

ZLATOMIR FUNG, CELLO & BENJAMIN HOCHMAN, PIANO
January 14, 2023 - Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechelt

ORNSTEIN: SIX PRELUDES FOR CELLO AND PIANO

- I. Moderato sostenuto
- II. Con moto
- III. Presto
- IV. Andante non troppo
- V. Non troppo (quasi improvisato)
- VI. Allegro agitato

LEO ORNSTEIN: Born in Kremenchuk, Poltava, Russian Empire (now Ukraine), December 11, 1892; died in Green Bay, Wisconsin, February 24, 2002

Leo Ornstein holds the record as the world's longest-lived composer of classical music. The lifespan of this Russian-born American composer – 109 years – embraced the entire twentieth century plus a few years more at either end. When he was born (1892) Brahms was still alive; when he died (2002) John Cage had already been dead for ten years and John Adams was at the height of fame. He composed almost to the end. His Eighth Piano Sonata (his final work) was written in 1990 at the age of 97.

At the age of nine the famed pianist Josef Hofman heard him play had him sent to the conservatory in St. Petersburg, where his teachers included Glazunov (also represented on today's program). In 1906, the scourge of anti-Semitism drove the Ornsteins to New York City. Here the youth continued his studies at the Institute of Musical Art (forerunner of the Juilliard School of Music). He made his New York debut as a pianist in 1911 and was quickly recognized as a world-class musician.

As to be expected from a composer with such a prodigiously long creative life, Ornstein's music cannot be neatly categorized. He made his name with outrageously provocative avant-garde compositions and was the first major composer to make extensive use of tone clusters. Although modernistic music is what Ornstein is best remembered for, this phase lasted only a short time, until about 1920, after which his writing incorporated elements of expressionism, romanticism, exoticism, and influences from composers like Debussy and Scriabin as well as from Eastern European Jewish chant (his father was a cantor).

The Six Preludes for cello and piano date from 1931. Though modern in comparison to Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff, they present no challenge to ears accustomed to the sounds of Bartók or Prokofiev. Each exhibits a unique character. The first, shortest of the six, is broadly lyrical. The second breathes an air of mystery and exoticism. If Scriabin had written a cello sonata, it might well have sounded much like this. The third has a fiercely pounding rhythmic energy such as Bartók might have wielded. The fourth is quiet and contemplative, the fifth turbulent and highly dramatic. The sixth returns to the supercharged world of the third, now positively ferocious in its high-octane output.

The Preludes are designated "for cello and piano," and indeed the piano is every bit an equal partner. The virtuosic writing reflects the level of technical mastery the composer himself possessed, and is at times truly impressive in its density and complexity. In these Preludes the listener can easily perceive a deeply committed musical personality at work, a unique voice that draws on external influences (especially from Bartók, Scriabin, Eastern European folk elements, and Hebraic chant), yet retains its individual voice. Ornstein himself said "I believe, frankly, that [the Preludes are] probably one of the best pieces of music that I've written, one of the soundest. I think if any music is going to last, I have a feeling that may be it."

SOKOLOV: ROMANCE OP. 19

NIKOLAY SOKOLOV: Born in St. Petersburg, March 26, 1859; died in Petrograd (today St. Petersburg), March 27, 1922

Nikolay Alexandrovich Sokolov was a Russian composer, not to be confused with the violinist and conductor Nikolay Grigoryevich Sokoloff (1886-1965) or with Glazunov's literary collaborator Nikolai Matveevich Sokolov (1860-1908). Rimsky-Korsakov was one of his teachers, and during his tenure at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, beginning in 1908, Dmitri Shostakovich was one of his pupils.

Sokolov was a member of the circle that developed around the music publisher Mitrofan Belyayev whose operations were based in St. Petersburg and Leipzig. In the latter city his name was spelled Beliaeff; after he died in 1894 his publishing house was taken over by C. F. Peters, which exists to this day. Sokolov's modest output includes three string quartets, several additional chamber compositions, shorter orchestral works, some songs and choral pieces. Sokolov also wrote four textbooks on harmony and counterpoint.

The Romance was published by Baliaeff in Leipzig in 1894 under the French title "*Romance pour violoncelle avec accompagnement de piano,*" and indeed, the piano's role in this music, unlike that of Ornstein's, is only that of accompanist. The cello "sings" this lovely song without words, firmly grounded in the key of A major, almost entirely by itself. The opening gesture is a descending major scale, upon which the Romance develops a fantasy. An episode midway through involves something resembling a dialogue between the cello and piano, but otherwise the cello has this lovely piece to itself.

WEIR: UNLOCKED

- I. Make Me a Garment
- II. No Justice
- III. The Wind Blows East
- IV. The Keys to the Prison
- V. Trouble, Trouble

JUDITH WEIR: Born in Cambridge, England, May 11, 1954; now living in London

Judith Weir is one of Britain's most successful living composers. Among her many honors, she serves as Master of the King's Music, appointed in 2014 by Queen Elizabeth II for a ten-year term – the first woman to hold this office. In this capacity she has written music for national and royal occasions including a setting of Psalm 42 ("Like as the hart") for the state funeral of Elizabeth II last September. In 1995 Weir was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and in 2007 she received the Queen's Medal for Music.

Although born in Cambridge, Weir comes from a Scottish family, and Scottish culture plays a significant role in her music. Her earliest composition lessons were from English composer John Tavener, while she was still a teenager. Weir's commissioned works include *Music Untangled* and *Natural History* for the Boston Symphony (1991), *We are Shadows* for Simon Rattle (1999), *woman.life.song* for Jessye Norman (2000), *The Welcome Arrival of Rain* for the Minnesota Orchestra (2002), *Tiger under the Table* for the London Sinfonietta (2003), and *CONCRETE*, a choral motet inspired by the Barbican building in London (2007). Her first full-length adult opera, *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987), was the work that brought her widespread acclaim. Weir's most recent opera, *Miss Fortune*, was premiered in Bregenz in 2011.

Unlocked for solo cello was written for Ulrich Heinen, who first performed the work in Birmingham, England on May 28, 1999. The five “fantasies,” as Weir calls them, were inspired by American folksongs in the Lomax collection assembled during the 1930s and now at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The following descriptions combine notes by the composer with commentary from the web site Scordaturawmc.com dated August 9, 2020:

No. 1 (“Make Me A Garment”) is based on a song sung by a prisoner in Florida who was found by the Lomaxes in the tuberculosis ward and could only whisper his song. This song is an example of a “holler,” a distinct type of African American folk singing. The singer vocalizes with an open throat, improvising variations on a simple melody.

No. 2 (“No Justice”) is a set of variations using extended playing techniques growing out of a simple prison song from Georgia (original title “Oh we don’t get no justice in Atlanta”). It is one of a number of protest songs about the treatment of black prisoners; Lomax describes the man complaining of the cold and the weight of his chains.

No. 3 (“The Wind Blow East”) comes from fragments of a chorus heard in the Bahamas. It describes the effects of a hurricane that has blown three ships off course “right down in town.” The song represents the prisoner’s dream of a better life. Weir asks for the music to be “dreamy and faint,” and for a mute to be used throughout.

No. 4 (“The Keys to the Prison”) is based on an original song sung in French by a fifteen-year-old Cajun girl. Lomax describes it as “a swift and acid dialogue between a condemned man and his father and mother [which] stands alone of its kind among American folksongs.” The young man sings of how terrible it is to know in advance that he is going to die, and that his mother should be the one to retrieve his body.

No. 5 (“Trouble, Trouble”) is a transcription/arrangement of a blues song by a prisoner in Alabama. Weir treats the song simply, alternating the melody with tremolo played over the fingerboard.

GLAZUNOV: ENTR'ACTE FROM RAYMONDA (arr. for cello and piano)

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV: Born in St. Petersburg, August 10, 1865; died in Paris, March 21, 1936

Alexander Glazunov (like Nikolay Sokolov, a member of the Belyayev Circle) represents a perfect example of a composer who did everything correctly, followed all the rules, earned tremendous respect, and made an enormously successful career for himself. He was precocious as well, writing his first symphony at the age of sixteen. He traveled throughout America and Europe, and received honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge.

Glazunov steadfastly refused to have anything to do with the new currents swirling around Europe, resisting the advanced chromaticism of Wagner, the polyphonic complexities of Richard Strauss, and the atonal explorations of Schoenberg. He continually astonished colleagues with a prodigious memory, impeccable compositional technique, and the incredible ease with which he composed numerous works. But, as writer Andrew Huth noted, “this sheer facility, it has been suggested, was eventually to have an adverse effect on his creative energy; composition was so easy for him that he seems never to have felt the need to renew his style or subject himself to that degree of self-criticism which might have raised his huge talent to the level of genius.”

If Glazunov does not command quite the respect he once enjoyed, his music is still eminently pleasing for its lyrical impulses and fine craftsmanship. Quite by chance, many of his compositions bear titles in common with well-known works by other composers: *The Seasons*, *The Song of Destiny*, and *Wedding March*. Other orchestral music includes eight symphonies and a Violin Concerto.

The ballet score *Raymonda* was premiered in St. Petersburg in January 1898 to choreography by Marius Petipa. The storyline need not concern us here except to mention that it takes place during the time of the Crusades and involves a knight who leaves home on a pilgrimage. During his absence his beloved (Raymonda) is pursued by a Saracen warrior but her knight returns just in time to save her. The *Entracte* with a performance direction of *Andante sostenuto* is actually the first of three numbers with this title scattered throughout the score. In its original form, it features a pair of clarinets, perfectly evoking the sensuous, dreamlike atmosphere that hovers over the end of the first scene of Act I. Glazunov himself arranged the number for two cellos and piano, and Konstantin Rodionova arranged it for violin and piano; there also exist versions for piano trio and for string quartet. We hear it today for cello and piano.

BEETHOVEN: CELLO SONATA NO. 3 IN A MAJOR, OP. 69

- I. Allegro ma non tanto
- II. Scherzo: Allegro molto
- III. Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN: Born in Bonn, December 16, 1770; died in Vienna, March 26, 1827

During Beethoven's lifetime, the cello was going through a transitional period. Until the late eighteenth century, it was used almost exclusively as a bass instrument. For music in the higher range, the viola da gamba was used. But the lower instrument's richer tone and flowing lyricism proved irresistible, and Beethoven exploited these qualities while extending the cello's range upwards as well. The gamba was becoming obsolete anyway, and Beethoven's sonatas and variation sets provided an additional impetus to merge the techniques of both instruments into one. About this time the cello also acquired its endpin to anchor it better to the floor. Beethoven's association with the finest cellists of the day provided further stimulus for his adventurous writing for this instrument.

Beethoven wrote only five sonatas for cello and piano, but like the 32 sonatas for solo piano, they span most of his creative life. They were written in three spurts of activity: two (Op. 5) in 1796 at the very outset of his career; one (Op. 69) in 1808, squarely in the midst of his career; and two more (Op. 102) in 1815 when he was moving into what musicologists would call his Late Period. Op. 69 was written in 1807-08, surrounded by many of the composer's most famous works including the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Violin Concerto and the *Emperor* Concerto. In contrast to the formal experiments and expansive layout of the first two sonatas, the A-major Sonata is a more disciplined and compact work. It is also by far the most popular of the five cello sonatas, and the most frequently performed outside the cycle. It was written for a nobleman-cellist, Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein.

Reasons why this sonata is an audience favorite appear immediately. The opening theme for cello alone is one of the most gracious Beethoven ever wrote for any instrument. The second theme is no less full of character, this one announced by the piano in a march-like vein. A long coda serves as a second development section, wherein Beethoven further expands on that elegant opening theme. The second movement is a typically Beethovenian scherzo – highly spirited, full of rhythmic displacements and irregularities within the framework of relentlessly pulsing triplets. The contrasting Trio section twice alternates with the Scherzo material. It opens with the cello playing double stops in an almost Brahmsian manner, displaying the instrument in its fullest, richest sonority. The *Adagio cantabile* is of such exquisite loveliness that the listener is almost disappointed to find it break off after just eighteen bars. The *Allegro vivace* follows without pause, another movement brimming with playful ideas and happy sentiment.

Programme notes: Robert Markow

ZLATOMIR FUNG

The first American in four decades and youngest musician ever to win First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition Cello Division, Zlatomir Fung is poised to become one of the preeminent cellists of our time. Astounding audiences with his boundless virtuosity and exquisite sensitivity, the 23-year-old has already proven himself to be a star among the next generation of world-class musicians. A recipient of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship 2022 and a 2020 Avery Fisher Career Grant, Fung's impeccable technique demonstrates mastery of the canon and exceptional insight into the depths of contemporary repertoire.

In the 2022-2023 season, Fung performs with orchestras and gives recitals in all corners of the world. Orchestral engagements include the BBC and Rochester Philharmonics, Milwaukee, Reading, Lincoln, Ridgefield and Sante Fe Symphonies, Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, Sarasota Orchestra, and APEX Ensemble. He gives the world premiere of a new cello concerto by Katherine Balch with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. He plays recitals throughout North America with pianists Benjamin Hochman, Dina Vainshtein, and Janice Carissa, including stops in New York City, Chicago, IL, San Diego and Berkeley, CA, Los Alamos, NM, Rockville, MD, Melbourne, FL, Vancouver and Sechelt, BC, Northampton, MA, Providence, RI, Burlington, VT, and Waterford, VA. Tours of Europe and Asia include a recital at Wigmore Hall and two performances at Cello Biënnale Amsterdam.

Recent summer festival appearances include Aspen Music Festival, Bravo! Vail with the New York Philharmonic and Leonard Slatkin, ChamberFest Cleveland, Chamber Music Northwest, La Jolla Chamber Music Society, Rockport Chamber Music Festival, and Verbier. As a soloist, Fung has appeared with the Detroit, Kansas City, Seattle, Utah, Greensboro, Ann Arbor, and Asheville Symphonies, among many others. Past recital highlights include his Carnegie Hall Weill Recital Hall debut with pianist Mishka Rushdie Momen and multiple tours throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. As a chamber musician, he has been presented by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Philharmonic Society of Orange County, IMS Prussia Cove, Syrinx Concerts in Toronto, The Embassy Series & The Phillips Collection in Washington DC, and Salon de Virtuosi and Bulgarian Concert Evenings in New York City.

A winner of the 2017 Young Concert Artists International Auditions and the 2017 Astral National Auditions, Fung has taken the top prizes at the 2018 Alice & Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition, 2016 George Enescu International Cello Competition, 2015 Johansen International Competition for Young String Players, 2014 Stulberg International String Competition, and 2014 Irving Klein International Competition. He was selected as a 2016 U.S. Presidential Scholar for the Arts and was awarded the 2016 Landgrave von Hesse Prize at the Kronberg Academy Cello Masterclasses.

Of Bulgarian-Chinese heritage, Zlatomir Fung began playing cello at age three. Fung studied at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Richard Aaron and Timothy Eddy. Fung has been featured on NPR's *Performance Today* and has appeared on *From the Top* six times. In addition to music, he enjoys cinema, reading, and blitz chess.

BENJAMIN HOCHMAN

In all roles, from soloist to chamber musician to conductor, Benjamin Hochman regards music as vital and essential. Composers, fellow musicians, orchestras and audiences recognize his deep commitment to insightful programming and performances of quality.

Born in Jerusalem in 1980, Hochman's musical foundation is laid in his teenage years. Frank at the Curtis Institute of Music and Goode at the Mannes School of Music prove defining influences. At the invitation of Uchida, he spends three formative summers at the Marlboro Music Festival.

At 24, Hochman debuts as soloist with the Israel Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall conducted by Zukerman. Orchestral appearances follow with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago and Pittsburgh Symphonies, and Prague Philharmonia under conductors including Nosedá, Pinnock, Robertson, and Storgårds. A winner of Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Career Grant, Hochman performs at venues and festivals across the globe, including the Philharmonie in Berlin, Vienna Konzerthaus, the Kennedy Center in Washington, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Germany's Klavierfestival Ruhr and Lucerne and Verbier festivals in Switzerland.

In 2015, Hochman develops an auto-immune condition affecting his left hand. He decides to pursue his longstanding interest in conducting, studying with Gilbert at Juilliard where he is granted the Bruno Walter Scholarship and the Charles Schiff Award. He assists Langrée, Järvi, and De Waart and creates the Roosevelt Island Orchestra, consisting of some of New York's finest orchestral and chamber musicians alongside promising young talent from top conservatories. Invitations to conduct the orchestras of Santa Fe Pro Musica, Orlando, and The Orchestra Now at Bard New York follow.

Fully recovered, Hochman re-emerges as pianist in 2018. He records Mozart Piano Concertos Nos. 17 and 24, playing and directing the English Chamber Orchestra (Avie Records). He presents the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas at the Israel Conservatory in Tel Aviv, performs Beethoven sonatas for Barenboim as part of a filmed workshop at the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin and plays both Beethoven and Kurtág for Kurtág himself at the Budapest Music Centre.

Highlights of 2022-2023 include Beethoven's last three Piano Sonatas at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Schubert's Trout Quintet at the Schubertiade Festival in Austria with the Emerson String Quartet and Dominik Wagner, and performances with cellist Zlatomir Fung at Wigmore Hall, London and across North America. He will conduct Beethoven and Schumann with the Greater Bridgeport Symphony in Connecticut and Kurtág at Bard New York.

Hochman is a Steinway Artist and a resident of Berlin, where he is a Lecturer at Bard College Berlin.