

Angela Cheng plays Mozart

Saturday, March 28 – 8 pm

Jean-Marie Zeitouni, conductor

Angela Cheng, piano

Rafael Hoekman, cello

Symphony Prelude, 7 pm Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with D.T. Baker

MURPHY

This is the Colour of My Dreams

(10')*

MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K.488

(24')*

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro assai

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

WAGNER

Tannhäuser: Overture (Dresden version)

(14')*

LISZT

Légende: St. François d'Assise: La predication aux oiseaux

(12')*

LISZT

Les Préludes

(15')*

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

This is the Colour of My Dreams

Kelly Marie Murphy

(b. Sardegna, Italy, 1964)

First performed: November 5, 1997 in Toronto
Last ESO performance: February 1999

This is the Colour of My Dreams was commissioned by the CBC for Shauna Rolston, and was written between January 4 and June 4 of 1997. It is a single-movement concerto in four sections and lasts under 10 minutes.

The title comes from a surrealist painting by Joàn Miro called *Photo: Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*. The painting is stunning in its simplicity and directness. It consists of a single blue smudge, with the words of the title written in a calligraphic style beneath it. It seems to me to pose this question: If you could take a snap shot of Miro's dream, would it develop as the isolated blue point?

This led me to think about our habit as a society of dreaming, wishing, hoping, striving to fulfill a goal that may, to others anyway, seem rather extraordinary or even frivolous. Throughout the piece, the cello has the role of the dreamer: first evoking the dream and giving it life, then running with it and discovering its depth and dimensions, being exhausted by it, and finally understanding it. The fundamental notion is that no matter what the hurdles and difficulties, life would be less appealing without allowing yourself the freedom to reach beyond what is most easily accessible. It is about experiencing the act of reaching towards something, not necessarily about achieving it.

This piece further explores my interest in the individual voice in contrast to a larger group. The cello is often playing alone or being answered by the orchestra rather than being accompanied by it in a traditional way. There is more of a conversational approach to the orchestration. There are points where the soloist engages in duets with violin, xylophone, and cello. These represent conversations on a different level: vigorous, agitated, perhaps argumentative. There are two elements which continue to influence my thinking about sound production, especially on stringed instruments: folk singing styles, and Celtic fiddling. In folk singing styles from blues to Balkan, colour and emotive quality are added by bending notes and manipulating vibrato. Celtic fiddling, to my ear, has a distinctive dark and sustained sound - the bow seems always to be in firm contact with the string no matter what the speed.

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K.488

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(b. Salzburg, 1756 / d. Vienna, 1791)

Composition completed March 2, 1786

Last ESO performance: March 2004

There are several fascinating aspects of Mozart's *A Major Concerto, K.488* that make it stand out prominently from most of the composer's other piano concertos. For one thing, Alan Tyson, who made a study of Mozart's manuscripts, has provided evidence that Mozart began working on this concerto as far back as 1784 – nearly two years before he completed it. Such a long period of gestation is virtually unheard of for Mozart.

The key of A Major is also interesting. Using that key meant that the concerto would not be suitable for trumpets to be included in the orchestra – but that clarinets could. As well, no oboes are used – another

rarity in Mozart's piano concertos. Indeed, Mozart used clarinets in only two other concertos, and Tyson's research points to the use of clarinets as a decision that came well after Mozart began mapping out the work. As well, A Major was often a key Mozart used for happy, sunnier compositions. But he was 30 by the time he completed this concerto, and even A Major works (one thinks particularly of the sad beauty of the famous *Clarinet Concerto*, for instance) could take on darker colours.

Some of those shades are hinted at even in the seemingly happy opening movement, where within the key of the movement is heard a hint of F-sharp minor. The extended orchestral beginning is one of bucolic contentedness, echoed in the piano's entrance. The movement's second section is darker in mood, with the clarinets more prominent than in the opening orchestral material. Ideas from the first and second subjects are traded off, with the piano adding virtuosic runs at times. A cadenza and a confident return to the sunny mood lead to a quiet close.

The slow movement is set in the remote key hinted at in the opening movement – F-sharp minor. Uncharacteristically for Mozart, the movement also begins with piano alone. Rather than a call-and-response type of movement, both piano and orchestra weave the music together – and the winds have a strong role in either creating the mood, or occasionally to dispelling it. Overall, however, this is a movement of brooding, reflective quietude, though a puckish sense of rhythm is present in the use of pizzicato strings just before the coda.

Piano alone once again ushers in the next movement – a gently rocking Presto, filled with much happier spirits. The piano and orchestra trade off ideas, with the soloist given a fairly wide range of pianistic skills to display. Moments that reflect on the more serious material from the previous two movements are brief, giving way to the more robust spirit of the finale's overall mood.

Tannhäuser: Overture

Richard Wagner

(b. Leipzig, 1813 / d. Venice, 1883)

Opera first performed: October 19, 1845 in Dresden

Last ESO performance of the overture: February 2005

If Richard Wagner took a misstep anywhere in his career, many scholars agree it was with *Tannhäuser*, first performed in 1845. "The flaw is clearly seen in the broken-backed character of Tannhäuser himself, a passive figure of a kind that Wagner was not able to understand," wrote Michael Tanner in his book *Wagner*. The story tells of a man who has left the superficial 13th century court of minstrels to spend an untold period of time relentlessly pursuing pleasures of the flesh in Venusberg. Finding the wages of sin ultimately world-wearying, he seeks redemption in finding true love back in his old world – which he ultimately achieves only as he dies following his pilgrimage to ask for redemption from the Pope.

The overture is dominated by two main themes. *The Pilgrims' Chorus* begins in woodwinds, and when the cellos begin to accompany, they do so with a sense of Tannhäuser's heavy heart. After a brassier statement of the Pilgrims' music is heard, it is cut off by the other dominant theme of the overture: the music of the sinful mountain where Venus lives in perpetual bacchanale. It is telling, perhaps, that while the pilgrim tune (the "good") is richly tonal, the Venus music (the "bad") is quite chromatic.

Légende: St. François d'Assise: La prédication aux oiseaux

Franz Liszt

(b. Raiding, Hungary, 1811 / d. Bayreuth, 1886)

First performance of the solo piano version: August 29, 1865 in Budapest. Work arranged for orchestra by Liszt in 1863.

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

It can be fairly said that Franz Liszt thought orchestrally as a pianist. One of the great innovators of piano performance, Liszt often made piano transcriptions of even the densest orchestral works (including Beethoven symphonies and Wagner opera excerpts), and when he composed for piano, he used every aspect of the instrument to create as vast a canvas of sound as he could. And yet, tonight's work, written for piano and later orchestrated by Liszt, is one of the very few examples of direct musical onomatopoeia in his piano works.

During the first half of the 1860s, Liszt dedicated much of his efforts to composing religious music. Liszt was named for St. Francis of Assisi and St. François de Paule, and wrote *Two Legends* based on miracles attributed to the saints. The first concerns the story of St. Francis of Assisi coming upon a bit of road in which birds filled the trees on both sides. Leaving his companions behind, St. Francis "preached" to the birds, which flocked to listen to his words. Birdsong can be heard imitated in the piano version, as well as in the orchestration of the piece. The serene chorale in the central section depicts the sermon St. Francis preached.

Les Préludes

Liszt

(see above)

First performed: February 23, 1854 in Paris

Last ESO performance: February 2005

Aside from developing the idea of thematic transformation as the compositional basis of a piece of music, we also have Franz Liszt to thank for the form known as the symphonic poem, or tone poem. Put simply, it is the musical depiction of a non-musical concept. A painting, a poem, a philosophical abstract

– things such as this provide the inspiration for symphonic poems. Many composers since Liszt have written them, but he was the first to fully explore the form.

Les Préludes (“The Beginnings”) was the third of the 13 symphonic poems Liszt wrote. The title comes from a poem by Alphonse de Lamartine – the music, however, comes from recycled material Liszt rescued from an earlier abandoned work intended for chorus. The score contains a preface by Liszt which says, in part: “What is our life but a series of preludes to that unknown song of which the first solemn note is sounded by death?” Again, thematic transformation takes the muted theme stated delicately by the strings at the outset, and systematically uses it through the increasingly rhapsodic emotional pull of the work – which ends in a sumptuously stated brilliant conclusion.

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