

Programme Notes

SUK: ELEGY, OP. 23

JOSEF SUK: Born in Křečovice, Bohemia (today Czech Republic) January 4, 1874; died in Benešov (near Prague), May 29, 1935

The year Josef Suk was born, 1874, was a particularly fertile one for composers. It was also the year that produced Schoenberg, Ives, Holst, Serge Koussevitzky, and Franz Schmidt, to mention only the well-known names. Suk's early musical training was with his father, also named Josef. Several other teachers contributed to his education, but it was Dvořák from whom he derived the greatest inspiration. Suk became Dvořák's star pupil, he followed in his teacher's footsteps stylistically (at least for a while) and married his daughter Otilie in 1898. Suk seemed destined for a lifetime of happiness until both his wife and father-in-law died within fourteen months of each other in 1904 (Dvořák) and 1905 (Otilie). Suk was devastated, and poured out his grief in one of his finest compositions, the Second Symphony, subtitled Asrael after the angel of death. Suk was also a professional violinist, and played second violin in the quartet he helped found in 1891. The Czech Quartet would give more than 4,000 concerts over a span of more than four decades, with Suk the only founding member to remain until the quartet disbanded in 1933. The composer's grandson Josef (1929-2011) was also a violinist, one with an international reputation as a soloist, who continued the family line of Josef Suks who played violin.

Instrumental music was Suk's specialty, and his catalogue of chamber music is considerable. The Elegy was written for a funeral ceremony in memory of the Czech author Julius Zeyer (1841-1901.) This was given in an enclosed pavilion with scenery on the grounds of Prague Castle. Upon the conclusion of the music the backdrop was lifted to reveal an actual view of Vyšehrad, the nearby fort. Suk scored the work for solo violin and solo cello along with string quartet, harmonium, and harp, later reducing the forces to just a piano trio, in which form we hear it today.

The six-minute Elegy develops a single, sweetly sad theme presented at the outset by the violin, and then taken up by the cello. There is a brief interlude of turbulence initiated by an outburst from the piano, after which the violin and cello settle into an intimate dialogue using the theme as the subject of discussion. The writing is richly romantic throughout, with reverberations from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* never faraway.

TCHAIKOVSKY: PIANO TRIO IN A MINOR, OP. 50

I. Pezzo elegiaco: Moderato assai

II. A. Tema con variazioni

Theme: Andante con moto

Variation I

Variation II: Più mosso

Variation III: Allegro moderato

Variation IV: L'istesso tempo

Variation V: L'istesso tempo

Variation VI: Tempo di valse

Variation VII: Allegro moderato

Variation VIII: Fugue: Allegro moderato

Variation IX: Andante flebile, ma non tanto

Variation X: Tempo di mazurka

Variation XI: Moderato

B. Variazione finale e coda: Allegro risoluto con fuoco

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY: Born in Votkinsk, May 7, 1840; died in St. Petersburg, November 6, 1893

Tchaikovsky wrote his Piano Trio “in memory of a great artist”—Nicholas Rubinstein. Rubinstein had been one of the composer’s harshest critics, but he had also been one of Tchaikovsky’s teachers, a friend, a trusted colleague, and the man who had given him a job as the first Professor of Harmony at the newly-founded Moscow Conservatory while he was still a student. Tchaikovsky was staying on the Riviera when he learned in March of 1881 that Rubinstein had died in Paris. He made the journey to the French capital to pay his last respects and to deliver a eulogy. In December he began writing the Piano Trio and completed it in just two months. The first performance was a private one, given in Moscow on March 2, 1882. The first public performance was on October 30.

Tchaikovsky’s tribute to Rubinstein took two forms. One was the unusually difficult piano part in the Trio (Nicholas, like his more famous brother Anton, had been a superb pianist). The other was the use of a folk-like theme as the basis of a series of variations in the second movement, reflecting Rubinstein’s love of Russian folk song and recalling a day in 1873 when the two friends had gone for a picnic in the mountains near Moscow and were given an impromptu performance of folk music by some peasants.

Although the Trio consists of just two movements, this work is one of the longest in the chamber music repertory, lasting approximately 45 minutes.

The first movement, called “Pezzo elegiaco” (elegiac piece), is in sonata form, and contains no fewer than five clearly-defined themes. These range in mood from the deeply melancholic opening theme in the cello to the noble, affirmative second (chordal blocks in the piano) to the sweetly yearning third (also introduced by the piano), the plaintive fourth (violin and cello in octaves) and the coyly beseeching fifth (violin).

The second movement, lasting more than half an hour, consists of an original folk-inspired theme followed by a series of twelve variations, the last of which amounts to nearly another movement in itself, including a lengthy coda.

The “Variazione finale” is one of enormous exuberance, vast proportions and symphonic textures. It is actually a complete sonata-form movement in itself, with two themes in contrasting keys (A major and E major), a long development section and a recapitulation. When its seemingly limitless energy is finally spent, the music changes character. Colors darken, the mood turns somber, headlong motion slows to a crawl. For a coda to this monumental work, Tchaikovsky brings back the Trio’s opening theme, now played fortississimo by the strings over a piano accompaniment of thundering chords and flashes of lightning. The great lament closes with a funeral march that recedes quietly into darkness ... blackness ... nothingness.

Bernadene Blaha

Piano

Bernadene Blaha's "brilliant command of the piano", whether featured as recitalist, concerto soloist or chamber musician, has been heralded in performances throughout North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Mexico. Piano and Keyboard magazine has reviewed her as, "a pianist of integrity, with lovely sonorities and total clarity of line." Highlights of this season include return engagements at the Piatigorsky Cello Festival, Newport Music Festival, Los Angeles Philharmonic Chamber Music Series, Worcester Chamber Music Society as well as performances in Canada, France and Italy.

Originally from Canada, Ms. Blaha first came to international attention as a prizewinner in the Montreal Symphony Orchestra Competition; the Young Keyboard Artists International Piano Competition, Grand Rapids, Michigan; the Masterplayers International Competition, Lugano, Switzerland; and the 11th Annual International Piano Competition, New York City. This latter award resulted in two highly acclaimed recital appearances, at Carnegie Recital Hall and the Lincoln Center Library. Soon afterward, Ms. Blaha was featured in the opening orchestra concert and a solo recital at the XXIX International Chopin Festival in Marianske Lazne, Czechoslovakia, followed by performances at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., and Disney Hall in Los Angeles.

Ms. Blaha is a founding member of the piano trio Latitude 41, formed in 2009 with violinist Livia Sohn and cellist Luigi Piovano. Also in demand as a teacher, adjudicator and clinician, Ms. Blaha has received the National Arts Foundation's Outstanding Teacher Recognition Award. She has been invited to serve on the jury of the Gina Bachauer International Artist Piano Competition, Virginia Waring International Competition and the 2015 International E-Competition.

Currently residing in Los Angeles, Ms. Blaha has been a member of the Keyboard Faculty at the Thornton School of Music, University of Southern California since 1993 where she is a Professor.

Elizabeth Dolin

Cellist

Since her Carnegie Recital Hall debut in 1985, Elizabeth Dolin is recognized as one of Canada's finest cellists, in demand as a recitalist and chamber musician throughout Canada and the United States, and as soloist with major Canadian orchestras under such conductors as Mario Bernardi, Yannick Nezet-Séguin and Simon Streatfield. Referring to her Mendelssohn recording with Bernadene Blaha on the Analekta label, *The Strad* writes that she "performs these works with technical finesse and just the right level of delicacy that Mendelssohn...demands. Highly recommended"

A founding member of several highly regarded ensembles (Les Cordes Romantiques, Duo Fouquet-Dolin, Reiner Trio), she has collaborated with such artists as Martin Beaver, Bernadene Blaha, Steven Isserlis and Pinchas Zuckerman. Her regular appearances at Festival of the Sound, the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival, the Orford Festival, Chamber Music Kincardine and the Fredericton Chamber Music Festival, among others, have been enthusiastically received. Highlights of note include a tour of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with l'Orchestre Metropolitain and a performance of Schumann's Concerto for Cello with the Victoria Symphony.

Elizabeth Dolin's large and varied discography includes works by Chopin, Coulthard, Debussy, Dolin, Franck, Mendelssohn, Mozart, St-Saëns, Widor, Rachmaninoff and Vierne, for the Naxos, Analekta, ATMA, CBC-Musica Viva, Fonovox, Espace XX1, and Pélleas labels. Her recording of the Rachmaninoff and Debussy sonatas, as well as the complete works of Mendelssohn for cello and piano, both for Analekta, were nominated for Best Album of the Year by l'ADISQ in 2002 and 2004 and received rave reviews.

In addition to being an active member of Montreal's chamber music scene, Ms. Dolin is Assistant Professor of Cello at the Schulich School of Music, McGill University, as well as Professor of Cello at the Conservatoire de musique de Montréal. She is also on faculty at Domaine Forget.

Elizabeth Dolin plays on a François Lotte bow, graciously provided to her by the company CANIMEX INC. from Drummondville (Quebec), Canada.

Laurence Kayaleh

Violin

International concert performer, Laurence Kayaleh is an artist of deep musical insight, possessing a rich, singing tone and a natural feeling for style. Possessing the impeccable technique and innate musicality of the grand tradition of violin playing, while at the same time venturing regularly into contemporary music, her playing comprises all the facets of a complete musician and creates an intensely moving experience for the public.

At her Paris debut at the Théâtre du Châtelet, the world-renowned critic of *Le Figaro*, Pierre Petit, described her playing as regal, praising her wonderful sound and her innate sense of phrasing. Following this event, she performed at the Gaveau Hall in Paris, has been a guest of the Lucerne Festival, and played as soloist under such well-known conductors as Pavel Kogan, John Carewe and Hiroshi Wakazugi.

Laurence Kayaleh performed as soloist at the Bolchoï Hall and at the Tchaïkovsky Hall in Moscow, performing the Brahms Violin Concerto with the Russian National Orchestra under Mikhaïl Pletnev, at the Pleyel Hall in Paris with the Orchestre Lamoureux under Grzegorz Nowak sharing the concert with violinist Igor Oïstrakh, at the Lied Center in Lincoln, USA, at the Mie Center for the Arts (Japan), and at the Suntory Hall in Tokyo. Her American career rewarded her with standing ovations wherever she performed: at the Blossom Festival with the Cleveland Orchestra, at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts with Washington's National Symphony Orchestra under Leonard Slatkin who described her as a unique musician.

Other engagements include a soloist performance with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under Charles Dutoit, concerts in the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival and a Gala Concert in Switzerland that she shared with violinists Viktor Pikayzen and Ida Haendel.

Laurence has recorded for NAXOS Records the complete works for violin and piano by N. Medtner (2 volumes), A. Honegger, G. Catoire, J. Raff and F. Rebay's complete sonatas for violin & guitar, and viola & guitar.

Laurence Kayaleh performs on a magnificent Pietro Guarneri built by the Venetian master in 1742, which belonged to the eminent violinist and pedagogue, Carl Flesch.