



VOICE AND THE VIOLIN

Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater

Friday, August 14, 2020

Joshua Bell, violin; Larisa Martincz, soprano; Peter Dugan, piano

Beethoven: Violin Sonata no. 5 in F major, op. 24, "Spring"

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio molto espressivo
- III. Scherzo: Allegro ma non troppo
- IV. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Mendelssohn: Concert aria "Ah, ritorna età dell'oro" – arrangement by Eugene Kohn

Kreisler: *Slavonic Fantasy*

Richard Strauss: "Zueignung" (Dedication), from songs, op. 10, no. 1

Rachmaninoff: Vocalise, op. 34, no. 14

Sarasate: *Carmen Fantasy* after Bizet

Puccini: "Quando m'en vo," from *La Bohème*

Chopin: Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2 – arrangement by Joshua Bell and Ben Wallace

Villa Lobos: *Melodia Sentimental*, from *Floresta do Amazonas (Forest of the Amazon)*

Bernstein: *West Side Story Medley* – arrangement by William David Brohn and Charles Czarniecki

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Program Notes, by Betsy Schwarm, author of the *Classical Music Insights* series

Beethoven: Violin Sonata no. 5 in F major, op. 24, “Spring”

For many ears, “spring” and violins equals Vivaldi. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827), too, tried his hand, with fewer literal bird songs, but perhaps even more in the way of the joys of the season. Not for him a thunderstorm to frighten the birds; here, virtually every moment is suffused with good cheer. Although there is no clear evidence that the composer himself thought of the nickname, for generations, the sonata has been imagined as perfectly spring-like in character.

Composed in 1801 and dedicated to Beethoven’s supporter, the Count Moritz von Fries, the sonata is structured in approximately symphonic terms, with four movements, rather than three. One finds a spacious first movement with contrasting themes and development of those themes, a peacefully song-like second movement, a short but spirited third movement of danceable energy, and a lively closing movement that juxtaposes themes of markedly dramatic variety. Throughout, Beethoven ensures that both players have music of charm and interest. One may think of it as a “violin sonata,” in part to distinguish it from the composer’s piano sonatas. Nonetheless, Beethoven’s own handwriting on the manuscript says “sonata for the piano and violin,” and he has taken care that the two players are expressive equal partners. In this 250th anniversary of the master composer’s birth, let us revel in one of his most joyous works.

Mendelssohn: Concert aria “Ah, ritorna età dell’oro” – arrangement by Eugene Kohn

Dating apparently from 1834, though not published until long after the composer’s premature death, the concert aria “Ah, ritorna età dell’oro” (Ah, to return to those golden days) of Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1849) is not concerned with days of prosperity, but rather with days of romantic bliss by the side of the beloved. From the first, there are gentle sighs of regret that the loved one is absent, becoming more urgent as the text looks back on past days when they could share their love. “In vain!” she declares, “Love brings no contentment without torment.” The text, by Metastasio, whose verses inspired many an opera, proves itself equally suited to use as a set piece separate from the realm of opera. Here, orchestral parts have been transcribed for piano performance with soprano, and also violin.

Kreisler: *Slavonic Fantasy*

The *Slavonic Fantasy* of Fritz Kreisler (1875 – 1962) draws inspiration and thematic material, from Dvořák. The tender opening pages rework the Czech composer’s “Songs My Mother Taught Me,” a poignant reflection that when Mother taught those songs to her child, tears would trickle down her cheeks amidst sad memories of those old lost days. However, the melancholy does not last long. From that tender but forlorn mood, Kreisler moves to one of vibrant spirits, with Dvořák’s Slavonic Dance no. 2 in e minor, op. 46. Together, the two contrasting ideas say much not only for Kreisler’s artistry, but also for the range of Dvořák’s vision.

Richard Strauss: “Zueignung” (Dedication), from songs, op. 10, no. 1

As a life-long fan of the singing voice, Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) composed many dozens of songs, often for his wife, who was a noted mezzo soprano. However, his opus 10 songs predate their meeting. Texts come from the Austrian poet Hermann von Gilm, a gentleman whose reputation today largely derives from the fact that Strauss saw musical potential in Gilm’s verses. In “Zueignung” (Dedication), moods of sweet regret lament the absence of the beloved, though the sorrow does not last. It is not that he has returned: rather, the singer is thankful for the salvation he brought to a troubled life.

Rachmaninoff: *Vocalise*, op. 34, no. 14

A “vocalise” is a wordless vocal line. In this case, it is a wordless vocal line that is also shared with violin and piano, bringing all three of tonight’s artists into the mix. It is music by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943), the last of a set of fourteen songs that he composed in the fall of 1915 for a soprano colleague. The other thirteen songs have words, but not this one, so it is simply music for the sake of musical expression. That it flows serenely is beyond doubt; whatever else it might mean is best left to the listener. However, that our performers are all providing their interpretive voices suggests that there may be more to it than just gentle, pretty sounds.

Sarasate: *Carmen Fantasy after Bizet*

Carmen (1875) by Georges Bizet (1838 – 1875) is one of the most widely familiar of all operas and one of the most tuneful as well. Though nearly all could recognize its “Toreador Song,” the other scenes also provide memorable music. In 1883, Spanish violinist/composer Pablo de Sarasate (1844 – 1908) thought to make the most of the opera’s Spanish setting (Bizet himself had been French) and wove its best-known themes, and some less famous transitional material, into a work he could include on his recitals. No singers, sets, or costumes: just a violin and a piano, as well as some impressively evocative music. Imagine bullfighters, gypsies, soldiers, and old Seville!

Puccini: “Quando m’è vo,” from *La Bohème*

Almost from the moment of its premiere in 1896, *La Bohème* by Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) has occasionally rivalled *Carmen* for the place as most popular of all operas. There may be no bullfighters, but there’s an abundance of luscious vocal display, luscious enough to have room for some violinistic expression as well, even with piano, rather than orchestra, as backing. In Act Two, the soprano Musetta regales a circle of masculine admirers with the aria “Quando m’è vo.” “When I go out,” she declares, “all the men are looking at me.” Musetta is beautiful and alluring, and more than a bit of a flirt: she knows well how to get a reaction from me, and Puccini’s beloved music makes clear her confidence in her own charms.

Chopin: Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2 – arrangement by Joshua Bell and Ben Wallace

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849) never composed anything for violin and piano. However, that is not to say that his music is unsuitable for the combination. His Nocturne in E-flat major, op. 9, no. 2 (1832), was originally a solo piano piece, one the composer himself played on his recitals and in private salon performance. It opens with the serenity of a spring afternoon, and stays largely in that mood, though with increasingly decorative touches added as the little piece proceeds. Chopin himself was known for having a rather flexible touch with tempo, moving forward or hesitating a touch if he felt the music would gain from that approach. In tonight’s performance of Joshua Bell’s own arrangement for violin and piano, it is likely that this same notion of “rubato” will be applied.

Villa-Lobos: *Melodia Sentimental*, from *Floresta do Amazonas (Forest of the Amazon)*

Quite late in his life, in 1958, Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 – 1959) set to music a series of poems by his countrywoman Dora Vasconcellos (1910 – 1973). All relate to what one might consider the Brazilian soul, and its reaction to its surroundings. Amongst the resulting songs is *Melodia Sentimental*, a lush and lyrical musing in the moonlight: “Ah, beloved, awake and share it with me!” The music flows with lines of increasing passion, leading ultimately to long, sustained high notes floating above ornamented piano phrases. In all, it is music of both delicate and rapturous beauty.

Bernstein: *West Side Story Medley* – arrangement by William David Brohn and Charles Czarniecki

While the themes are from the imagination of Leonard Bernstein (1918 - 1990), the arrangement is not. However, Brohn's arrangement for violin and orchestra was begun before Bernstein's passing and, according to Bernstein's daughter Janie, undertaken with his permission. This reduction for violin, voice and piano is somewhat newer, but the tunes are still those beloved by fans of *West Side Story*. Look for everything from the ebullient *I Feel Pretty* to the more tender side of the work as well. What would *West Side Story* be without *Tonight*, *Maria* and *Somewhere*?

About VPAC:

Located in the heart of Colorado's Beaver Creek Resort, the Vilar Performing Arts Center is a 535-seat theatre, owned and operated by the [Vail Valley Foundation](http://www.vailvalleyfoundation.org), which presents a variety of year-round performances including Broadway musicals, concerts, family entertainment, comedy, dance, classical music and more. Visit vilarpac.org for more.

About the Vail Valley Foundation

The Vail Valley Foundation is a nonprofit with the mission to enhance and sustain the quality of life in the Vail Valley by providing leadership in arts, education and athletics. The organization is known for its work in education with YouthPower365, which provides programming to more than 4,200 local children with early childhood, K-12, and scholarship programs. The Vail Valley Foundation also provides the Vail Valley with several of its most treasured annual events, such as the GoPro Mountain Games, the EverBank America's Winter Opening, the Birds of Prey FIS World Cup races, the Colorado Classic cycling race, the Vail Dance Festival and the Whistle Pig Vail concert series. The Vail Valley Foundation was the organizing body for the Alpine World Ski Championships in Vail and Beaver Creek in 1989, 1999, and 2015. It also manages and operates the Vilar Performing Arts Center in Beaver Creek Village and the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater in Vail, providing more than 100 concert, Broadway, dance, and family events per year.

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