



CONCERT PROGRAM VI:

The Age of Expression

AUGUST 2

Wednesday, August 2

7:30 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

SPECIAL THANKS

Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Dan and Kathleen Brenzel with gratitude for their generous support.

ALEXANDER BORODIN (1833–1887)

String Quartet no. 2 in D Major (1881)

Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro
Notturmo: Andante
Finale: Andante - Vivace

Danbi Um, Paul Huang, violins; Paul Neubauer, viola; Clive Greensmith, cello

OTTORINO RESPIGHI (1879–1936)

Violin Sonata in b minor (1917)

Moderato
Andante espressivo
Passacaglia: Allegro moderato ma energico

Paul Huang, violin; Orion Weiss, piano

INTERMISSION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The generation of virtuosi that emerged in the early twentieth century, headed by the preternaturally gifted Fritz Kreisler, charted new frontiers in the violin's expressive potential. As the art of the violin was reimagined, so inevitably was the music written for it, as composers created music expressly for the soulful practitioners of the new style. Concert Program VI features music by Borodin, Respighi, Ysaÿe, and even Kreisler himself—works that illustrate the age of expression's transformative effect on how composers would forever approach the instrument.

EUGÈNE YSAÏE (1858–1931)

Sonata in e minor for Solo Violin, op. 27, no. 4 (1924)

Allemande
Sarabande
Finale: Presto ma non troppo

Benjamin Beilman, violin

FRITZ KREISLER (1875–1962)

String Quartet in a minor (1919)

Fantasia
Scherzo: Allegro vivo, con spirito
Einleitung und Romanze
Finale: Allegro molto moderato

Benjamin Beilman, Danbi Um, violins; Paul Neubauer, viola; Nicholas Canellakis, cello

Program Notes: The Age of Expression

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

ALEXANDER BORODIN

(Born October 31/November 12, 1833, St. Petersburg, Russia; died February 15/27, 1887, St. Petersburg)

String Quartet no. 2 in D Major

Composed: 1881

Published: 1888, Leipzig

Dedication: Yekaterina Borodin

Other works from this period: *V sredney Azii* (In the Steppes of Central Asia) (symphonic poem) (1880); *Arabskaya melodiya* (Arabian Melody) for Voice and Piano (1881); Scherzo in D Major for String Quartet (1882); Symphony no. 3 in a minor (1882, 1886–1887)

Approximate duration: 30 minutes

The Russian composer Alexander Borodin boasts a unique biography among the canon of great composers. The illegitimate son of a Russian prince and his mistress, he was baptized as the son of one of the prince's serfs, one Porfiry Ionovich Borodin (hence his patronymic, Alexander Porfir'yevich). Nevertheless, Alexander and his mother enjoyed the prince's favor and the privilege that came with it: a sound education, financial security, and, before the prince's death, Alexander's official emancipation from serfdom.

Borodin studied music as a child and, from early on, demonstrated an intellectual curiosity and an autodidactic bent that would flourish into his professional career. Growing bored with piano lessons, he explored, with a friend, four-hand arrangements of music by Haydn, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn of his own volition. He later taught himself to play the cello, out of a desire to participate in chamber music readings.

In his adolescence, Borodin developed an interest in chemistry that would match and even exceed his passion for music. He studied chemistry at the St. Petersburg Medical-Surgical Academy, en route to a profession as a chemist and physician. Borodin thrived in academia but never forsook music. Nikolay Zinin, the Chemistry Chair at the academy, implored him, "Mr. Borodin, busy yourself a little less with songs. I'm putting all my hopes in you as my successor, but all you think of is music. You can't hunt two hares at the same time." To our benefit, Borodin did not heed his professor's advice and continued to turn to music for personal catharsis.

In 1862, now serving as a professor at the academy (having, indeed, succeeded Zinin), Borodin met the composer Mily Balakirev at a musical gathering at the home of a colleague. He became a part of Balakirev's inner circle—along with César Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. This group became known as the Mighty Handful or the Five: the set of nationalist, largely self-taught composers who sought to establish a distinctly Russian musical style. With Balakirev's encouragement and guidance, Borodin soon completed his Symphony in E-flat and a number of songs—works that herald the consolidation of his personal voice.

Borodin composed his String Quartet no. 2 in D Major in 1881. The quartet is a love letter to the composer's wife, the pianist Yekaterina Sergeevna Protopopova, whom Borodin had met in Heidelberg in 1861, where Yekaterina had been sent for treatment of her tuberculosis. The two immediately bonded over their common musical interests—she convinced him of Schumann and Chopin, and the two discovered Wagner together—and Borodin proposed three months after they met. The quartet, composed twenty years hence, is a nostalgic recollection of their early courtship. That Borodin was utterly devoted to his wife (and constantly preoccupied by her poor health) can easily be heard in the work's euphoric tone.

The quartet begins with a blissful dialogue between first violin and cello—clearly meant to symbolize Yekaterina and Alexander. The two voices dominate the first movement, with the first violin waxing especially rhapsodic. The development section forays into F major, a key traditionally

associated with pastoral settings (cf. Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony, et al.), meant perhaps to evoke idyllic memories of their meeting in Heidelberg. Even in its more aggressive moments, the *Allegro moderato* never darkens; the musical contrast suggests a richness of experience rather than distress.

The second movement, a lighthearted scherzo, skips along, propelled by fleet eighth notes. This playful music soon slows to a charming waltz, *molto cantabile e dolce*, fit for a fairy tale. The movement elegantly balances these two musical ideas, as if to depict the young lovers frolicking by day and romancing by night.

The ravishing **nocturne** seduces the listener with its first utterance, a heartfelt cello solo, *cantabile ed espressivo*. The first violin replies in kind. We are listening in on Alexander and Yekaterina's amorous dialogue, on a summer evening softly moonlit by the second violin and viola. Midway through the movement, ascending runs in the violins quicken the tempo, and the main theme returns, now more urgent. This nocturne's irresistible allure has made it one of Borodin's most famous creations.

The fourth movement begins with an *Andante* introduction, as if still lost in the afterglow of the nocturne. Violins and lower strings exchange a playfully teasing question and answer, before launching into an ebullient *Vivace*. This finale reinforces the quartet's joyful demeanor. Before its conclusion, an *Andante* interruption recalls the slow introduction, now with the viola and cello posing the question and the violins responding. As elsewhere throughout the work, it is not difficult to hear this as contented conversation between the composer and his beloved.

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

(Born July 9, 1879, Bologna, Italy; died April 18, 1936, Rome)

Violin Sonata in b minor

Composed: 1917

Published: 1919

First performance: March 3, 1918, Bologna, by violinist Federico Sarti with the composer at the piano

Other works from this period: *Fountains of Rome* (1915–1916), *Preludio* for Organ (1916); *Ancient Airs and Dances* (1917); *Woodland Deities* (song cycle) (1917)

Approximate duration: 26 minutes

The Italian composer Ottorino Respighi's early musical education was broad: in addition to his compositional instruction under the influential pedagogue Giuseppe Martucci, he trained as a violinist and violist and also studied music history with the noted early music scholar Luigi Torchi. In 1900, Respighi was appointed Principal Viola of the Russian Imperial Theatre Orchestra in St. Petersburg; while in Russia, he studied composition for a period of five months under Rimsky-Korsakov, whose influence can be heard in the vivid colors of Respighi's later orchestral scores.

In 1913, Respighi became a professor of composition at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia in Rome, a post he would hold for the rest of his life. Rome seduced him so and inspired his best-known works: the **symphonic poems** *Fountains of Rome*, *Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*. This beloved triptych has won Respighi a measure of popularity arguably unmatched by any Italian composer since Puccini.

Though primarily known for his orchestral music, Respighi produced a modest catalogue of chamber music, as well. His Violin Sonata in b minor dates from the same period as *Fountains of Rome*, during which time the composer actively explored different stylistic directions. While *Fountains* might evoke the modern orchestral color of Debussy and Ravel, the sonata resoundingly echoes nineteenth-century Romanticism. Reflecting Respighi's

*Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 92.

competence as both a violinist and pianist, the sonata is notably idiomatic for both instruments.

The piece's opening *Moderato* begins with a penetrating melody in the violin, set atop an expectant murmur in the piano accompaniment. Respighi's melodic writing, in spite of its chromatic twists and turns and disjunct contour, has a strikingly vocal quality. The legato second theme, sung *dolcissimo* in the upper reaches of the violin, starts in bright D major before proceeding to more complex harmonies.

The movement features a highly charged development section. The piano part becomes densely orchestrated, and the music turns rhythmically volatile to match its mercurial harmonies. The violin whips up an impressive maelstrom, playing agitated **quintuplets** and **septuplets** above a clangorous accompaniment. Soon, tentative fragments of the high *dolcissimo* melody lead to the first theme's languid return. The movement culminates in a transcendent coda, marked *Calmo*, to be played *con grande espressione e dolcezza*.

The *Andante espressivo* begins with a childlike introduction, the piano presenting placid octaves in lilting 10/8 time. This quickly blooms into a statement of Romantic opulence. The 10/8 lilt assumes the profile of steady quintuplets, supporting a stirring melody in the violin, rich with pathos. The movement gathers steam towards a headstrong *Appassionato* section; when the quintuplets return, the piano presents an assertive new melody, immediately taken up by the violin. This leads to a fervid climax, *poco più mosso*, impelled by the violin's fortissimo double-dotted declarations.

The sonata concludes with a **passacaglia**, a form based on the constant repetition and variation of a central musical idea. The movement begins with the sinewy, dotted-rhythm passacaglia theme in the piano's bass register. The violin enters with Brahmsian hardiness. Over this recurring **ostinato**, Respighi spins a rich web of varied musical characters.

The Violin Sonata in b minor's first performance was given on March 3, 1918, by Respighi's former teacher, the violinist Federico Sarti, with Respighi at the piano. The composer allowed himself a moment of pride following the premiere. "Praise be!" he wrote to a friend. "I shouldn't say so, but we played well. Me included!"

EUGÈNE YSAÏE

(Born July 16, 1858, Liège, Belgium; died May 12, 1931, Brussels)

Sonata in e minor for Solo Violin, op. 27, no. 4

Composed: 1924

Published: 1924

Dedication: Fritz Kreisler

Other works from this period: Sonata for Solo Cello, op. 28 (1924); Ten Preludes for Solo Violin (1928); String Trio, *Le Chimay* (1927)

Approximate duration: 13 minutes

Upon hearing the Hungarian virtuoso Joseph Szigeti perform J. S. Bach's Sonata in g minor for Solo Violin—the first of the Baroque master's celebrated Six Sonatas and Partitas for the instrument—Eugène Ysaÿe was inspired to compose his own set of six sonatas. Completed in 1924, Ysaÿe's Six Sonatas for Solo Violin, op. 27, have subsequently come to occupy a similarly hallowed place in the instrument's literature. Penned by the premier violinist-composer of his generation, they stand as an early twentieth-century rejoinder to those works by Bach by which they were inspired: spotlighting the violin alone, sans keyboard accompaniment, they demonstrate the apex of the instrument's technique in their era, just as Bach's solo works did two centuries before. "At the present day, the tools of violin mastery, of expression, technique, and mechanism, are far more necessary than in days gone by," Ysaÿe surmised. "In fact they are indispensable, if the spirit is to express itself without restraint."

Each of the six sonatas bears a dedication to a violinist contemporary with Ysaÿe. The fourth sonata, in e minor, is dedicated to Fritz Kreisler. Cast in three movements, it explicitly nods in form to the Baroque dance suites that prompted its creation. The first movement is an allemande, one of the most

prevalent sixteenth- and seventeenth-century instrumental dance forms. In this magisterial allemande, Ysaÿe uses double-, triple-, and quadruple-stopped chords to create a dense polyphonic texture, evocative indeed of Bach. (In its final measures, by some impressive violin alchemy, Ysaÿe even accomplishes five- and six-note chords.)

The second movement takes the form of a **sarabande**, a triple-meter dance form with origins in Latin America and Spain. Ysaÿe's sarabande demonstrates a degree of **polyphony** equal to that of the preceding allemande—here, executed pizzicato. Thus prefaced by music of such especial delicacy, the subsequent arco (that is, bowed) music is deeply affecting.

The sonata concludes with an unrelenting *Presto* finale. Like the sonata as a whole, this *Presto* is not merely a paean to virtuosity, though its demands on the player are considerable. Rather, characteristic of Ysaÿe's art, this bracing final movement features utterly captivating music whose expressive power outpaces even its athletic thrill.

FRITZ KREISLER

(Born February 2, 1875, Vienna; died January 29, 1962, New York City)

String Quartet in a minor

Composed: 1919

Published: 1921

First performance: April 26, 1919, New York, by the Letz Quartet

Other works from this period: *La gitana* (1919); *Londonderry Air* (1922); *Lotus Land* (after Cyril Scott's Opus 47 Number 1) (1922); *Midnight Bells* (after Richard Heuberger's *Midnight Bells* from *The Opera Ball*) (1923)

Approximate duration: 27 minutes

Born in Vienna in 1875, the violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler ranks among the most celebrated virtuosos of his generation. At the turn of the twentieth century, successful appearances with the Vienna, Berlin, and London Philharmonic Orchestras catapulted Kreisler to international stardom. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* notes: "Kreisler was unique. Without exertion (he practiced little) he achieved a seemingly effortless perfection."

Kreisler was also an active composer. In addition to a string quartet, an operetta, and other works, his oeuvre includes miscellaneous pieces that he claimed had been written by various popular seventeenth- and eighteenth-century composers. Later, he admitted that these pieces were a hoax and that he had written them himself. Some listeners got, and appreciated, the joke; others angrily disapproved.

For listeners familiar with the lighthearted fare that constitutes the majority of Kreisler's oeuvre, the String Quartet in a minor may reveal an unexpected facet of the composer's art. It is a robust, harmonically complex work, as richly inventive as it is grand in its design.

The quartet moreover marks a fraught chapter in Kreisler's life. Kreisler served in the Austrian Army during the First World War; he was wounded and discharged in 1914, whereupon he left Europe for the United States. The war had produced fervent anti-German sentiments in America—Beethoven symphonies went unperformed for a time—and Kreisler was forced to withdraw from public performance for five years, not appearing onstage until a concert in New York in October 1919.

His quartet was published two years later. The composer described the piece as a tribute to Vienna, the city of his birth; indeed, the work's prevailing impression is one of deeply felt nostalgia on the part of the expatriate composer, longing, in the midst of a trying period, for the comfort of home.

The work comprises four movements. The first movement is an episodic fantasia, spanning a variety of musical characters and ensemble textures. It begins with a forceful ascending statement, *quasi recitativo*, in the cello, amplified by the upper strings and answered by a softer, romantic utterance. (It has been surmised that the quartet may follow an autobiographical program, with the cello cast as its protagonist.) A stylish *Allegro moderato* section in 3/4 time follows, quite easily heard as a fond reminiscence of Vienna. An expressionistic passage interrupts this dreamy music, with quiet *tremolandi* and bowed *sul*