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CENTER FOR THE ARTS

PRESENTS

STARRY NIGHTS

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
COLIN CARR

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2023

Bach, ***Trio Sonata from The Musical Offering***
Arthur Haas, harpsichord
Si Eon Choi, flute
Sofiya Levchenko, violin
Sameer Apte, cello

Schnittke, ***Hymn 4 (1979)***
Eduardo Leandro, percussion
Arthur Haas, harpsichord
Delano Bell, bassoon
Sameer Apte, cello
Keenan Zach, bass
Vanessa Putnam, harp

John Cage, ***Credo in Us***
Michael Dodds, piano
Eduardo Leandro, percussion
Will Sewell, percussion
Ignacio Corales, percussion

-INTERMISSION-

Dvorak, ***Piano Trio in f minor op 65***
I. Allegro ma non troppo
II. Allegretto grazioso
III. Poco Adagio
IV. Allegro con brio

Sunmi Han, piano
Arnaud Sussman, violin
Colin Carr, cello

STARRY NIGHTS

PROGRAM NOTES

J.S. Bach, *Trio Sonata from A Musical Offering (BWV 1079)*

Eyewitness descriptions of composing and performing by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) are quite rare. So, we should treasure the lengthy obituary written by his second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel together with one of J.S. Bach's former students, Johann Friedrich Agricola. It was published in 1754.

Through C.P.E. Bach, in 1747, his father (J.S Bach.) was permitted to visit the royal court of Frederick the Great in Potsdam. The king was an amateur flutist and an active music lover. Thus, J.S. Bach's reputation as a composer and keyboard improviser had preceded him. Eyewitness C.P.E. Bach writes:

> . . . On this occasion [he] had the opportunity of being heard at Potsdam by his Majesty the King of Prussia. His Majesty himself played him a theme for a fugue. Which he at once developed, to the particular pleasure of the Monarch, on the pianoforte. Hereupon His Majesty demanded to hear a fugue with six obbligato voices, which command he also fulfilled, to the astonishment of the king and the musicians there present, using a theme of his own. After his [J.S.'s] return to Leipzig, he set down on paper a three-voiced and a six-voiced so called *ricercar* [precursor of fugues] together with several other intricate little pieces, all on the very theme that had been given to him by His Majesty, and this [*A Musical Offering*] he dedicated, engraved on copper, to the King. (Translation by Christoph Wolff)

Considering Bach's numerous regular duties, he completed the whole work in a relatively short span of time. The dedication dates from July 1747, and a newspaper announcement places the completion on September 30 of that year.

The *Musical Offering* is an anthology of sorts, consisting of simple to complex ricercares on the king's theme including one for six "voices" (an obvious allusion to the fugue Bach had improvised in the presence of Frederick the Great), and several canons. (Think "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," but much more complex.) We suppose that the single "Trio Sonata" portion of the *Musical Offering* was included for the benefit of the flutist king plus three of his court musicians: one violinist, one harpsichordist (ostensibly C.P.E. Bach), and one bowed bass string instrument (doubling the harpsichord's

bass line).

The royal musical theme appears at the opening of the first movement (Largo) in the bass line. However, it is more of a skeletal "reference" to the theme, using ornamental notes inserted between the king's original notes.

In the lengthy *Allegro* movement that follows, we hear many passages where the ear is drawn cautiously downward, subtly echoing the downward flow of notes in the king's original melody. Again, Bach gives us skeletal "references" to the theme. However, the movement is more Bach than Fredrick.

The *Andante* that follows has a pastoral mood for the most part. References to the royal theme melody come in short fragments, transformed by Bach's genius into a moody atmosphere. Only near the end do the flue and violin spin out truly lyrical melodic lines to draw the movement to a quiet (*piano*) ending.

The opening of the *Allegro* finale brings with it (at last!) more easily recognizable references to the king's original theme. Beginning as a strict (accompanied) fugue for the flute and violin, the more freely-constructed episodes involving all three instruments generate audible excitement. Here and there, fragments of the theme can be heard, culminating in a final exposition (featuring flute and violin) and an exuberant finish to the sonata.

Schnittke, *Hymn #4*

Alfred Schnittke (1934-1998) was one of Russia's foremost 20th-century composers. Born in Engels on the Volga, Schnittke studied at the Moscow Conservatory during the 1950s under Golubev and Rakov. From 1962 until 1972, he taught at the Moscow Conservatory. Afterward, Schnittke composed free-lance, occasionally teaching abroad. He produced a sizeable oeuvre including symphonies, chamber works, choral music, film scores, and four violin concertos championed by Gidon Kremer.

Schnittke's style was influenced by composers as diverse as Carl Orff and Luigi Nono. In his very personal "polystylism," he often mixed various historical styles, quotations from other composers, and his own highly individual message to achieve an extraordinary dramatic effect. In the words of critic Nicolas Williams:

> The secret of Schnittke's unique blend of past and present lies both in his personal situation as a composer and in the general condition of an artist struggling for sincerity and originality of expression in what was, until recently, the restrictive atmosphere of Soviet Russia.

Hymn IV for cello, bassoon, double-bass, harpsichord, harp, timpani and bells (1974–1979):

In 1974, Schnittke composed

three Hymns for cello with various other instruments. Hymn IV followed over the next several years for cello, bassoon, double-bass, harpsichord, harp, timpani and bells. It is a fine example of a dominant tendency in Schnittke's music termed "polystylism." Most often, these are (1) the 20th century and (2) an earlier period of music. In Hymn IV, we hear combinations of instruments from the Baroque Era, for example the (18th century) harpsichord and the (19th-20th century) harp. The constant quick pulse is also shared by Schnittke and J.S. Bach. As in Schnittke's earlier three Hymns, the ever-present cello ties the entire movement together.

Cage, *Credo in US*

Composed in 1942, *Credo in US* is the first collaboration between John Cage and Merce Cunningham, a partnership which led to radical experiments in both music and dance. It was conceived weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as exiled European artists escaping Nazi persecution began arriving in New York, a situation that provided many American artists the opportunity to interact with the luminaries of the European avant-garde. It is in this context that Cage composed this work, which embraces a collage aesthetic by juxtaposing a diverse range of musical styles and sounds from folk music, jazz, phonograph samples, radio sounds, and "found" percussion noises. The open-ended way these random elements are incorporated also anticipates his later embrace of indeterminacy and chance in his composing.

The work is composed for a Percussion Quartet in the following format:

Player I: 2 Muted Gongs, 5 Tin Cans

Player II: 5 Tin Cans, Electric Razor, Tom-Tom

Player III: Piano, Hands on Wood, Tom-Tom

Player IV: Radio, Phonograph

This was the first piece where Cage incorporated records or radios - and music of other composers for that matter (in the score he suggests Dvorak, Beethoven, Sibelius, or Shostakovich). Cage described the work as a suite with a satirical character. The ambiguous title *Credo in US* could be patriotic, with US standing for United States – and might have been interpretated by many as such considering when it was composed - but the word US could also just be the first person plural, with Cage committing himself to humanity-at-large.

Dvořák, *Piano Trio in F Minor, Op. 65*

The years 1882 and 1883 were a period of intense personal, spiritual, and artistic crisis for Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904). He was emerging as a successful Czech composer in

central Europe, England, and elsewhere. Yet the influential German-speaking culture centers (chiefly Vienna) were asking him to shed his nationalistic mantle as the price of true celebrity. In December 1882, Dvořák's mother died, and in his bereavement the composer seems to have experienced a spiritual dilemma. Normally a man of simple and explicit faith, Dvořák's beliefs may have been shaken during the early months of 1883. For the postscript, "Thanks to God" usually found at the end of his manuscripts, is missing from the F Minor Trio and other works of that time.

Dvořák's inner crisis is manifested in the breadth, depth, and emotional content of the trio as well as in its details. The passionate first theme group of the first movement is in two parts like the form of question and answer. A quieter transition leads to the second theme, which bears a remote resemblance to part of the opening theme. The development section concentrates on the question-and-answer themes, leading to a recapitulation that at first emphasizes the "question" motive but eventually reaches the lighter second theme. The very broad coda employs the principal themes in a particularly poignant manner.

Dvořák offers an *Allegro grazioso* in place of the usual scherzo movement. In the main section, a perpetual motion triplet accompaniment in the strings supports a folksong-like duple-rhythm theme in the piano. Later, these roles are reversed. The middle section of the movement presents a pleasant contrast in texture and mood.

The slow movement is more tranquil than those preceding it, but the tone of spiritual suffering is still present in its principal theme. The middle section is marked by a spiky canon between the string parts, the tension of which finds release in an eloquent, high violin theme. In the coda, the theme reappears, this time in a form that foreshadows the main finale theme of Dvořák's Symphony No. 7.

With the vivacious, shifting rhythms of his native *Furiant*, Dvořák takes up the struggle again in the finale. However, this time triumph is in the air. We have the impression that the composer has weathered his period of "Storm and Stress" and has emerged victorious. This is especially apparent when, near the end, he shifts to the major mode and reprises a version of the main theme from the first movement. Concerning the unison ending, Dvořák scholar Otakar Šourek writes that this work, "which sang of a spiritual combat fought out on the battlefield of the composer's soul, must end with the expression of peace-bringing clarification and reconciliation."

Program Notes by
Dr. Michael Fink

Program Note For Credo in US *by*
Kent Marks

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