Benjamin Silberman

Graduate Recital

Saturday, May 14, 2022 • 12:00 PM

Murray and Michele Allen Recital Hall
2330 North Halsted Street • Chicago
Benjamin Silberman is from the studio of Ann Marie Brink. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the degree Master of Music.

Masks must be worn at all times. As a courtesy to those around you, please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices. Flash photography is not permitted. Thank you.
Program Notes

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)
Viola Sonata Op. 31, No. 4 (1923)
Duration: 16 minutes

Paul Hindemith was a German composer and conductor, and also a talented viola player. As such, he has presented violists with quite an extensive repertoire. Among his output is a viola concerto and a total of seven viola sonatas (three with piano and four without) and this sonata was his third of the four unaccompanied ones.

This work is written in three movements, each with unique styles. The first movement begins as an explosion of aggression and from this opening, Hindemith utilizes the natural power of open strings to magnify the sound of the melodic line. After establishing a pattern of alternating between dissonant chords and pure open strings, it is developed in order to create a feeling of rushing forward and gradual acceleration. This figure propels forward to the very end, not giving any opportunity for rest, even until the final notes.

The second movement, marked “Lied” (and translated as “song”), contrasts the first with an introverted mood and tender melodies. By capitalizing on the lack of accompaniment, Hindemith further sets this movement apart with a more subdued dynamic range and at times drifting the melody so soft as to be barely heard at all. Within these singing lines, we can hear clear resolutions from dissonant chords to consonant ones, resolving the emotions of the “singer.” The movement ends, gradually decaying within a consistent repetition, as if the performer is growing more and more distant and eventually reaching a suspended moment of silence.

Motion returns with the opening of the final movement, a grand “Theme and Variations” which begins with a proud statement of the theme in parallel octaves. Throughout, Hindemith explores the full dynamic range of the viola and tests the technical abilities of the performer, periodically returning to the characters of both prior movements. The movement ends with a powerful return to the opening theme, embellishing the octaves with larger chords before the final chords ring a powerful three octave C.

Charles Martin Loeffler (1861-1935)
2 Rhapsodies for Oboe, Viola, and Piano (1901)
Duration: 22 minutes

Charles Martin Loeffler wrote his 2 Rhapsodies based on poems by Maurice Rollinat. Prior to this version, he originally set the text to a trio of bass voice, clarinet, and piano (1898). Once rearranged for oboe, viola, and piano, the text naturally did not have a literal part in the performance, but it does illustrate very clearly the music itself. The translation of the poem which served as inspiration for this movement is listed below:
The Pool
Full of old fish, blind-stricken long ago,
The pool, under a near sky rumbling dull thunder,
Bares between centuries-old rushes
The splashing horror of its gloom.

Over yonder, goblins light up more than one marsh that is black,
Sinister, unbearable;
But the pool is revealed in this lonely place
Only by the croakings of consumptive frogs.

Now, the moon, piercing at this very moment,
Seems to look here at herself fantastically;
As though, one might say, to see her spectral face,

Her flat nose, the strange vacuity of teeth,
A death’s-head lighted from within,
About to peer into a dull mirror.

Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)
Duration: 5 minutes
Augusta Read Thomas is an American composer from New York and is currently a University Professor of Composition in Music at the College at The University of Chicago. From 1997-2006 she was the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, working with conductors Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez.

In 1995, Incantation was written as an unaccompanied violin work. Eventually reworked for solo viola and then for cello, Incantation is one of Thomas’ earliest works which she has not withdrawn. It is one of many unaccompanied works that she has written for solo string instruments, showing her love for the medium.

The piece was written for Cathryn Tait who was dying of cancer and Thomas hoped to celebrate her generosity of spirit with this work. Tait premiered the work in a beautiful performance weeks before her death. Regarding the original composition, she explains:

The music sings out, with beauty and grace, always with a richness and elegance. The work falls loosely into an ABA form, ending as it were, on a question, with a major seventh hanging in the air, unresolved.
Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979)
Viola Sonata (1919)

Duration: 23 minutes

Rebecca Clarke was a British-American woman who became well-known not only as a composer, but also as a world-renowned violist and one of the first women to play professionally in an orchestra. In 1919, Elizabeth Sprague Collidge, who was Clarke’s neighbor and a patron of the arts, held a chamber music competition and encouraged Clarke to enter. She wrote this sonata and of the seventy-two entries, hers was tied as the winner with Ernest Bloch’s Suite. Ultimately, Bloch was declared the winner but her sonata still remains a prominent work in the viola repertoire.

On the first page of the sonata, Clarke included the text from Alfred de Musset’s poem La Nuit de Mai:

“Poète, prends ton luth; le vin de la jeunesse
Fermente cette nuit dans les veines de Dieu.”

Translated, it reads:
“Poet, take up your lute! The wine of youth
Ferments tonight in the veins of God.”

Presenting this, Clarke opens the sonata with a proud and celebratory statement in the solo viola which transitions to a passage that sounds improvisational. Following this introduction, we abruptly transition to a tempestuous passage with sudden changes from loud to soft resulting in a wave-like motion in the melodic line. This eventually clears the way for a tender melody, introduced by the piano and then in the viola.

The second movement features more colorful techniques in the viola including harmonics and pizzicati. The combination of these techniques, as well as the use of a mute, create a feathery texture. Recognizing the virtuosic nature of fast glissandi and flurries of notes, this movement is a substantial contrast of the outer two.

The final movement begins more lyrically and gradually grows more and more grand, equally involved in both the piano and viola parts. After the excitement boils over, the viola clears from the texture. A rumbling of the open C string supports a melodic interlude in the piano before suddenly returning to material reminiscent of the first movement. Clarke masterfully weaves material together from all movements of her sonata before bringing the piece to a triumphant close.

Notes by Benjamin Silberman
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