

Programme and notes for YMS March 23. 2024

Johannes Brahms: *Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2 in A major, Op. 100*

Amy Beach: *Romance for violin & piano, Op. 23*

Miklós Rózsa: *Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song, Op.4*

Interval

Edvard Grieg: *Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2 in G major, Op. 13*

Igor Frolov: *Concert Fantasia On Themes From Gershwin's Porgy & Bess, Op.19*

Programme Notes:

JOHANNES BRAHMS: Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 2 in A major

Allegro amabile

Andante tranquillo – Vivace

Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

Brahms liked to retreat from Vienna in the summer and this sonata was written during the highly productive months he spent in the Swiss resort of Hofstetten near Thun in 1886. At this stage Brahms was at the height of his powers. It was also a happy time for him, to judge from his Op. 100, one of the favourites of the violin sonata repertoire. The instructions to the players: amabile, tranquillo and grazioso convey the mood.

Brahms' second violin sonata used to be named 'The Meistersinger' because of the resemblance of its opening theme to the first three notes of Wagner's Prize Song. This resemblance is almost certainly coincidental. But Brahms chose as the second theme of the first movement a tune he also used in his setting of the words Die Melodien zieht es mir (Like a melody it passes) which became his Op. 105 No. 1.

The middle movement alternates music suitable to a slow movement with lively dance music suitable to a scherzo. It may be the composer was already toying with having a second middle movement, a plan he carried out in his Violin Sonata No 3, Op. 108. After the fast music unusually included in the middle movement Brahms chose to end with a leisurely rondo finale.

AMY BEACH: Romance for Violin and Piano, Op. 23

Born into a musically gifted family, Amy Beach began taking piano lessons from her mother when she was six years old. At the age of sixteen, she made her first concert debut and later went on to perform piano concertos with prominent orchestras such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra. When Beach married her husband, she became known as Mrs. H.H.A Beach, which were the initials of her husband. He made her promise that she would no longer teach piano, only perform two recitals a year and live according to his status as a doctor. When he died, she dropped the three initials and simply went by "Amy Beach". Beach

dedicated her piece “Romance for Violin and Piano” to Maud Powell, who was a violin prodigy and a pioneer female performing violinist. Romance by Amy Beach portrays a love story from beginning to end. It’s filled with passion, soaring high notes and calming passages that pull the listener in to the love story.

This work is very special to me because I’ve never performed a solo piece written by a woman. I’d like to dedicate this piece to female musicians, past and present, who continue to pursue their love for music making.

MIKLÓS RÓZSA: Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song, op 4

While not a household name, Miklós Rózsa’s music has, nevertheless, been heard by millions of cinemagoers worldwide because, between 1937 and 1982, he wrote more than one hundred film scores, for epics such as Ben-Hur (1959) and El Cid (1961), for thrillers and films noirs (Spellbound and Lost Weekend) and for biopics (A Song to Remember and Song of Scheherazade). During the course of his distinguished Hollywood career, Rózsa received three Oscars and fourteen Oscar nominations.

However, Miklós Rózsa was also a prolific composer of orchestral, chamber and choral music in the post-romantic tradition of the great Hungarian composers Bartok and Kodály. His stylistic roots too are in Hungarian folk music which he began to absorb while a child from peasants on his father’s estate. Rózsa wrote Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song in 1929 when still an undergraduate at the University of Leipzig and it is the first of two compositions based on peasant music written that year. Originally composed for violin and orchestra the work begins with a haunting evocative theme marked Andante which is followed by sixteen short variations (Allegretto – Allegro molto – Meno mosso – L’istesso tempo – Moderato – Largamente – Allegretto – Andante quasi recitativo – Allegramente – Allegro deciso – Presto – Piu mosso – Poco piu largamente – Andante rubato – Prestissimo – Molto vivace). Rózsa himself was a virtuoso violinist and, in this work, he exploits the technical and musical capabilities of the instrument to the full in variations that range from smoothly lyrical to spiky and disjointed and from slow and meditative to fast and furious.

INTERVAL

EDVARD GRIEG: Sonata for Violin and Piano no. 2 in G Major, op. 13

Lento doloroso - Allegro vivace

Allegretto tranquillo

Allegro animato

Norway's 'national' composer, Edvard Grieg, is well-known for his Piano Concerto and orchestral works such as the Holberg Suite. But much of his best music was conceived on a smaller scale. He wrote to a friend in 1900 that his three Violin Sonatas had a special significance for him. This was partly because they were, in his own opinion, amongst his very best works. But they were also important to him because they represented different stages in his development as a composer: the first (1865) being naive and rich in ideals, the second (1867) nationalistic and the third (1886) having a wider outlook.

The Second Sonata reflects Grieg's increasing interest in and use of Norwegian folk music. Not only does he

make use of native folk tunes and dance rhythms but he even expects the violinist to adopt some of the techniques associated with Norwegian fiddle, the *hardangerfidel*. In the first movement the rhythms of an energetic folk dance known as a *springdans* are prominent. Also noticeable are the snatches of folk melody. But the movement is, despite these novelties, still in the established sonata form. The second movement is also in an established form – ABA, with a quiet interlude in the middle before the nostalgic main theme returns. The third movement is in a freer form, though it has links to both the earlier ones: it makes use of the *springdans*, though much speeded up, and there is a central section that is a variation on the central section of the slow movement.

IGOR FROLOV: Concert Fantasia On Themes From Gershwin's Porgy & Bess, Op.19

In his short life George Gershwin made a unique contribution to the music of the twentieth century and above all he made the popular music of America, with its jazz idioms, artistically respectable. His serious orchestral works were few but his *Rhapsody in Blue* brought him worldwide fame. Pieces such as *An American in Paris* followed, leading to the high point which came with his opera *Porgy and Bess* which received its first performance in Boston in September 1935, marking the culmination of a long held ambition. It was based on the story of the love of Bess for the crippled Porgy, in the play by Dorothy and Debose Hayward. Gershwin spent weeks in Charleston, South Carolina, getting the feel of the locale of the story, in a tenement in Catfish Row. The songs in the opera such as *I got plenty o' nuttin*, *Bess you is my woman now*, *It ain't necessarily so*, and the most famous of them all *Summertime*, sung by Clara as she lulls her baby to sleep while a game goes on around her, are all woven into this Fantasia by Igor Frolov.

Although Frolov never studied composition formerly, with professional musicians as parents he soon learnt to play the violin, finally studying under the great David Oistrakh. His composing career started in 1989 and, although brought up in the classical tradition, he had a great interest in jazz, elements of which can be readily found in many of his compositions. His *Porgy and Bess Fantasia*, for violin and piano, which the composer called "a poem about love", dates from 1991. Opening with a short declamatory piano introduction, the violin then weaves in the various Gershwin tunes with changes of mood and virtuosic passages for the instrument, leading this challenging work to a brilliant concluding coda.