



CONCERT PROGRAM VII:

National Flavors

AUGUST 5

Saturday, August 5

6:00 p.m., The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

SPECIAL THANKS

Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Marcia and Hap Wagner with gratitude for their generous support.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ (1890–1959)

Duo no. 1 for Violin and Cello (1927)

Praeludium: Andante moderato

Rondo: Allegro con brio

Danbi Um, violin; Nicholas Canellakis, cello

JOHN CORIGLIANO (Born 1938)

Red Violin Caprices (1999)

Bella Hristova, violin

ERNŐ DOHNÁNYI (1877–1960)

Ruralia hungarica, op. 32c (1924)

Andante rubato, alla zingaresca (Gypsy Andante)

Danbi Um, violin; Hyeyeon Park, piano

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Music@Menlo's 2017 festival season finale offers a colorful survey of violin playing across the Western world. The vitality of modern Bohemia is heard in Martinů's ingenious duo, while the visceral influence of the great Russian school of string playing is evident in Shostakovich's Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, completed while the composer was still a teenager. Composer Ernő Dohnányi drew from his native Hungary's folk traditions in his *Ruralia hungarica*, while American composer John Corigliano's *Red Violin Caprices* glorify the instrument with a distinctly modern voice. The program concludes with the thrilling String Octet by the Romanian composer, violinist, pianist, and conductor George Enescu.

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, op. 11 (1924–1925)

Prelude: Adagio

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Arnaud Sussmann, Soovin Kim, Danbi Um, Bella Hristova, violins; Richard O'Neill, Paul Neubauer, violas; Dmitri Atapine, David Finckel, cellos

INTERMISSION

GEORGE ENESCU (1881–1955)

String Octet in C Major, op. 7 (1900)

Très modéré –

Très fougueux –

Lentement –

Mouvement de valse bien rythmée

Bella Hristova, Danbi Um, Arnaud Sussmann, Soovin Kim, violins; Paul Neubauer, Richard O'Neill, violas; Nicholas Canellakis, Clive Greensmith, cellos

Program Notes: National Flavors

Notes on the program by Patrick Castillo

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ

(Born Polička, Bohemia, December 8, 1890; died Liestal, Switzerland, August 28, 1959)

Duo no. 1 for Violin and Cello

Composed: 1927

Published: 1928

First performance: March 17, 1927, Paris, by violinist Stanislav Novak and cellist Maurits Frank

Other works from this period: String Quintet (1927); Impromptu for Violin and Piano (1927); *Le jazz* for Orchestra (1928); Jazz Suite for Chamber Ensemble (1928); Sextet for Piano and Winds (1929)

Approximate duration: 11 minutes

Of the generation following Antonín Dvořák, Bohuslav Martinů is widely regarded, second perhaps only to Leoš Janáček, as the most significant Czech composer of the twentieth century. Martinů also ranks among his generation's most prolific composers, writing in virtually all genres of vocal and instrumental music.

Born in 1890 in Polička, a small town just on the Bohemian side of the Bohemia-Moravia border, Martinů showed great promise as a youngster on the violin and was sent, with the help of funds raised by his local community, to study at the Prague Conservatory. He performed poorly at school but was enthralled by the cultural life of the big city. Martinů's access to a broad range of music during these years was formative—he attended the Prague premiere of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1908, which had an especially significant impact on him—and by 1910, the twenty-year-old was earnestly focused on developing his voice as a composer.

In 1923, Martinů moved to Paris, a city he had long been drawn to. Though he would frequently visit Prague and Polička, he never resided in his homeland again. When the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939, Martinů was instrumental in facilitating the emigration of a substantial number of Czech artists to France; as the Nazis approached Paris the following year, he fled with his wife to the south of France and then, in 1941, to the United States, where he would spend most of the following decade.

In addition to being one of the twentieth century's most prolific composers, Martinů also possessed one of the most distinctly personal styles of his generation. He was influenced early on by his teachers, the Czech composer Josef Suk and then the French composer Albert Roussel, with whom he studied in Paris. Since hearing the Prague premiere of *Pelléas*, he was deeply influenced by Debussy, and while in Paris, he also encountered the music of Stravinsky and the composers of *Les Six* and discovered jazz. Alongside this broad palette of musical tastes, Martinů's output from the 1930s onward also reveals a growing interest in Czech folk music and culture—in this regard, he greatly admired Dvořák and Janáček. Finally, he also took a deep interest in music from the Renaissance and Baroque and drew frequently from forms and conventions of early music in his own work. All of these ingredients coalesce in the piquant recipe of Martinů's compositional language.

His extensive output of chamber music consists of dozens of works for various combinations of instruments—duos, trios, quartets, quintets, sextets, and more, including works scored for up to as many as twelve instruments. His Duo no. 1 for Violin and Cello, composed in 1927, is the first of two such works; a second violin-and-cello duo followed three decades later.

The Duo no. 1 comprises two movements. The opening *Praeludium* is quietly introspective; violin and cello issue intertwining chromatic lines. In the movement's opening measures, Martinů places the cello in the same range as the violin, imbuing the hypnotic eighth-note undulations with a rather bewildering sound. As the movement develops, the tempo quickens and the two instruments gradually diverge, each distinguishing its voice from the other. At

the movement's climax, double-stopped chords in both instruments expand the duo's texture to a four-voiced **chorale**.

The second movement is a spirited rondo, suffused with a folk-like élan. Barreling triplets power the music forward. Though presenting contrasting content, the rondo's episodes retain the refrain's effusive temperament. Part-way through the movement, Martinů assigns the cello a virile **cadenza**. Over *tremolandi* set in the cello's highest register, the violin joins in, expanding on the cello's cadenza material. This music soon enough finds its way back to the rondo's primary material, and the duo arrives at a fortissimo conclusion.

JOHN CORIGLIANO

(Born February 16, 1938, New York City)

Red Violin Caprices

Composed: 1999

Published: 1999

Other works from this period: *The Red Violin* (film score) (1998); *The Red Violin*: Suite for Violin and Orchestra (1999); Vocalise for Soprano, Electronics, and Orchestra (1999); *Phantasmagoria*: Suite from *The Ghosts of Versailles* for Orchestra (2000); Symphony no. 2 for String Orchestra (2000)

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

These caprices, composed in conjunction with the score for François Girard's film *The Red Violin*, take a spacious troubadour-inspired theme and vary it both linearly and stylistically. These variations intentionally evoke Baroque, Gypsy, and arch-Romantic idioms as they examine the same materials (a dark, seven-chord chaconne as well as that principal theme) from differing aural viewpoints. The caprices were created and ordered to reflect the structure of the film, in which Bussotti, a fictional eighteenth-century violin maker, crafts his greatest violin for his soon-to-be-born son. When tragedy claims wife and child, the grief-stricken Bussotti, in a gesture both ardent and macabre, infuses the blood of his beloved into the varnish of the instrument. Their fates thus joined, the violin travels across three centuries through Vienna, London, Shanghai, and Montreal, passing through the hands of a doomed child prodigy, a flamboyant virtuoso, a haunted Maoist commissar, and at last a willful Canadian expert, whose own plans for the violin finally complete the circle of parent and child united in art.

—John Corigliano

ERNŐ DOHNÁNYI

(Born Pozsony, Hungary [now Bratislava, Slovakia], July 27, 1877; died New York City, February 9, 1960)

Andante rubato, alla zingaresca (Gypsy Andante) from Ruralia hungarica, op. 32c

Composed: 1924

Published: 1924

Other works from this period: *Magyar népdalok (Hungarian Folk Songs)* for Voice and Piano (1922); *Ünnepi nyitány (Festival Overture)*, op. 31 (1923); String Quartet no. 3 in a minor, op. 33 (1926); *Der Tenor (The Tenor)*, op. 34 (opera) (1920–1927)

Approximate duration: 6 minutes

Excepting perhaps Franz Liszt, Ernő Dohnányi must be regarded as the most versatile musician to come from Hungary. He was, in addition to being a great composer, one of history's greatest pianists; he achieved particular notoriety for performing Beethoven's complete piano music in one season and undertaking all twenty-seven of Mozart's piano concerti in another. Dohnányi

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

was moreover a supremely gifted conductor and an influential teacher and administrator, as well, playing a crucial role in building Hungary's musical culture in the first half of the twentieth century.

Dohnányi received his formal musical training at the Budapest Academy of Music, where he would later briefly serve as Director. At the time of his enrollment, he was the first Hungarian musician of his level to choose to study at the Budapest Academy; his childhood friend Béla Bartók followed suit, beginning a lifelong trope of Dohnányi leading the way forward for Hungarian musical culture by his example. Some years later, starting in 1915, Dohnányi took it upon himself to raise Hungary's collective musical sophistication: he independently presented hundreds of concerts, selecting programs that aspired to a higher artistic standard than Hungarian audiences were accustomed to—and, between 1919 and 1921, when guest artists were unavailable, Dohnányi himself performed some 120 concerts a year in Budapest alone. Bartók credited Dohnányi with providing his country's entire musical life during these years.

While Dohnányi did not turn to Hungarian folk music as routinely as did Bartók, Kodály, and others of his countrymen, he did produce a series of four interrelated scores collectively titled *Ruralia hungarica*, based on Hungarian folk material. The set began as a seven-movement suite for solo piano, composed in 1923 and published as Dohnányi's Opus 32a. The following year, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Budapest, the composer arranged five of the seven movements into an orchestral suite (op. 32b). Dohnányi subsequently transcribed two of the seven movements for violin and piano and added a newly composed *Andante*—a heartfelt movement popularly known as the *Andante alla zingaresca*. An arrangement of the *Gypsy Andante* for cello and piano was published as Dohnányi's Opus 32d.

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH

(Born September 12/25, 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia; died August 9, 1975, Moscow)

Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet, op. 11

Composed: 1924–1925

Published: 1927

Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

Shostakovich composed his Opus 11 Prelude and Scherzo for String Octet while still a student at the Leningrad Conservatory. The eighteen-year-old composer was a precocious student indeed: the early masterworks composed during his student days include his Opus 1 Scherzo in f-sharp minor (1919), Opus 3 Theme and Variations (1921–1922), and Opus 7 Scherzo in E-flat Major for Orchestra; Piano Trio no. 1 in c minor, op. 8 (1923); Three Pieces for Cello and Piano, op. 9 (1923–1924); and Symphony no. 1 (1924–1925), which first brought Shostakovich to international attention and was championed by such leading conductors of the day as Klemperer, Stokowski, Toscanini, and Walter.

While the character of the Opus 11 Prelude and Scherzo might stand apart from the emotional severity of some of Shostakovich's later, better-known chamber works, it lacks nothing of the composer's singular intensity. Shostakovich originally composed the prelude in December 1924 as an elegy to the poet (and his close personal friend) Volodya Kurchavov; the scherzo was added seven months later. The movement's opening measures forcefully establish a feeling of unsettled angst: massive chords, played by the full ensemble, raise the curtain to reveal an impassioned violin **recitative**. Lugubrious chromatic lines answer this opening proclamation with ambivalence: quiet utterances, begun by the second cello, murkily ascend to the first violin. The prelude's middle section provides a stark, dramatic contrast to these introductory gestures. Shostakovich instructs the performers to play *spiccato*, using quick, off-the-string bow strokes. The unique color of this string technique lends the descending chromatic melodies a mischievous quality. A brief canon ensues soon thereafter, its subject a folk-like melody interjected by the first cello. The music surges to a return of the opening chords and violin recitative.

In the wild second movement, Shostakovich exploits the full capacity of his ensemble of eight to evoke a sound of orchestral scope. Following a hair-raising start, the scherzo meditates briefly on a bewildering tune played

by the first cello. This seemingly drunken chant is punctuated by the rest of the ensemble with soft pizzicati. But the listener's respite is brief: the tempo quickly picks up again and does not relent for the remainder of this breathtaking movement. Throughout the scherzo, Shostakovich experiments with an array of interesting sonic effects. In one striking passage, nervous **tremolo** in the first cello underpins manic, cascading dissonances in the upper strings. In another passage, the two violas share a playful yet menacing melody; Shostakovich gives the tune a unique color by having the first viola play hurried sixteenth notes, accentuated by loud pizzicati in the second viola. Near the scherzo's conclusion, Shostakovich employs glissandi, or slides between two notes, to weave a disorienting texture before finally slamming the door.

GEORGE ENESCU

(Born August 19, 1881, Liveni-Virnav, Romania; died May 4, 1955, Paris)

String Octet in C Major, op. 7

Composed: 1900

Published: 1905

Dedication: André Gédalge

First performance: December 18, 1909, Paris

Other works from this period: *Aubade* in C Major for String Trio (1899); *Symphonie concertante* in b minor for Cello and Orchestra, op. 8 (1901); *Two Romanian Rhapsodies* for Orchestra, op. 11 (1901); *Impromptu concertant* in G-flat Major for Violin and Piano (1903); Suite no. 1 in C Major for Orchestra, op. 9 (1903)

Approximate duration: 40 minutes

The Romanian composer George Enescu's Octet for Strings invites numerous comparisons with the exemplar of the genre, the Octet of Felix Mendelssohn—beginning with the two composers' extraordinary gifts. Enescu was a child prodigy in league with Mendelssohn: a violinist from age four and a composer by five, he entered the Vienna Conservatory at seven and continued his studies with Massenet and Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire at fourteen, by which time he had established the beginnings of a promising career.

To label both octets as products of their respective composers' precocious adolescence is a considerable understatement. Mendelssohn's Octet, after all—completed when Mendelssohn was only sixteen—remains one of the literature's most hallowed masterpieces. Enescu penned his Octet at nineteen. It is certainly one of the finest, if not *the* finest, after Mendelssohn's. More than this, however, it warrants attention in its own right as one of the twentieth century's most compelling chamber works. Like its composer, the Octet, though not unrecognized, is severely under-recognized.

Despite being composed at such a young age, the Octet already illustrates the breadth of Enescu's musical language. It incorporates the post-Romantic, hyper-**Expressionist** language of Schoenberg and Strauss. It also nods to Romanian folk music, which Enescu took a deep interest in and would advocate for over the course of his career in much the same way that Bartók championed Hungarian music. Finally, the Octet displays impressive contrapuntal skill (and fittingly bears a dedication to André Gédalge, Enescu's counterpoint teacher).

It is a work of striking thematic unity. The bold unison statement that begins the Octet—wide melodic leaps, as though the master were stretching his canvas—serves as a motto throughout the work's four movements (played without pause), lending the music a cogent narrative impact. After traversing a piquant scherzo, this motto finds itself completely transfigured in the bewitching slow movement.

This is not to suggest a want of melodic ideas. In the first movement alone, Enescu introduces no fewer than six distinct themes, which, rather than develop in Classical fashion, he fragments and reassembles into a dizzying mosaic. A similar brilliance marks the Octet's finale, which reprises the work's entire plethora of musical ideas. "I'm not a person for pretty successions of chords," Enescu once claimed. "A piece deserves to be called a musical composition only if it has a line, a melody, or, even better, melodies superimposed on one another."