist to do so; he had a living example in a Hungarian Count named Géza Zichy (1849-1924), who had concertized this way after a hunting accident. There were a few left-hand specialists in the early 19th century as well, and a handful of pieces by composers such as Scriabin, Bartók and Saint-Saëns. Wittgenstein was dissatisfied with the available repertoire, however, and set out to create his own, both by composing 3 volumes of studies and by using his significant family wealth to build a repertoire from the leading composers of his time. The list of composers he worked with is long and distinguished, including Britten, Strauss, Prokofiev and others, and the most famous piece to come from his efforts is Ravel's Concerto for Piano Left Hand, but the honor of the very first commissioned concerto went to Korngold in 1923.

Wittgenstein was so taken with Korngold's single-movement concerto that he commissioned him again a few years later, this time for a piece of chamber music. While the concertos generally received the most attention, Wittgenstein had a special place in his heart for chamber music, and he commissioned many works for piano left hand with various instrumental combinations. Korngold's Suite, completed in 1930, is for an unusual ensemble of two violins, cello and left hand piano, and the piano writing is especially dense, a formidable challenge that often sounds like it can't possibly be achieved with only one hand. Its large five-movement structure is also

atypical, bookended by a dramatic Prelude and Fugue and a highly inventive Rondo with variations. The middle movements feature a Waltz that is undeniably Viennese yet contains pungent dissonances, a fiendish Scherzo, and a song without words, based solely on Korngold's own "Was Du mir bist?" (What are you to me?) from the Op. 22 songs, one of his most beautiful melodies. Korngold's musical personality shines throughout, with sweeping melodies, virtuosic counterpoint, and a mastery of instrumental color that creates an unexpected richness of sonority.

- Gabriel Rice