



VIRTUAL BACH FESTIVAL

Friday, June 19, 2020

PROGRAM

Giant Hummingbirds [2019]

Amanda Gookin, cello
Sam Suggs, bass

Sam Suggs
b. 1990

Notes from the composer: My father is president of the Buffalo Ornithological Society, and I have always felt a special sense of comfort when I am in the presence of birds. At Avaloch Farm Music Institute where cellist Amanda Gookin and I workshopped this piece, hummingbirds would frequent the nearby gardens. Ultra-slow motion videos of them in flight inspired the battuto technique in which the bow bounces on double-stops. I find the resonance of this technique with both players playing two or more notes at once resembles my favorite range of the marimba. I was also interested in the identity of the cello and bass as members of the baroque continuo section, which historically play the same line in octaves. Amanda and I had also been studying Schnittke's *Hymnus* where the two instruments split into four-part harmony, and I wanted to continue to explore the thickness of texture that harmony between these instruments can achieve. I imagine Giant Hummingbirds to be the script for a minimalist migration – a route full of detours with room for improvisation through environments, drifting colors, and dark timbres created by a cello-bass “super-instrument.”

Sam Suggs is Assistant Professor of Bass at James Madison University. Based in New York City, cellist Amanda Gookin is the creator of Forward Music Project which commissions new multimedia works for solo cello that elevate stories of feminine empowerment.

This performance is by the young Brazilian trombonist, José Milton Vieira who won top prize and the audience favorite award at the 26th annual international competition (Concorso Internazionale Città di Porcia) in Italy, November 2015. The performance is the final event of that competition; the orchestra is conducted by Luciano Acocella. Vieira is a soloist of international fame, having played with orchestras on many continents. He is highly regarded as a teacher, and is a frequent award winner for his fine playing.

Concerto per Trombone e Orchestra in C [1966]

Nino Rota

1911 – 1979

Allegro guisto
Lento, ben rimato
Allegro moderato

José Milton Vieira, trombone
Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto

Giovanni “Nino” Rota, a prolific composer, pianist, conductor, and academic, was born in Milan to a musical family. His musical gifts were apparent in his very young years; an early work of his was a full-length oratorio, *The Childhood of St. John the Baptist*, performed in several European capitals, when he was only twelve years old.

Rota’s greatest fame came from his work on 170 film scores. He wrote prolifically for world-famous directors including Federico Fellini, Franco Zeffirelli and Francis Ford Coppola. He received an Academy Award for Best Original Score for *The Godfather, Part II* (1974). His compositions include ten operas, numerous ballet scores, a significant body of sacred choral music, orchestral music, several concertos, chamber music, and solo piano pieces. At times critics found his music a bit on the superficial side. To them he said, “They reckon my music’s just a bit of nostalgia plus lots of good humor and optimism. Well, that’s exactly how I’d like to be remembered: with a bit of nostalgia and lots of optimism and good humor... When I’m creating at the piano, I tend to feel happy; but – the eternal dilemma – how can we be happy amid the unhappiness of others? I’d do everything I could to give everyone a moment of happiness. That’s what’s at the heart of my music.”

The *Concerto per Trombone e Orchestra in C* was played for the first time on 6 March 1969 at the Conservatory in Milan. It is considered one of Rota’s most successful concerti. It displays the many timbres of the trombone. It is written in a neo-classical style, without significant fireworks but enough show-off moments to make the work an intriguing challenge to the trombonist. In three movements, the concerto provides opportunity to hear the trombone, normally an orchestral instrument, as a solo instrument instead.

Der Wanderer

Franz Schubert

1797 – 1828

David Newman, baritone
David Berry, piano

Fantasia in C Major, *Wanderer Fantasy*, D. 760 [1822]

Franz Schubert

Allego con fuoco, ma non troppo
Adagio
Presto
Allegro

David Berry, piano

The Schubert *Fantasia in C Major*, or the *Wanderer Fantasy*, is based on an 1816 song by Schubert, *Der Wanderer*. The poem, by Georg Philipp Schmidt von Lübeck, is filled with Romantic isolation, longing, nostalgia, and uncertainty, as the final stanza demonstrates:

I walk in silence, am rarely happy,
and always asking a whispered: Where?
A ghostly voice speaks the answer:
“Wherever you are not, there fortune is found.”

In 1822, Schubert borrowed a central melody from *Der Wanderer* for a monumental four-movement fantasy for solo piano. The technical requirements of the completed work were such that the composer reportedly once invoked “infernal deities” as the true source of the music! Robert Schumann remarked on the inherently symphonic nature of Schubert’s original: “Schubert would like, in this work, to condense the whole orchestra into two hands, and the enthusiastic beginning is a seraphic hymn to the Godhead; you see the angels pray; the *Adagio* is a gentle meditation on life and takes the veil off of it; then fugues thunder forth a song of endless humanity and music.” And, in 1850, Franz Liszt, who had written piano versions of 60 Schubert songs, transcribed the work for piano and orchestra, creating a concerto version of Schubert’s original.

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