

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
“Piccinini and Friends”
Saturday 23 September 2023 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2023

Quartet in D for flute and strings, K.285

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

At age 21, Mozart already had a superb reputation as violinist, keyboardist, and composer. He also had an eye for a pretty face, and was not always so focused on the need to find commissions and steady employment as his father Leopold might have liked. With his mother as chaperone, he traveled to Mannheim in autumn 1777 for a conducting engagement, hoping to secure a position with the Elector of Bavaria.

The Mozarts were befriended by Johann Baptist Wendling, flutist in the Mannheim court orchestra. Wendling knew of Wolfgang's growing frustration as the hoped-for appointment failed to materialize. He was acquainted with a well-to-do Dutchman, Ferdinand DeJean, who worked for the Dutch East India Company. DeJean was also a creditable flutist and a great admirer of Mozart's music. Wendling arranged for DeJean to commission several solo concerti and flute quartets from Mozart. K.285 is the first of those works.

Ironically enough, Mozart reportedly disliked the flute. "You know that I become quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument that I cannot bear," he wrote to Leopold. No trace of any such incapacity clouds the delightful D major quartet, a lively and spirited work treasured by flutists and string players alike. Its finest movement is the all-too-brief B-minor *Adagio*, with string pizzicato accompaniment. But the outer movements also overflow with beautiful melodies and accomplished writing.

Sonata for Flute, Viola, & Harp (1915)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

In October 1915, Debussy wrote to his publisher Jacques Durand:

I am enjoying these last days of liberty. I think of Paris as a sort of prison where one has not even the right to think and where even the walls have ears. . . . I am writing down all the music that comes into my head -- like a madman, and rather sadly, too. Now the curtains have gone from the windows and when I see a trunk it makes me feel as sad as a cat.

Already ill with the cancer that would take his life in 1918, he had spent the summer in Pourville-sur-mer, just west of Dieppe on the Normandy coast. After a compositional dry spell, he had produced in rapid succession a series of major works, including 12 *Etudes* for piano, the two-piano suite *En blanc et noir*, the Cello Sonata, and the Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp.

The two sonatas were part of a projected series of six "sonatas for diverse instruments," as Debussy noted on his title page. Unfortunately, he only completed three of them. The Sonata for Violin and Piano (1917) was his last finished work. Each of the sonatas was to have been scored differently. His unfinished plans projected a sonata for oboe, horn, and harpsichord, another for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon, and piano, and one for several instruments and double bass. Regrettably, none of these works was even started.

Debussy originally planned to use oboe in the Sonata for Flute, Viola and Harp. He changed his mind, choosing instead the viola, whose darker sound mediated more judiciously between the lush plucked strings of the harp and the delicate timbre of the flute. This Sonata is probably the most tantalizing window we have looking into the music that Debussy might have composed had he lived. Though its dynamic range is relatively narrow, the Sonata explores a broad spectrum of colors and moods. The very refinement of its scoring persuades us to listen more carefully, and heightens our sensitivity to the music's extraordinary expressive nuances.

The three movements are closely related, with material from the opening *Pastorale* recurring in both succeeding movements. Chordally and in its melodic lines, the Sonata favors pentatonic and whole tone scales, with an emphasis on fifths and tritones. Debussy distributes his musical material liberally among the three players. Occasionally viola and flute play in unison. Each of the three instruments has brief opportunities for solos, and Debussy provides for all three duet possibilities: viola and flute, flute and harp, viola and harp. While splendidly written for all three instruments, the Sonata must be singled out for its superb flute writing, on a level with that in *Syrinx* and the Prélude to *Afternoon of a Faun*.

***Fountains of Fin* for Flute, Violin, and Violoncello**

Behzad Ranjbaran (b.1955)

Long-time patrons of Fort Worth Symphony concerts may recall Behzad Ranjbaran's name, because he was composer in residence with the orchestra many years ago, during the 2008-2009 season. Artistic Director Gary Levinson has previously programmed Ranjbaran's chamber music on this series, Ranjbaran's unique fusion of his Persian heritage with Western musical forms and techniques has placed him at the forefront of American composers.

Ranjbaran came to the United States from Iran in 1974 to attend Indiana University. He subsequently earned a doctorate in composition at Juilliard and has served on Juilliard's faculty since 1991. In 1996, he received the ASCAP Foundation's Rudolf Nissim Award for his Violin Concerto, which was subsequently premiered by Joshua Bell. Mr. Bell is one of several distinguished performers who have been champions of Ranjbaran's music, including the conductor Charles Dutoit, the soprano Renée Fleming, the violinist Chantal Juillet, the cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and the pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

Ranjbaran has been named a Distinguished Artist by the New Jersey Council on the Arts. He is also the recipient of grants from the NEA and Meet the Composer and an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

His composer's note for *Fountains of Fin* explains its programmatic elements and relationship to Persian music and culture.

Fountains of Fin [pronounced 'feen'] celebrates one of the most enchanting gardens, the historical Garden of Fin in Kashan, Iran. The garden in its present form was built in the 16th century but historical references go back to the medieval period. The music is also a tribute to the great 19th-century Vezir and reformer, Amir Kabir, who was slain in the bath of the Garden of Fin. In writing *Fountains of Fin*, I was inspired by the utmost beauty of this captivating garden with its tall cypresses, fragrant flowers, and hundreds of spring-fed fountains, as well as its dark and violent history.

The opening flute solo, heard in the dark breathy low register with ornamental melodic figures, emulates the sound of the Persian *ney*, a type of bamboo flute. The opening theme is the melodic and harmonic basis of the piece with decorative figures and emphasis on the interval of the perfect fourth, so widely found in Persian music. The timbre of the *ney* permeates the piece, particularly in extended solo sections. Many elements of Persian modes and folk rhythms are also intertwined in the fabric of the piece. The somber and elegiac concluding section brings back many of the opening materials, ending on the lowest note of the flute.

Fountains of Fin was commissioned by Bargemusic, which played the premiere on 5 March 2008 in New York. The score was written for Olga Bloom.

– Behzad Ranjbaran

Serenade for Two Violins and Harp

Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840)

When Niccolò Paganini was a boy in Genoa, his mother told him that an angel had appeared to her in a dream to grant her one wish, and she had asked that her son become a great violinist. Both parents recognized the boy's exceptional ability and pushed him relentlessly, forcing him to practice long hours. The drudgery paid off. Young Niccolò, who started on mandolin at age five, took up violin at seven and composed his first sonata by age eight. He

could already sightread flawlessly any music placed in front of him. Having mastered conventional violin technique by his early 'teens, he began to experiment with unconventional methods of achieving unusual note combinations and unorthodox tone colors on the violin. These were the beginnings of his revolution in violin technique.

Living in Lucca from 1801 to 1809, he began to solidify a reputation as a brilliant and eccentric performer. A series of Italian tours from 1810 to the mid 1820s increased his renown, and in 1828 he made his first international foray. Within two years he was the most famous performer in Europe, and only Franz Liszt's extraordinary piano career approached the success of Paganini's during his lifetime.

Unlike Liszt, Paganini was neither dashing nor handsome. He was, however, charismatic. All the contemporary reports comment on his mesmerizing presence in the concert hall. His physical appearance -- tall, gaunt, pale, angular, with long, loose hair -- both repulsed and attracted audiences, particularly women. Dazzled by his unique stance, striking features, and unconventional playing style, European critics intimated that he was in collusion with the devil. The German critic Ludwig Rellstab likened Paganini to 'a vision of Goethe's Mephistopheles playing the violin.'

Though he is best known for his virtuoso violin writing, Paganini's list of compositions includes more than one hundred pieces for solo guitar; dozens of duets for guitar and violin, plus four trios and eight quartets for strings and guitar. Paganini's father played mandolin, so young Niccolò was exposed to the sound of plucked strings from his youth. He is reputed to have written many of the guitar pieces for an Italian mistress who played guitar; however,

musical scholars believe the early serenades are juvenile works.

The Serenata on this afternoon's program was originally for two violins and guitar. The guitar part transfers smoothly to harp, as we hear it. The piece divides into three sections: an introduction marked Largo; a minuet marked *amoroso*; and a concluding Andantino scherzando in a rustic, lively style. The introduction favors the first violin, but for the balance of the Serenata Paganini often pairs the violins in parallel thirds. Harp provides most of the harmonic underpinning. The final Andantino scherzando includes a brief passage in minor mode that places harp in the foreground. This is lighthearted, charming music, intended to entertain the performers as well as the listeners.

***Assobio a Jato* ["Jet Whistle"] for Flute and Cello**

Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

Heitor Villa-Lobos is arguably the most important composer Latin America has produced. Enormously prolific -- he composed about 2000 works -- he succeeded in merging European traditional forms and ideas with the distinct rhythms and melodies of his native Brazil. As a young man, Villa-Lobos travelled through Brazil for seven years, listening to the colorful indigenous music of his country, collecting themes. From 1923 to 1930, he studied and worked in Paris, where he encountered artists and musicians at the forefront of the international *avant-garde*. The 1930s and early 1940s were a period of neoclassicism, merged with his incorporation of indigenous Brazilian material. After the Second World War, Villa-Lobos traveled abroad extensively, as a self-styled ambassador of Brazilian art.

His most famous works date from the 1920s; the most notable exception is the series of 9 *Bachianas Brasileiras* he wrote between 1930 and 1945. For the most part, his later compositions are regarded as less daring: music of consolidation.

Assobio a Játo, a three movement duet dating from 1950, is one of the standout chamber pieces, drawing a little of the best of all Villa-Lobos's characteristics. His neoromanticism is there in the broad, singing phrases so easily achieved by the combination of cello and flute. So, too are the aspects of Brazilian music. The first movement is a Brazilian street waltz much like those popularized by the country's *Choro* groups. In the style of the *Choros*, the flute embellishes in simple improvisatory variations once it assumes primary responsibility for the theme.

Assobio a Játo ("The Jet Whistle") draws its title from an instruction to the flutist in the third movement, *Vivo*. Toward the end, as its agitation increases, the tempo marking changes to *Prestissimo*. The note in the score reads: "The only way to achieve the effect which the composer wishes . . . is to blow into the embouchure *fff* as if one were warming up the instrument on a cold day."

Chant de Linos for Flute, String Trio and Harp

André Jolivet (1905-1974)

The flute has a rich history in French music that extends at least as far back as the Baroque era, when it was a favored instrument in the French courts. André Jolivet had many fine examples to study when he first wrote for solo flute in 1936. Early on, he was influenced by Edgard Varèse, with whom he studied starting in 1929. By 1944, Jolivet was more established

and had developed his own musical language.

Jolivet's instruments were cello and piano; however, he was drawn to flute and returned to it repeatedly, particularly in his chamber music. He regarded flute as "the instrument of music *par excellence*: that because it is animated by the breath which emanates from the depths of man; its tones charged with what is both visceral and cosmic within us."

The occasion for *Chant de Linos* was a competition piece for Claude Delvincourt, then director of the Paris Conservatoire, which commissioned a flute and piano piece annually for exams. Jolivet eventually dedicated the work to Gaston Crunelle. (The winner of the competition would become quite famous: Jean-Pierre Rampal.) Jolivet transcribed the work the following year for flute, string trio, and harp, as we hear it this afternoon.

The title comes from the mythological figure Linus, who is associated with several legends. He was thought to have created melody and rhythm, and to have taught music to both Hercules and Orpheus. Songs of Linus are lamentations or dirges. Jolivet drew on modal scales and rhythms from Greek and Turkish folk tunes. His *Chant de Linus* alternates slower sections of lamentation with vibrant dance sections. Both types are in irregular rhythms, with laments generally in 5/4 and dance sections in an insistent 7/8 pattern.

Though there are five performers, the flute is clearly *primus inter pares*, reflecting the work's origin as a showcase for flute. Jolivet incorporates several narrative cadenzas for the instrument, as well as extended techniques like flutter-tonguing. It is dazzling, bravura writing.