

Sunday, June 23, 2024

Francisco Tárrega (1852–1909)

Recuerdos de la Alhambra, arr. Ricci

Kerson Leong, violin

Recuerdos de la Alhambra, originally a virtuoso work for guitar, is a showcase of technical proficiency and the effects possible on that instrument. A musical landscape of the great Moorish Alhambra palace in Granada, the piece relies heavily on tremolo playing, in which notes are repeated so quickly that they almost sound sustained. As a piece for solo guitar, Tárrega's addition of an arpeggio pattern played by the thumb gives the impression of a duet rather than a solo performance. Ricci's transcription of the piece for solo violin replicates this texture, but couched in the sweeter, sligher texture of the violin's high register.

Ernö Dohnányi (1877–1960)

Serenade in C Major, op. 10

Marcia: Allegro

Romanza: Adagio non troppo

Scherzo: Vivace

Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto

Rondo: Allegro vivace

Gabrielle Després, violin

Marina Thibeault, viola

Peter Eom, cello

Dohnányi's music is unique in the way it reflects the two long-competing sides of the late-Romantic Austro-German classical tradition. Like Mahler, his contemporary, Dohnányi reveals deep devotion to both the conservatism of Brahms and the decadence of the "progressive" school influenced by Liszt and Wagner. An uneasy awareness of the immense social, political, and technological upheaval underway in the mid-nineteenth century lurks in the music of so many composers of this generation.

Composed in 1902, the *Serenade* is scored for a traditional string trio consisting of a violin, viola, and cello. Dohnányi's material is well-suited to the noticeably leaner sonorities of a trio and the work, though not without its serious moments, maintains a lightness and reserved classicism throughout. In the course of its five short movements, we hear an intriguing blend of lyricism and harmonic inventiveness, with a formal coherence that looks back lovingly to the divertimentos of Haydn and Mozart.

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931)

Sonata for Solo Violin in E Minor, op. 27, no. 4

Allemande

Sarabande

Finale

Kerson Leong, violin

That Ysaÿe's Op. 27 set of six short sonatas for unaccompanied violin are inspired by the famous violin sonatas and partitas of J.S. Bach is obvious – especially in the fourth sonata which, apart from some

adventurous modulations, is a charming imitation of the late-Baroque style. A stately allemande opens the work, recalling the imposing dignity of Rococo royal courts. Following a similarly regal slow sarabande that uses plucked strings to suggest an atmosphere of antiquity, Ysaÿe hurls the player to a demanding perpetuum-mobile movement characterized by cascading runs of sixteenth notes and agile ornamentation.

Intermission

Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in A Major, op. 81

Allegro, ma non troppo

Dumka: Andante con moto

Scherzo (Furiant): Molto vivace

Finale: Allegro

Kerson Leong, violin

Gabrielle Després, violin

Marina Thibeault, viola

Peter Eom, cello

David Fung, piano

Dvořák's Second Piano Quintet, like the rest of his greatest chamber music, is driven by a melodic gift perhaps matched only by Mozart and Schubert. The charm and ease with which the work unfolds marks it as both one of Dvořák's great achievements and a masterpiece of the piano quintet genre.

The folk music of Bohemia was at the heart of Dvořák's creative impulse, and such a vein runs deeply throughout this work. Even its academically rigorous moments are propelled by irrepressible Czech tunefulness and rhythmic excitement. From the soft, achingly sweet cello melody of the opening allegro, to the wandering dumka and agitated furiant dance movements that make up the centre of the work, to the the last half of the finale, in which irrepressibly optimistic folk dance material is put through its paces as a whirling fugue, the Second Quintet is Dvořák's most compelling attempt to marry exuberant Czech lyricism to Austro-German formal rigour.

Program notes by Morgan Lueth