

FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

Peabody Trio
Violaine Melançon, violin
Natasha Brofsky, cello
Seth Knopp, piano

March 31, 2001
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California



This program is dedicated to the memory of Eleanor Frank

Program

“Soliloquy” for Piano Trio

Composed in 1997 for the Peabody Trio

Shulamit Ran

(b. 1949)

Trio in a minor (1915)

Modere

Pantoum (Assez vif)

Passacaille (Tres large)

Finale (Anime)

Maurice Ravel

(1875-1937)

—Intermission—

Trio in B-flat Major, Op. 97 “Archduke”

Allegro moderato

Allegretto

Andante cantabile, ma pero con moto

Finale: Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)



The Peabody Trio appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists
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The Peabody Trio

The three musicians of the Peabody Trio come from diverse musical backgrounds. Violinist Violaine Melançon is from Quebec, Canada and after receiving First Prize in violin at the Conservatoire de Musique, she continued her studies with Ivan Galamian at the Curtis Institute of Music and with Isadore Tinkleman at the San Francisco Conservatory. While at Curtis, she was a member of the Nisaika Quartet, prizewinner of the Eighth International String Quartet Competition in Evian, France.

Cellist Natasha Brofsky grew up in New York City, studying with Marion Feldman and later attending the Juilliard School. She received her Bachelor's degree from Eastman, where her teachers were Robert Sylvester and Paul Katz, and her Master's degree from Mannes as a student of Timothy Eddy. In 1987 she was awarded a Fulbright Grant to study with William Pleeth in London, and while there she won the Muriel Taylor Cello Prize. Subsequently, she held principal positions in the Norwegian Radio and Chamber Orchestras.

Pianist Seth Knopp studied at the New England Conservatory and San Francisco Conservatory. His teachers have included Leonard Shure and Leon Fleisher. Currently, Mr. Knopp is Associate Artistic Director of the Yellow Barn Music School and Festival in Putney, Vermont, and is Chairman of the Chamber Music Department at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore.

In 1983 Mr. Knopp and Ms. Melançon formed the Knopp-Melançon Duo, begun when both were students. Since then, this husband and wife team has performed throughout the world. In 1987 the Duo was appointed USIA Artistic Ambassadors and toured abroad extensively.

Program Notes

Ran-Soliloquy for Piano Trio

Shulamit Ran was born in Tel-Aviv, Israel. She studied piano and composition there and in 1962 came to the United States on scholarships, already an accomplished composer. She continued her studies in New York, where she performed her *Capriccio* with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under Leonard Bernstein in 1963. In 1991, she became composer-in-residence of the Chicago Symphony

Orchestra. Her first Symphony won the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 1991 and first prize in the Kennedy Center Friedheim awards in 1992. Most of her works are for traditional forces with or without voices; her style may be characterized as freely atonal.

The composer drew the musical ideas for *Soliloquy* from her composition of the opera, *Between Two Worlds (The Dybbuk)*. The opera was based on S. Anski's famous Yiddish play by the same name. The protagonist, Khonnon, has an opening soliloquy expressing his yearning and desire for the beloved Leya. The phrase, originally a tenor line, is played by the cello and is the second theme of this one movement work, lasting approximately seven minutes. The first theme is a newly composed idea for the violin, though Khonnon's music was the "trigger" for the initial inspiration of the composition, and the source of the title.

In *The Dybbuk*, Khonnon dies of unrequited love, but this death is only the first step in the journey towards fulfillment of the great longing of the doomed would-be lovers. The legato first theme is loosely based on a whole-tone configuration; this line is subjected to different melodic permutations throughout the opera, changing as Khonnon's desire evolves.

Ravel-Trio in a minor

Ravel's only piano trio was composed in 1914, entirely at St. Jean-de-luz on the sea in the Basque enclave in the department Basses-Pyrenees, across the cove from Ciboure where he was born. Ravel's mother was Basque and lulled him to sleep with Spanish lullabies. Though the family moved to Paris, the Basque element dominated their lives and Ravel spoke the Basque language fluently. He shared an attraction for the Spanish idioms with other composers in Paris, the hub of all that was musically new and exciting at this time. (Ravel was present at the riotous premier of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913, and took his full share in the clamor.) France was a colonial power and French musicians imported music material from more distant shores, including those of Africa and Asia.

These influences are found as intrinsic elements of the Trio, as well as Ravel's attraction to the dance, which had its sources not only in folk dancing but also in the *suites* of dances of the Baroque

clavecinists. Though nominally written in A minor, the tonality of the Trio is modal through Ravel's use of chromaticism and harmony that often gives the music an archaic ring.

Ravel declared that the Modere was Basque in flavor and he may have believed that it was. But the theme is analogous to a primitive form of the Castilian fandango, according to his friend Roland-Manuel. Ravel could have heard it in the marketplace of St. Jean-de-luz, a curious local melody that had crossed the mountains. The theme is composed of a meter using asymmetric accents, 3 plus 3 plus 2, and it sways along over a "pedal" in the low piano. The second theme is a gentle, suave tune presented in the violin, then in the cello punctuated by gentle chords on the piano. A more intense section, somewhat turbulent, is followed by a coda with the theme in lower registers over octave mutterings in the piano.

The form of the next movement is that of a "Pantoum," a literary genre from Malay used by Victor Hugo and other French poets. The second and fourth line of a quatrain is used as the first and third line of the next verse, and so on, a form that was much more of a challenge for a musician than for the literary artists who found it formidable enough. This scherzo begins with a chattering theme in duple metre to be followed immediately by the main theme in triple metre and both continue in alternation between piano and strings. An anguished climax does not last for long. The trio presents a chorale melody of broad chords. In this movement, breath-taking delicacy alternates with vigor.

While Ravel was composing the Trio in 1914, the World War broke out and this event, developing with unexpected speed, had a profound effect on his mood and outlook. He tried to enlist but was too slight ("Jockey-like" a friend commented) and was told his composing was his war effort. He set about it with a new passion. He writes: "Yes, I am working...with the assurance and clarity of a madman...suddenly there

I am sobbing over my sharps and flats.” The melody of the Passacaglia (a form in which a theme is repeated over and over again in various voices) would seem to portray this depression of Ravel. The slow, haunting passage is introduced in the lowest register of the piano; the cello takes the second repetition and the slow moving music attains a dignity and poise over swaying bass octave passages. The theme is varied in its third repetition played by the violin, and is followed by a piano solo of calm and tranquility suggestive of someone awaiting inevitability with composure and resignation. The movement reaches a climax of pitch, intensity, and dynamics, the piano playing chords with great power at its center. In the final repetitions the music dies away; finally the piano plays the theme alone as at the beginning.

The Finale, the emotional antithesis of the Passacaglia, is unusually brilliant, a free rondo with swinging meters of 5/4 and 7/4. Ravel had just completed his music for the Ballet Russe, *Daphnis et Chloé*, and some of this orchestral expansiveness is heard here. A rarity in chamber music, the strings play *tremolando* and rich arpeggiated passes. The second subject is warmer and smooth. After the apex of intensity on the piano, marked by string trills, the development presents the second theme flaunting its strength. The coda is enormous and features arpeggios for the full length of the piano. It is to be remembered that Ravel admired Liszt as much as he disliked Wagner. Ravel wanted this last movement to “trumpet” and it reflects the idealism that Frenchmen had at the moment in the wake of a “holy war.” Ravel felt differently by 1918. The trio is big without being grandiloquent or portentous.

Beethoven—Trio in B-flat Major

Perhaps the last music Beethoven really heard, and the last in which he played (except as an accompanist) were two performances of the Op. 97 Trio in 1814 in Vienna. The Trio was completed in 1811, not a prolific period of composition for Beethoven. Spohr, who was present at the performance, wrote, “On account of his deafness there was scarcely anything left of the virtuosity of the artist which had formerly been so greatly admired. In *forte* passages the poor deaf man pounded on the keys till the strings jangled, and in *piano* he played so softly that whole groups of

tones were omitted, so that the music was unintelligible.” This work more than deserves a performance that fully explores the architecture, drama, and subtlety of a masterpiece.

The Trio was dedicated to Archduke Rudolf, brother of Emperor Franz, who was to be consecrated Archbishop of Olmutz (in Moravia) in 1820, the event for which Beethoven began the *Missa Solemnis*. Rudolf had been one of Beethoven’s students and the two shared a mutual attachment. Rudolf was an epileptic and not an attractive man but was the object of the composer’s deepest affection and was his chief patron and passport to the Imperial Court.

The Allegro Moderato opens with a quietly symmetrical theme, its lyric spaciousness supported by a mass of harmony on the piano; a few dramatic bars with violin and cello lead into the second subject which gently descends followed by dialogues among the voices in the development. Finally, the piece ends with a monumental coda.

The strings present the tune seemingly slight and innocent in a disarming Scherzo before the piano enters. In the trio a fugato develops with one tune and a waltzy passage with another tune.

The andante cantabile is long, with four variations on a theme of contemplative simplicity. Throughout the variations, the harmonic scheme is kept intact while the melody is decorated; here baroque ornamentation has become thematic, trills essential motifs. The rhythmic scheme undergoes increasing subdivisions.

After a romantic coda, Beethoven with “calculated intent” immediately begins a rondo full of brusque wit and of “outrageous conviviality” in the opinion of Neville Marriner. He asks “Is it a joke...or is it Beethoven in a mood of contemptuous rancor, enjoying the squirming dismay of his patrons and sycophants?” Whatever his intention he created a supreme achievement in this medium. Beethoven had generated a work whose architecture was monumental by the development of broad, moderately paced and flowing melodies. The work has a sense of calm, spaciousness, and measured nobility. The Trio represents the impulses toward a new type of classicism Beethoven was exploring at the time.

—Notes by Catherine Roche

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