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in Cooperation with Pacific's Conservatory of Music present

STRATA

AUDREY ANDRIST, piano
NATHAN WILLIAMS, clarinet
JAMES STERN, violin and viola

2:30 PM, Sunday, February 4, 2018
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

GIAN CARLO MENOTTI TRIO FOR CLARINET, VIOLIN & PIANO (1996)
(1911–2007) Capriccio
Romanza
Envoi

MAX BRUCH from ACHT STÜCKE, OP. 83 (1910)
(1838–1920) No. 2: Allegro con moto
No. 3: Andante con moto
No. 7: Allegro vivace, ma non troppo
No. 5: Rumänische Melodie: Andante
No. 4: Allegro agitato

— INTERMISSION —

ARAM KHACHATURIAN TRIO IN G MINOR (1932)
(1903–1978) Andante con dolore, con molto espressione
Allegro
Moderato

PAUL SCHOENFIELD TRIO FOR CLARINET, VIOLIN & PIANO (1990)
(b. 1947) Freylakh
March
Niggun
Kozatzke

For bookings, please contact:

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Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation

ARTIST PROFILE



Strata is a classical music ensemble whose brilliant performances are a counterpoint of old and new, reflecting the unbridled joy they take in making music together.

Strata is a coming together of three extraordinary musical talents. Their combined credits encompass numerous international prizes and performances across four continents including such places as Carnegie Hall, the Marlboro Festival and the Kennedy Center.

Strata brings “deft ensemble playing” and a “talent...that’s worth getting worked up about” [*Washington Post*] to a repertoire that combines the great trio and duo repertoire of the past with an ever-growing body of new works written especially for them over the more than 25 years they have been playing together. Equally capable of winning over an audience with unique renderings of popular music and of making even the most complex works accessible, exciting and meaningful, Strata has received enthusiastic repeat engagements at the Piccolo Spoleto Festival, New York’s historic Maverick Concerts and San Francisco Composers Inc, for which they were listed as one of San Francisco Classical Voice’s “highlights of 2005.” They have been resident artists at the Banff Centre for the Arts and appeared in New York City under International Society for Contemporary Music auspices.

All holders of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Juilliard School, the members of Strata are dedicated to every level of music education, from the mentoring of graduate students and young professionals, to the initial sparking of musical passion in very young children, to the guiding of audiences in what to listen for. Spoken commentary is an integral part of all their concerts. They perform a wide range of specially tailored presentations for K-12 schools, and have done numerous university residencies involving coaching chamber music and both advising and performing the music of young composers. They have appeared as a featured ensemble at the annual conventions of the Music Teachers’ Association of California and the International Clarinet Association.

Examples of a clarinet-violin/piano trio were extant as early as the 18th century. Bruch composed his suite for eight pieces (some of which we hear today) for this combination at the beginning of the 20th century, and others existed between as well as since: Stravinsky's arrangement for *L'histoire du soldat*, Bartok's *Contrasts*, Milhaud's Op. 157b, Berg's *Adagio*, and Ives' *Largo* are examples. This combination of instruments is also common in traditional Ashkenazi Jewish music.

Unlike the piano trio or concerto, there is not a standard form for this combination of instruments; it can have any number of movements.

Acoustically, most chamber music contains high, mid-range, and low parts. The clarinet and violin, however, fall into the same range, which you might think will make for a less balanced sound than a trio that contains a broader range. But the needed contrast is provided by the timbral differences provided by the woodwind, the bowed string, and the piano.

Menotti: *Trio*

The Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti was born in the Italian town of Cadegliano (near Lake Lugano), the sixth child of ten. He moved to the United States when he was seventeen and studied composition at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia from 1927 until 1933.

Menotti's reputation was established with the triumph of his first opera, *Amelia Goes to the Ball* (1937). He has written a series of popular, well-received operas, usually writing to his own libretto in both Italian and English. He has been hailed as a natural successor to Giacomo Puccini. Menotti is probably best known for his most renowned work, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a Christmas work and the first opera ever commissioned for television.

This trio is a charming and lyrical work that advances the repertory of this grouping of instruments. It was written at the behest of the Verdehr Trio, the leading pioneer violin-clarinet-piano trio, and was completed only a few hours before its first full performance—he literally wrote the final chord at noon on the day of the concert.

The three movements are "Capriccio," "Romanza," and "Envoi." The themes of the first and third movements, which are in brisk tempos, have the sprightly quality of

Prokofiev, while the middle movement is a melancholy, expressive song. The trio is in a distinct, straightforward tonal writing that is pleasing to most audiences.

This enchanting, seldom performed work is classic Menotti: melody-driven, romantic, flavored with intermittent dissonance, and organized so that each instrument gets its place in the sun. It is a dazzling work, full of tuneful lyricism and the whimsicality for which Menotti is famed. We should be deeply grateful to him for adding such a beautiful work to the chamber corpus.

Bruch: *Acht Stücke*

A brilliant child prodigy, Max Bruch was a German composer who loved folk music as a source of material. He began composing at the age of nine and by his early teens had completed his first symphony. At his pinnacle, he was thought fated to be one of history's greatest composers.

But alas, by the time of his death his standing had degenerated precipitously, eclipsed by Romantic colleagues Brahms, Dvorak, and Tchaikovsky. Bruch modeled his early compositions after those of Mendelssohn and Schumann. As he grew older, he stubbornly refused to embrace the innovative musical expression of "radicals" like Liszt, Wagner, Strauss, and Schoenberg. Undeniably, many of his ultimate works seem as if they were composed sixty years before, and he lived to see himself become a musically conservative anachronism.

Taken on its own though, Max Bruch's music is melodic, masterfully created, and completely worthy of being performed and heard. The *Trio* is a set of eight pieces for this instrumental combination, written when he was 72, was dedicated to his son, Max Felix Bruch, a gifted professional clarinetist of renowned tone. The presentation today of only five of the pieces complies with the desire of the composer, who stated that there was no programmatic titles and the work did not form a cycle. He did not intend the work to be performed in its entirety at any one time but played separately or in smaller groupings. Each is a two- or three-part form with thematic matter dexterously joined together, portioned out, or alternated between clarinet and violin, with piano providing harmonic backing.

No.2 is a piece shaped in a fast 3/4 time, but without the charisma of a waltz or a

schерzo. To a certain extent it is a tempestuous piece, evocative of Brahms. It finally comes to rest in the major key.

No.3 is apparently the most significant piece for Bruch and also his favored according to his comments. It blends passionate and rapturous flourishes from the viola with a transcendent, slow clarinet melody. Each has his own turn, but in the last clarinet section the viola discourse is 'clamed' to produce a heavenly ending.

No.7 is an enthusiastic scherzo that is reminiscent of Mendelssohn. This piece, the most celebratory composition of all eight, contains two subordinate occurrences of a more peaceful and juxtaposed character.

No.5 contains the title, "Rumanische Melodie." The notion was proposed by the charming young 'Princess zu Wied', and in the end the entire dedication of the eight compositions went to her. The exploitation of Rumanian or gypsy ambiance is demonstrative of Bruch's interest in folk sources.

No.4, the final piece in today's set of choices, is a powerful movement that sustains energetic momentum, even in the expressive parts. At the end, the music switches to the home major key to generate a magnificent conclusion.

When Bruch died three months before his 83rd birthday, music had reached a time when Stravinsky was now very famous, Schoenberg was absorbed in dodecaphony, Bartók had two string quartets behind him, and microtonal music was sufficiently well established that in some places it was being viewed as "the next big thing." Bruch obviously did not relate to any of this. As a composer he was always a conservative, in the style of Brahms, a strong opponent of the 'modern madness' and 'modernists' like Strauss, Reger, Debussy (whom he defined as an 'unqualified scribbler'), and others. He ended his life bitter that he was being boycotted because of his traditional style and his open opposition to these new tendencies.

Khachaturian: *Trio*

Born to a poor Armenian family in Tbilisi, Georgia (then a part of Imperial

Russia), Aram Khachaturian did not study music or learn to read it in his youth, even though he was fascinated by the songs he heard around him. In 1921, he traveled to Moscow and although he had almost no musical education and spoke not a word of Russian, he was talented enough to be admitted to study cello and composition at the Gnessin Institute. Later he transferred to the Moscow Conservatory where he completed the *Trio* while a student.

This rhapsody-like first movement, *andante con dolore*, with its improvisatory qualities should make you think gypsy encampment. The main melody, appearing successively in the clarinet, violin, and piano, is offset by greatly decorated passagework and cadenzas. The elements of the movement are continuously repeated rather than developed, which creates a vibrant and hypnotic ambiance.

The second movement, *allegro*, begins as if it wants to be a scherzo, with a descending scale motive, but soon a lighthearted folk tune appears on the clarinet and the tempo eases. The *agitato* section which follows combines both of these ideas, and a presto cadenza escorts to an exultant, ornamented reappearance of the folk melody. The movement closes *scherzando*, as it opened.

The finale, *moderato*, is a set of variations on a different folk-inspired tune, with a subordinate rhythmic element acting as an impendance and growing in prominence as the movement evolves. Both figures divide the limelight at the climax, after which it all slowly dissipates before dissolving into emptiness.

Aram Khachaturian, along with Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, is among the most well-known Soviet composers. Despite being written while a student, the masterful and unique *Trio* reveals the obvious inspiration of the Armenian folk music that fascinated him as a child and continued to color his mature compositions.¹

Khachaturian is generally celebrated as the foremost Armenian composer of the 20th century synthesizing European “classical” art music with striking elements of Eastern Eurasian folk music in a vivid nationalism that reflects the multiple cultures under the

sprawling aegis of the old Soviet Union. An outstanding conductor and teacher as well, Khachaturian is remembered today primarily for his orchestral music comprising symphonies, concerti, ballet and film music, his most popular “hit” being the Sabre Dance from the *Gayane* suite.

Schoenfield: *Trio*

Paul Schoenfield, a native of Detroit, is a pianist and composer who began playing the piano at age six and wrote his first composition the following year. Like Khachaturian, he often uses his ethnic tradition as a source and muse. He has written works with titles such as *Tales from Chelm*, *Klezmer Rondos*, and *Six Improvisations on Hassidic Melodies*, with Jewish themes and gestures to Klezmer music.² Schoenfield has also surveyed other styles of folk and popular music in works such as *Six British Folk Songs*, *Slovakian Children’s Songs*, *Three Country Fiddle Pieces*, and *Vaudeville*.

The NEA, Chamber Music America, the Rockefeller Fund, and the Juilliard School, among others, have awarded Schoenfield commissions and grants. He studied piano with Rudolf Serkin, toured with Music from Marlboro, and now teaches at University of Michigan.

The well-known clarinetist David Shifrin invited Schoenfield to compose a trio for clarinet, violin, and piano in 1986. Because he was busy with other projects, it was four years later that he began sketching out the work we hear today.

For the composer, the undertaking required two prerequisites that entailed exactly the challenge he has welcomed in fashioning many of his compositions. First, there was his long-held interest in creating music targeted at celebratory Hassidic assemblies as well as at classical chamber music concert audiences entirely outside the Hassidic setting; and second, it posed the artistic challenge to create music that is at once engaging and creative.

The resultant *Trio for Clarinet, Violin & Piano* is an inventive mix of artistic collaboration, instrumental virtuosity, and purposely disjointed allusions to melodies that might well have been heard at various Hassidic courts in Europe. Many of those

courts frequently retained or invited solely instrumental bands of klezmerim for their festivities. Thus, this piece features nuances and adornments classic of the clarinet playing in those bands in both Europe and America.

Despite that resemblance, much of the writing here for all three instruments extends past folk idioms in sophistication and recalls flashes of chamber music by Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Bartók.

One of the best-known dances among eastern European Jewry is the freylakh, so titled because of its melody and rhythm. Although the dance is not exclusively Hassidic, it was heard at Hassidic courts in the context of festivities.

The first movement is entitled freylakh and is representative and reminiscent of the dance. However, the frenzied vigor and passion in this *Freylakh* largely exceeds that of any performance by klezmerim for the purpose of entertainment or dance accompaniment. From the start, this is clearly a concert work rather than music composed for some specific, identifiable purpose or application.

Schoenfield has described *March*, the second movement, as “bizarre and somewhat diabolical.” It recalls and employs recognizable folk motifs, the tuneful and rhythmic constituents reflecting a characteristic march at a Hassidic court during a celebratory event.

The third movement is titled *Niggun*, referring to the transcendent and profoundly mystical Hassidic succession of musical tones constituting a melody in general.

The concluding *Kozatzke*—a Russian Cossack dance often used by Jews at wedding celebrations—integrates fragments of both Russian and eastern European Jewish dance tunes.

—notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

¹ So much so that he was posthumously honored by having his image used on Armenian currency!

² And who can forget his *Five Days from the Life of a Manic Depressive for Piano Four Hands*?

62ND SEASON

2017-2018

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- Please turn off cellular telephones and disengage audible signals on digital devices during concert.
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