CARTE BLANCHE CONCERT III:
Yura Lee, violin,
and Dina Vainshtein, piano

JULY 30
Wednesday, July 30, 8:00 p.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School

PROGRAM OVERVIEW
Violinist Yura Lee returns to Music@Menlo, joined by pianist Dina Vainshtein in her festival debut, for a colorful program juxtaposing Czech and Hungarian folk-inflected works for violin and piano. The rich textures of George Enescu’s Impressions d’enfance exquisitely preface Dvořák’s beguiling Opus 75 Romantic Pieces. The music of the Hungarian Jenő Hubay and the Czech Josef Suk, each among the leading composer-virtuosos of their generation, demands complete mastery of the instrument, giving voice to folk-like melodies with lyricism and dazzling virtuosity in equal parts. The program concludes with Bartók’s riveting First Violin Sonata, one of the most hallowed works of the modern violin repertoire.

SPECIAL THANKS
Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Jim and Mica Brenzel with gratitude for their generous support.

GEORGE ENESCO (1881–1955)
Impressions d’enfance for Violin and Piano, op. 28 (1940)
   Ménétier
   Vieux mendiant
   Ruisseau en fond du jardin
   L’oiseau en cage et le coucou au mur
   Chanson pour bercer
   Grillon
   Lune à travers les vitres
   Vent dans la cheminée
   Tempête au-dehors, dans la nuit
   Lever de soleil

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)
Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 75 (1887)
   Allegro moderato
   Allegro maestoso
   Allegro appassionato
   Larghetto

JENŐ HUBAY (1858–1937)
Scènes de la Csárdá no. 3, op. 18 (1885)

INTERMISSION

JOSEF SUK (1874–1935)
Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 17 (1900)
   Quasi balata
   Appassionato
   Un poco triste
   Burleska

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)
Sonata no. 1 for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75, BB 84 (op. 21) (1921)
   Allegro appassionato
   Adagio
   Allegro

Yura Lee, violin; Dina Vainshtein, piano
Program Notes: Yura Lee, violin, and Dina Vainshtein, piano

GEORGE ENESCU
(Born August 19, 1881, Liveni Vîrnav, near Dorohoi, Romania; died May 3/4, 1955, Paris)

Impressions d’enfance for Violin and Piano, op. 28
Composed: 1940
Other works from this period: Sonata no. 2 in C Major for Cello and Piano, op. 26, no. 2 (1935); Piano Quintet in a minor, op. 29 (1940); String Quartet no. 2 in G Major, op. 22, no. 2 (1951)
Approximate duration: 22 minutes

George Enescu is revered as one of Central Europe’s most influential composers of the early twentieth century. Born to a middle-class family, he was an early prodigy, playing the violin at age four and enrolling at the Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna at age seven. Skilled both in piano and violin, Enescu subsequently developed an interest in composition that would lead him away from his native Romania to the Paris Conservatoire in 1895, where he studied with Gabriel Fauré. He became established as a conductor and instrumentalist in the Parisian musical community, forming the Enescu String Quartet in 1904 and taking a grand tour France, Germany, and the Netherlands before the outbreak of World War I. His fame throughout Western Europe sparked interest in his native Romania, and Enescu returned to Bucharest in 1897, where he conducted the premiere of his Poème roumain for Orchestra, op. 1. His compositions were met with high acclaim, and Enescu established himself at the forefront of Central Europe’s composition community. Throughout the remainder of his career, he would thus maintain dual reputations, renowned in Central Europe as a composer and in Western Europe as a violinist and conductor.

As World War II began to ignite, Enescu took ill from heart complications and, amongst many other side effects, lost much of his hearing. He rushed to complete Oedipe, his first opera, which had taken nearly two decades to compose, and also refocused his energy on music reminiscent of his childhood. The resulting works included the Third Orchestral Suite, the Third Violin Sonata, and Impressions d’enfance (Impressions of Childhood). Throughout this period, Enescu displayed a remarkable ability to adapt his harmonic language to various styles, including Romantic, impressionist, experimental, and folk idioms.

Impressions d’enfance, a continuous ten-movement sonata for violin and piano, threads together many of these styles with a doina, or melancholic Bohemian melody. The programmatic music personifies a young child, intimately following his emotions as he experiences the world around him. The first four movements describe things that a child might encounter on the streets of Romania, such as a fiddler and a beggar on the street, a brook running through a garden, and a bird in a cage. Near the end of the fourth movement, a cuckoo clock rings, and the child is prepared for sleep. After a quiet cradlesong and a fleeting moment of the end of the fourth movement, a cuckoo clock rings, and the child is nearly two decades to compose, and also refocused his energy on music incorporating into these works a fiery virtuosity and folk piquancy characteristic of his compositions. The opening movement, originally designated a cavatina, embarks on a graceful descending sequence with a stepwise bass line in the piano. The tranquil melody is given verve by an exclamatory phrase of parallel octaves in the violin’s B minor. The violin opens with three bold broken chords, given a distinctly rustic flair by the static fifth (D and A) and the Bohemian raised fourth (G-sharp). The vicious momentum of the piano further accentuates the violin’s aggressive staccato.

The third movement romance is a charming miniature in A-B-A form, incorporating an exclamatory phrase of parallel octaves in the violin’s B section. Despite the desperate nature of the final elegy in the mournful key of g minor, the work closes with a peaceful contentment.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Bohemia; died May 1, 1904, Prague)

Romantic Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 75
Composed: 1887
First performance: March 30, 1887
Other works from this period: Symphony no. 7 in d minor, op. 88 (1885); Slavonic Dances, op. 72 (1887); Terzetto in C Major for Two Violins and Viola, op. 74 (1887); Piano Quintet in A Major, op. 81 (1887); Piano Trio no. 4 in e minor, op. 90, Dumky (1890–1891)
Approximate duration: 13 minutes

In 1887, between a series of musical tours to London, the Dvořák family lodged a young chemistry student, Josef Kruis, in a spare room of their Žižná Street home in Prague. Kruis was an enthusiastic amateur violinist and took private instruction from Dvořák’s neighbor Jan Pelikán, a violinist of Prague’s National Theatre Orchestra, where Dvořák was conductor. Dvořák, himself a competent violinist, would often listen in as Pelikán instructed Kruis with a series of exercises and violin duos, and in January 1887, he felt compelled to write a piece that he could play with Pelikán and Kruis. From January 7 to 14, Dvořák briskly composed his Terzetto for Two Viols and Viola, op. 74. He excitedly presented the piece to Pelikán and Kruis; upon their initial read-through, however, the work was revealed to be too difficult for the student violinist, and Dvořák set to work on a simpler work for the same instrumentation.

On January 18, 1887, Dvořák’s Miniatures for Two Viols and Viola, op. 75a, was played privately at the composer’s residence; only a matter of days later, Dvořák rearranged it into four pieces for violin and piano, published as Romantic Pieces, op. 75b. This incarnation of the work, premiered that March, has endured as the version most frequently heard (the Miniatures for String Trio would not be performed in public until 1938). Dvořák had originally intended each of the four movements to be published with individual names. Simrock, whose deteriorating relationship with the composer soon ended, published the works with the simplified title Romantic Pieces.

The Romantic Pieces’ surface simplicity notwithstanding, Dvořák incorporates into these works a fiery virtuosity and folk piquancy characteristic of his compositions. The opening movement, originally designated a cavatina, embarks on a graceful descending sequence with a stepwise bass line in the piano. The tranquil melody is given verve by delicate octave leaps, and it shifts towards a dramatic lyric passage in the middle section reminiscent of the Sturm und Drang of Schubert’s Erlkönig. Contrasting with the reflective cavatina is a stormy capriccio in the key of g minor. The violin opens with three bold broken chords, given a distinctly rustic flair by the static fifth (D and A) and the Bohemian raised fourth (G-sharp). The vicious momentum of the piano further accentuates the violin’s aggressive staccato.

The third movement romance is a charming miniature in A-B-A form, incorporating an exclamatory phrase of parallel octaves in the violin’s B section. Despite the desperate nature of the final elegy in the mournful key of g minor, the work closes with a peaceful contentment.

—Andrew Goldstein

*Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 100.*
JENŐ HUBAY
(Born September 15, 1858, Budapest; died March 12, 1937, Budapest)

Scènes de la Csárda no. 3, op. 18

Composed: 1885

Other works from this period: Scènes de la Csárda no. 2, op. 13 (1880–1881); Sonate romantique for Violin and Piano, op. 22 (1884); Symphony no. 1 in B Major, op. 26 (1885), Dix pièces caractéristiques, op. 79 (1899)

Approximate duration: 7 minutes

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Hungarian violinist and composer Jenő Huber—who later changed his name to the more native sounding “Hubay”—had achieved widespread renown throughout Europe. In 1871, the thirteen-year-old prodigy’s debut at the Hungarian National Theatre, under the baton of his father, conductor Károly Huber, attracted the attention of Central Europe’s most prominent artists and patrons, including Franz Liszt and Joseph Joachim. The latter, two years later, agreed to teach Hubay violin at Germany’s Berlin Hochschule für Musik. At the suggestion of Liszt, Hubay toured Paris, where he encountered Henri Vieuxtemps, then professor at the Budapest Conservatory. Vieuxtemps became the young composer’s most important mentor, grooming Hubay to become his artistic successor. Before long Hubay was Head of Violin Studies at, and subsequently Director of, the Budapest Conservatory, holding the post until 1934.

Hubay’s compositional output, though massive in breadth, was all but forgotten following his death in 1937. The first of his career, from 1880 to 1900, was largely devoted to composing violin music, resulting in some two hundred pieces. His attention then shifted to grand-scale works, likely at the prompting of Liszt. Hubay’s opera, A cremnai hegedűs (The Violin Maker of Cremona), became the first Hungarian opera to be staged outside Europe. Written over a period of some forty years, the fourteen pieces is considered the first mature chamber music from Suk’s pen, including Franz Liszt and Joseph Joachim. The latter, two years later, agreed to teach Hubay violin at Germany’s Berlin Hochschule für Musik. At the suggestion of Liszt, Hubay toured Paris, where he encountered Henri Vieuxtemps, then professor at the Budapest Conservatory. Vieuxtemps became the young composer’s most important mentor, grooming Hubay to become his artistic successor. Before long Hubay was Head of Violin Studies at, and subsequently Director of, the Budapest Conservatory, holding the post until 1934.

Hubay’s compositional output, though massive in breadth, was all but forgotten following his death in 1937. The first of his career, from 1880 to 1900, was largely devoted to composing violin music, resulting in some two hundred pieces. His attention then shifted to grand-scale works, likely at the prompting of Liszt. Hubay’s opera, A cremnai hegedűs (The Violin Maker of Cremona), became the first Hungarian opera to be staged outside Europe. Written over a period of some forty years, the fourteen delicate and fiery Scènes de la Csárda represent a compilation of Hubay’s greatest showpieces for violin.

The third piece of the Scènes de la Csárda, subtitled Maros vize (The Waters of the Maros), begins with a turbulent piano tremolando imitating a cimbalom, a type of hammered dulcimer common in Central and Eastern European folk music. The violin echoes this drama with a cadenza-like passage in the style of Gypsy melodies. The gentle arpeggios and harmonics of the following adagio passage evoke the placid Maros River in Southern Hungary. This leads into the melody “Slowly Flows the Bodrog” by composer Miska Borzó, a melody also borrowed by Brahms in his first Hungarian Dance in 1869.

Hubay’s Scènes de la Csárda no. 3

Brahms’s Hungarian Dance no. 1 for Violin and Piano

A variation on this melody leads into the final trotting melody in the piano, accompanied by a swaying and fluttering violin tune. The final section displays the virtuosity of the violinist with rapid double-stops and thrilling harmonics.

—Andrew Goldstein

JOSEF SUK
(Born January 4, 1874, Křečovice; died May 29, 1935, Prague)

Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 17

Composed: 1900

Other works from this period: String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 11 (1896); Four Pieces for Piano, op. 21 (1900); Fantasy in g minor for Violin and Orchestra, op. 24 (1902–1903)

Approximate duration: 17 minutes

In 1889, the Prague Association for the Promotion of Music offered Antonín Dvořák a post at the Prague Conservatory as Professor of Composition and Instrumentation. Dvořák delayed accepting the offer until January 1891, when a disassociation with his publisher, Simrock, left him in need of a steady income. Josef Suk, a young Hungarian composer and violinist, had just graduated from the conservatory but rematriculated into the chamber music program upon hearing of Dvořák’s appointment. Suk studied with Dvořák until the latter’s departure for America in 1892, graduating again after a performance of his Dramatická ouvertura, op. 4. On September 15, 1892, Dvořák left Prague with his wife, son Antonín II, and daughter Otilie, in whom Suk took a keen interest. Before long, Dvořák returned to Prague after funding dried up in America, and Josef Suk married Otilie posthaste in 1898.

With colleagues at the conservatory, Suk founded the Czech Quartet, an ensemble whose forty-year career began with the work of Johannes Brahms in 1893. While concertizing in Russia with the quartet, Suk wrote the Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 17, dedicated to Karel Hoffmann, its first violinist. This is one of the few works composed before Dvořák died at age sixty-two, soon followed by the sudden death of Otilie. The impact of these losses drastically transformed Suk’s early compositional gaiety into a more introspective and dark modus operandi. The set of four pieces is considered the first mature chamber music from Suk’s pen, and its display of virtuosity and energy is unmistakably reminiscent of a newlywed embarking on his first grand tour of the world.

Each of the four pieces is cast in ternary (A–B–A) form. The work begins with a wandering, chromatic piano accompaniment, joined by an eerie violin melody. An accelarando leads seamlessly into a valiant B section. The second of the Four Pieces, marked Appassionato, is a clever conversation between the violin and piano, each feeding into the other’s energy. Though Suk does not often include folk melodies in his work, the middle section’s swooning passion and eloquence evoke a rustic, folk-like sentiment reminiscent of the work of Dvořák. Ambiguity returns in the third piece, yet the violin’s blissful melody anchors the work. The final burleska is a dizzying display of sixteenth notes interrupted by a trotting middle section and a blazing reprise to close the work.

—Andrew Goldstein

BÉLA BARTÓK
(Born March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary; died September 26, 1945, New York)

Sonata no. 1 for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75, BB 84 (op. 21)

Composed: 1921

First performance: 1922, London

Other works from this period: String Quartet no. 2, BB 75 (1914–1917); Romanian Folk Dances, BB 76 (1917); Eight Improvisations on Hungarian Folk Songs for Piano, Sz. 74, BB 83 (op. 20) (1920); Sonata no. 2 for Violin and Piano, BB 85 (1922)

Approximate duration: 33 minutes

In the aftermath of World War I, composers began to give voice to the sepulchral horrors the world had just witnessed, creating an international platform for cultural expression. As postwar cultural barriers fell,
composers across the continent were exposed to new ideas and influences from all regions of Europe, familiarizing such composers as Bartók and Kodály with the work of the Second Viennese School, led by Arnold Schoenberg, and vice versa. Though it is unclear whether Bartók and Schoenberg ever met in person, correspondences between the two reveal exchanges of new works and ideas. As architects of separate factions—Arnold Schoenberg created the twelve-tone system, and Béla Bartók was the revered Hungarian ethnomusicologist known for infusing the character of Central European folk music into his modernist language—the two composers had immense impact on each other.

In 1920, Bartók published an essay entitled “Das Problem der neuen Musik” (“The Problem of New Music”), in which he recognized the need for “the equality of right of the individual twelve tones.” In 1921 Bartók contradicted his earlier statements, remarking that folk song demands tonality and that his art was indeed incompatible with the twelve-tone style. This short-lived period of twelve-tone composition, however, produced Three Studies for Piano, op. 18, along with two massive violin sonatas.

The Sonata no. 1 for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75, was dedicated to and premiered by the violinist Jelly d’Arányi, Joachim's great-niece, with Bartók at the piano. D’Arányi captivated the interest of Bartók, romantically as well as musically, but unwaveringly avoided a personal relationship with him, writing in her journal, “It is sad, too sad, that I should make this great man suffer.” The music, however, well resembles the nature of their relationship; each voice takes tedious care to never mimic or reminisce on each other’s thematic material. The violin and piano remain almost entirely independent of the other, coming together only at pinnacle moments to nostalgically share Hungarian folk rhythms and altogether avoiding tonal intervention.

Despite the work’s Expressionistic façade, the sonata’s three movements (fast, slow, fast) maintain intrinsically Classical qualities. The opening Allegro appassionato is in sonata form, despite a fleeting recapitulation and a subtle return to the exposition’s subject material. Over an arpeggiated accompaniment, a jarring violin entrance creates the stark and brash tonal soundscape typical of the first movement. An elongated development is introduced by the piano’s pianississimo arpeggios.

The elegiac Adagio in ternary form begins with a lengthy dialog between unaccompanied violin and piano, which builds to an ornate middle section before the movement culminates with unaccompanied violin. In the developmental style of the first movement, each voice maintains a restrained complexion. A vigorous Allegro finale employs sections of various tempi, utilizing violin pizzicato, arpeggiated chords, and a barrage of sixteenth notes to bring the work to a thrashing close.

—Andrew Goldstein