

Society for
C H A M B E R

Music

in
R O C H E S T E R

46th Season

Rebecca and Johannes

Sunday, Mar. 12, 2023 at 4:00 pm

Beston Hall at Glazer Music Performance Center
Nazareth College

PROGRAM

Passacaglia for violin and cello (1896) Handel/Halvorsen

Tigran Vardanyan *violin*
Benjamin Krug *cello*

Sonata for viola and piano (1919) Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)

Impetuoso - ma non troppo Allegro
Vivace
Adagio

Ryan Hardcastle *viola*
Jacob Ertl *piano*

Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, Op. 8 (1854) Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro con brio
Scherzo. Allegro molto
Adagio
Finale. Allegro

Tigran Vardanya *violin*
Benjamin Krug *cello*
Jacob Ertl *piano*

PROGRAM NOTES

Handel/Halvorsen: *Passacaglia*

Johan August Halvorsen had humble beginnings. He came from a modest background in the small industrial and market town of Drammen, 30 km south of Oslo. Largely self-taught, he received his musical education playing in theatre and operetta ensembles in Kristiania (now Oslo) starting at the age of 15, and then in Stockholm, where he studied violin with Jakob Lindberg for the year prior to his appointment as concertmaster of the Musikskabskabet Harmonien, now the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, in 1885. Following a year in Bergen, he went to Leipzig for two years of study with Adolph Brodsky where he also played with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and became known as one of Scandinavia's foremost violinists. In 1889 he accepted a position as professor of violin at the Helsinki Music Institute, also playing in numerous chamber ensembles and trying his hand at conducting. His colleagues in Helsinki, including Ferruccio Busoni, prompted him to also start composing.

Following a partial year of study in Berlin with Albert Becker in counterpoint, he returned to Bergen in 1893 with dual appointments as conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic and Theatre Orchestras. In Bergen he became acquainted with Edvard Grieg. This acquaintance would develop into a close friendship that also had important musical consequences. As a chamber musician, Johan Halvorsen often played with Edvard Grieg's brother, the cellist John Grieg. Halvorsen would later marry John's daughter.

In 1899, Halvorsen moved to Oslo to accept the position of conductor of the new national theatre, a position that he held until 1929. As well as conducting stage music, often his own as he wrote incidental music for over 30 plays, he regularly conducted symphony concerts at the theatre, and directed more than 25 opera productions. Toward the end of his tenure at the theatre, Halvorsen made time to concentrate on the composition of his three symphonies and two well-known Norwegian orchestral rhapsodies.

As a composer, Halvorsen was again largely self-taught with a style strongly influenced by his friends Grieg and Svendsen, but marked by brilliant orchestration inspired by the French Romantic composers. The cooperation between Grieg and Halvorsen was extremely significant for Norwegian music. Through Grieg, the legendary folk fiddler Knut Dale from Tinn in Telemark came to Halvorsen in the late autumn of 1901 to have the many folk dances in his repertoire written down, as he couldn't write music himself and was afraid that a whole genre of folk dances would be lost when he died. Halvorsen became seriously aware of the uniqueness of folk music and its potential in music with a clearly national character, and also embarked on

thorough studies of the Hardanger fiddle. The first time the Hardanger fiddle was used with an orchestra was in Halvorsen's 1905 music for Fossegrimen (a fiddle-playing water sprite), a play by Eldegard based on Norwegian folk stories and legends, with Halvorsen playing the solo part at the premiere.

The *Passacaglia* dates from Halvorsen's second stay in Bergen, as conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic and Theatre Orchestras. This composition is a free adaptation of a Handel theme from the final movement of the Harpsichord Suite No. 6 in G minor, HWV 432. Handel composed numerous harpsichord suites comprising dance movements often concluding with the traditional Baroque passacaglia, a term originally designating a Spanish street dance (though the earliest extant examples are Italian). The essential feature of the passacaglia is a short, resolved, chord progression that is repeated as a harmonic bedrock for a series of improvisations or inventive variations. The Passacaglia theme, a brief four-measure sequence of eight chords with a characteristic dotted rhythm, is a closely modeled paraphrase of the original that is broad and vigorous. The theme generates a series of thrilling variations in a tour de force of musical invention that offers a real challenge to performers. The variations explore a variety of bow and finger techniques, yet preserve a certain classical dignity. The complexity of the variations contrasts sharply with the simplicity of the melodic kernel. Originally written for violin and viola, the *Passacaglia* is most commonly performed with the deeper cello voice as the anchoring bass instrument. The spare resources of only two string instruments require numerous double and triple stops, multi-note chords on each instrument to create a full four-part harmony. Some of the variations take an alternative approach using swift melodic lines that create a linear harmonic effect over time. The result is a sumptuous and scintillating dialog for two master players frequently expanding to four and five simultaneous parts.

Rebecca Clarke: *Sonata for viola and piano*

Rebecca Clarke was born in Harrow, England in 1886, the eldest child in a very strict Victorian family with strong interests in chamber music. Clarke was given violin lessons as a child, studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London for two years, and was accepted in 1907 to the Royal College of Music where she became Charles Villiers Stanford's first female composition student when it was rare for women to study, let alone specialize in composition. Stanford, head of the composition department at the RCM, was a seminal figure in English music, a fine composer, and a great teacher whose students included Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, John Ireland, and Frank Bridge. Stanford introduced Rebecca to the viola by suggesting that as a composition student, by being in the middle of the orchestra she could "tell how it's all done." She took naturally to the viola and made rapid progress in both composition and viola studies, winning several prizes in her first and second years. Trying to fit into a society that applied rigid stereotypes to the identity of a woman, Clarke repeatedly minimized her own achievements.

After three years at the conservatory, she quarreled with her father who threw her out of the household, unsupported, to fend for herself. She found that as a violist she had a means of earning a living, at first at the RCM and as a freelance player. At Stanford's recommendation, the all-female Norah Clench Quartet offered her a position. Later, in 1912 she became one of the first women to play professionally in an established orchestra when Sir Henry Wood invited her to join the Queen's Hall Orchestra. She developed a notable reputation as a soloist and chamber

musician and in 1916, embarked on an extended concert tour of the United States. By chance in 1918, she attended the first Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music in western Massachusetts. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who organized and sponsored the festival, encouraged her to enter the composition competition the following year. Seventy-two works were entered anonymously. Clarke's Viola Sonata tied with Ernest Bloch's Suite for Viola. Coolidge herself broke the tie and awarded the 1919 prize to Bloch. Clarke was runner up a second time in 1921 for her Piano Trio and in 1923, Coolidge commissioned her to write a work, the Rhapsody for cello and piano.

In 1924 she returned to London into a society which following World War I had retrenched and reasserted traditional roles. The freedom of Clarke's travelling years, reinforced by the necessity of supporting herself in new environments, were largely lost upon this return to an ordered life with societal expectations for an upper middle class woman. Although Clarke continued to perform extensively as a chamber musician, as a composer her output declined steadily.

As a violist, Clarke was first rate, playing with many of the outstanding musicians of the twentieth century such as Casals, Schnabel, Hess, Thibaud, Cortot, Szell, and others. Artur Rubenstein referred to her as "the glorious Rebecca Clarke."

As a composer, despite many very encouraging reviews and compliments by outstanding musicians, Clarke's own modesty, culturally encouraged as an acceptable feminine pose, contributed greatly to her obscurity. Recent appraisals of Rebecca Clarke's music have placed her among the most important British composers of the interwar years.

The viola sonata is a superb example of late-romantic chamber music, growing out of the tradition of Brahms with enriched moods, colors, and a clarity of design inspired by the French impressionists. The work is presented with a quotation from Alfred de Musset's poem *A May Night*, "Poet take up your lute; tonight the wine of youth is fermenting in the veins of God," which motivates the flow of ideas and emotions expressed throughout this piece.

Brahms: *Piano Trio, Op. 8*

A perfectionist who was almost obsessively private about his compositional methods, Johannes Brahms ruthlessly burned not only the manuscripts of all his compositions that did not meet his exacting standards, but also all of the sketches, drafts, and preliminary revisions of the works that he did find worthy of public release. Brahms preserved the privacy of his creative processes to such an extent that it has proven nearly impossible for musicologists to figure out how he worked and by what means he honed his inspirations into the burnished masterpieces that were published.

The B Major trio provides a fascinating, and almost unique, glimpse into the composer's workshop. Originally written in 1854, when Brahms was twenty-one, as his first venture into chamber music, it was revised thirty-five years later for a second edition, on the initiative of his publisher, Fritz Simrock, who decided to re-publish several of Brahms's early compositions that had gone out of print. Simrock wrote to Brahms and asked if he might take advantage of the opportunity to revise any of these earlier compositions. Since the earlier version had already been published, Brahms could not simply destroy it, as he would have done with a manuscript. The first version had its world premiere in New York in 1855, performed by William Mason, piano (who had brought the score home with him when he returned from a European tour), Carl Bergmann, cellist, and a young German-American named Theodore Thomas who moved west to become the founder and first music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The Trio was

the first substantial work by Brahms to be heard in the United States and its reception by the press was expressed in terms that were to become all too familiar: it was ‘of the ultra new school . . . we do not yet understand it.’

The revision is an entirely different work, though it begins with the same themes. The mature composer reigned in the young man’s fancy and produced a much tauter web of ideas. Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann in the fall of 1889, “You’ll never be able to guess what childish amusement I have used to while away the gorgeous summer days. I have rewritten my B Major Trio and can now call it Opus 108 rather than Opus 8. It’s not as wild as it was, but whether or not it’s better - ?” In typical understatement, he wrote to another friend that he “did not provide it with a wig, but just combed and arranged its hair a little.” The copy used by Brahms for the revision has been preserved by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, and in its innumerable pencil marks and complete re-writes of sections, it affords evident proof of the complete transformation which the work had undergone. Only the Scherzo received mercy from the mature Brahms with the Coda alone being modified.

The Adagio and Allegro movements are considerably shorter than the original versions. Altogether, the work lost more than a third of its length, but gained enormously in focus and depth.

In March of 1890, Brahms, together with the violinist Hugo Heermann and the cellist Hugo Becker, gave the first performance of the revised Opus 8 Trio in a chamber music evening at the museum in Baden. The revised version of the Trio quickly displaced the original, but not without reservations. Brahms’s close friends the Herzogenbergers did not hesitate to express their regrets at his decision to revise the work, “(We) feel that you had no right to impress your masterly touch upon this adorable, if sometimes vague, product of your youth ... because no one can be imbued with the same spirit after so many years.” And a few weeks later, “although both of us now understand the new version, we quietly mourn the lovely things that have been removed.”

In its final form the B major trio bears the hand, the mind, and the heart of both the young and the older Johannes Brahms.

Notes compiled by Eric Zeise from text by Kai Christiansen, Alfred Frankenstein,
Christopher Johnson, and Karl Geringer “Brahms, his life and works”.

Biographical Notes

Pianist **Jacob Ertl** is a sought-after performer and teacher who has performed extensively in the U.S. and abroad in recital, as soloist with orchestras, and giving master classes. He is currently a member of two contemporary chamber ensembles: Ensemble Alla Balena, and the Eastern Standard Trio. Ensemble All Balena has recently performed in Mexico as well as in the Eastman Artist Series. As a founding member of Eastern Standard, he has recorded two commercial albums, commissioned and premiered over 20 new works, and presented annual tours for the past eight seasons. He was formerly a core member of the Eastman Broadband Ensemble for several seasons, and a guest artist with the Alia Musica Ensemble. An advocate for music outreach, Dr. Ertl was the Artist-in-Residence Fellow for the PianoArts organization for eight years, performing numerous interactive concerts and developing educational outreach initiatives. He also serves as an adjudicator for international, national, and regional competitions. Ertl holds piano performance degrees from the Oberlin

Conservatory (BM) and the Eastman School of Music (MM, DMA), and currently serves as Coordinator of Keyboard Studies, Associate Professor of Piano, and Performance Program Director at the Nazareth College School of Music.

Violist **Ryan Hardcastle** maintains a varied career as a performer, teacher, and music historian. He is currently on faculty at Nazareth College, where he teaches viola and music history. In recent years, Ryan has dedicated his attention to unknown works from the former Soviet Union. These lectures and recitals have resulted in the American premiere of works by Schnittke, Weinberg, Grigori Frid, Volkonsky, and Druzhinin. As a two-time Presser Grant recipient, Ryan is currently at work on a book, *1985: A Year of Triumph and Trauma in the Life of Alfred Schnittke*. The book explores aspects of memory, cerebrovascular disease, and refreshing discussions of Schnittke's music including his Viola Concerto, Cello Concerto No. 1, Concerto for Mixed Chorus, String Trio, and Concerto Grosso No. 3. Additionally, Ryan is transcribing a late, unpublished work by Schnittke. Ryan completed his DMA in Performance and Literature at the Eastman School, studied at Indiana University-Jacobs School of Music and at the University of North Texas. He completed his Bachelor of Music at Missouri State University, *magna cum laude*. As an undergraduate, Ryan was a National Finalist in the Music Teachers National Association Young Artist competition as well as the Chamber division with the William T. White String Quartet.

Benjamin Krug is a tenured cellist with the RPO, and the newly-appointed Suzuki cello instructor at Hochstein School of Music. In recent summers, he has performed with the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra, the Chautauqua Festival Orchestra, and the Finger Lakes Opera. As a chamber musician, Benjamin is a member of the Salaff Quartet (with RPO colleagues) performing free concerts throughout the Rochester community and serving as Outreach Ambassadors for the Society for Chamber Music in Rochester. Prior to joining the RPO, Benjamin was a member of both the Akron and Canton Symphonies and participated in summer festivals including the National Orchestral Institute, Aspen Music Festival, and Tanglewood Music Festival. Benjamin is a dedicated pedagogue, having recently completed Suzuki teacher training and studying the method from the age of four. He graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Music with his Master's Degree and Professional Studies Diploma, after receiving his Bachelor of Music in Cello Performance with departmental distinction from St. Olaf College. Prior to his cello career, Benjamin was a celebrated boy soprano and graduate of the American Boychoir School, touring throughout the country and internationally from the age of 11 and performing and recording with world-class orchestras.

Violinist **Tigran Vardanyan** is from Yerevan, Armenia. At a very young age, Vardanyan won First Prize at the 1991 and 1993 Armenian National Competitions, the Gold Medal at the 1992 Amadeus Competition for Young Artists, and performed as a soloist with the Armenian Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, the Armenian Chamber Orchestra, and the Armenian TV and Radio Orchestra. He is a graduate of the Eastman School (2000) and has been a member of the RPO since 1998. He remains active as a soloist and chamber musician and has appeared in various concert venues in his native Armenia, Europe, Central America, and North America. He has presented numerous recitals live on WXXI, and was featured as a soloist with the Rochester Philharmonic playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto. He performs on a violin made by Francesco Gobetti (Venice, ca. 1720).

Vardanyan is on the faculty of Nazareth College, and is a co-founder of TheArcRest, Inc., a company that makes violin and viola shoulder rests.

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