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Strata

JAMES STERN, violin/viola

NATHAN WILLIAMS, clarinet

AUDREY ANDRIST, piano

2:30 pm, Sunday, April 7, 2024

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

University of the Pacific

WOLFGANG A. MOZART TRIO IN E \flat MAJOR, K. 498 "KEGELSTATT" (1786)

(1756–1791) Andante
Menuetto
Rondeaux: Allegretto

KARIM AL-ZAND STOMPING GROUNDS (2015)

(b. 1970) hop | skip | jump
dog days dirge
mbira song
sto(m)p time dance

— INTERMISSION —

JEAN FRANÇAIX TRIO FOR CLARINET, VIOLA, AND PIANO (1992)

(1912–1997) Preludio: Largo
Allegro
Scherzando
Largo
Presto

MAX BRUCH DOUBLE CONCERTO, OP. 88 (1911) *arr. Otto Lindemann*

(1838–1920) Andante con moto
Allegro moderato
Allegro molto

For bookings, please contact: Audrey Andrist, (301) 318-3240
stratamusic.org@gmail.com

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. 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" 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 the auspices of the International Society for Contemporary Music.

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, and 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.

Mozart: *Trio in E♭ Major*

After the premiere of *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart found time to write some intimate chamber works, including the second of his piano quartets and his only trio for clarinet, viola, and piano. Both of these were new genres he pioneered.

The Clarinet Trio, which entered into the composer's catalogue on August 5, 1786, has become known by its nickname "Kegelstatt", the German word for the alley (statt) where an early form of bowling (Kegel) was played, typically accompanied by drinking. In fact, Mozart did compose a work while bowling with friends – but it wasn't this one. Mozart folk lore is filled with tales about the young prodigy composing exquisitely constructed scores in his head while simultaneously gaming. Somehow, that image commingled K.487¹ with K.498, which Mozart's catalogue describes simply as "a trio for piano, clarinet, and viola." The moniker *Kegelstatt* first appears ascribed to the K.498 trio in Ludwig von Köchel's 1862 catalogue of Mozart's music.

Mozart loved to spend time with his fellow musicians. He wrote this Trio for his colleagues Franziska von Jacquin, his favorite piano student, and Anton Stadler, friend and one of history's first clarinet virtuosos. For its debut, Mozart himself was violist.

The scoring of the trio is significant for numerous reasons: a) including clarinet with the string family; b) writing a piano trio itself, a largely new thing; c) featuring a new-fangled piano vs. a harpsichord; d) using the piano in a startlingly clear texture of classical balance and reserve where it truly sings with its cohorts. It is a superb instance of chamber music as a balanced dialogue among equals.

That Mozart begins with a first movement *Andante* rather than an *Allegro* is unusual. It is also unusual that Mozart develops just one theme as the

movement is in sonata form. To achieve unity, he depends on ingenious elaborations and instrumental interchange, and on an ornamental turn (gruppetto) that recurs throughout the movement.

Like the *Andante*, the jolly *Menuetto* is notable for Mozart's blending of complex polyphony with a cordial, gallant style. The dynamic contrasts and the viola's energetic triplets in the movement's minor-key trio confer excitement. The reappearance of the trio's theme at the movement's end is a delectable touch.

Mozart concludes with a *rondeaux* (plural because there are more variations than usual between returns of the rondo) that in Alfred Einstein's words "sings from beginning to end." It highlights vibrant contrasts, virtuosic twists, melodic and contrapuntal charms, a minor-key occurrence that momentarily turns the movement darker, and a jubilant ending that brings the work to a perfect close.

Whether one calls it *Kegelstatt* or not, it combines friends, history, a fresh foray of contemporary musical color and a mature mastery of the finest Viennese chamber music into an inexpressible delight sure to, as Wolfie liked to say, please "beginners and connoisseurs."

Al-Zand: *Stomping Grounds*

The wide-ranging compositions of composer Karim Al-Zand move from settings of classical Arabic poetry to scores for dance and pieces for young audiences. His works study connections between music and other arts and draw inspiration from diverse sources such as 19th century graphic art, fables of the world, folksong, and jazz. Al-Zand's music has enjoyed success in the US, Canada and abroad, and he is the recipient of several national awards, including the ArtSong Prize, the Sackler Composition Prize, the Louisville Orchestra Competition Prize, and the "Arts and Letters Award in Music" from

the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He holds degrees from Harvard and McGill Universities and is currently on the faculty of the Shepherd School of Music (Rice University) in Houston. Al-Zand is also a founding member of Musiqa, Houston's premier contemporary music organization.

Al-Zand describes his own music as usually having a "thread" that forms his initial inspiration and his guide as he creates the fabric of a piece, connecting them to something outside of the music itself. That connection might be explicit or hidden; it might be collaborative or inter-disciplinary; musical or extra-musical; its context may be historical or contemporary, social or political.

In early music, a "ground" is a repeating melodic phrase or harmonic progression. *Stomping Grounds* comprises four diverse character pieces, each one using a repeating rhythmic idea as its musical basis. Al-Zand has the following to say:

"*hop | skip | jump*, the first movement, is playful and animated, with a fanfare-like theme and a persistent seven-note chord that serves as the movement's musical 'clock'. Behind its exuberant surface is a fourteen-beat rhythmic scheme (2+3, 2+3, 2+2) that is followed throughout.

"The second movement, *dog days dirge*, is slow and languid, the instruments seeming to move as little as possible. The piano repeats thick chords in a pattern which moves ever-so-slowly, while the violin and clarinet echo each other's motives lazily.

"A welcome freshness arrives in the next movement, *mbira song*. The *mbira*, or "thumb piano," is an indigenous percussion instrument of Central and Southern Africa. Its music

¹ Mozart wrote on the first page of the K.1487 autograph manuscript "untern Kegelscheiben" (while playing skittles)

is characterized by numerous rhythmic layers—superimposed and interwoven—to create a sort of syncopated “music box.” The third movement tries to capture the charming grooves of this musical texture.

“Rhythmic performance anchors the last movement even more prominently. In early jazz, “stop time” is the term for a sparse, punctuated accompaniment, one usually meant to support a showy tap dance routine. In *sto(m)p time dance*, the trio provides both the song and the dance. The players trade solos, bang out rhythms with their feet, and bounce along briskly in a spirited finale.”

Françaix: *Trio*

Jean Françaix was one of the considerable international 20th century composers who acquired their skills from the French teacher Nadia Boulanger and then acquired world respect for their expertise and sophistication.

Like his French predecessors Satie and Poulenc, there were two sides to Françaix’s musical temperament. On one hand, he could be deadly serious, even deeply spiritual. On the other hand, his music could be clever, even satirical.

Françaix’s music evolves from the seminal influences of modern French music: Debussy, Ravel, Poulenc, and Boulanger. Here the clarinet becomes a perfect instrument for a collection of sentiments: madcap, gloomy and completely melodic. Françaix utilizes the three instruments with a splendid sense of color and texture attaining a range of new sonorities as each of the distinct instrumental timbres blend into amalgamated configurations.

The Trio comprises five movements in a kind of fairy tales suite.² A slow, distinctive, slightly troubling prelude rises in a single action towards resolution pursued by a fleet, debonair *Allegro* that suddenly dissolves into a Tango parody before scurrying away in a jazzy march send up.

At the middle is an amazing contesting Scherzando dance with a five-note recurring melody and another section with a swaying three-note waltz. Both themes echo as the ending of the movement approaches.

The Largo fourth movement is the lingering, expressive moment of tranquility: smoky, indolent, and sensuous with a romantic emotional responsiveness.

The finale is a spry sendup full of musical fun, vibrant textures, and frantic rhythms with the victorious Scherzando theme from the third movement amusingly making a brief entrance within the jovial chaos.

This a fine work paralleling Mozart’s trio for clarinet, viola and piano, composed as Françaix turned 80, reinforcing the adage that music is the place where one never grows old.

Bruch: *Double Concerto*

Bruch was born in the same decade as Johannes Brahms, Georges Bizet, and four of the Russian Five or “Mighty Handful.” He held numerous impressive positions including directing the Liverpool Philharmonic and leading notable concerts in Berlin and other German cities. In America he directed singing societies, composing for men’s and mixed chorus.

Max Bruch is recognized today primarily for two solo violin works—the Violin Concerto in G minor and the Scottish Fantasy—and for his *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra. However, in his day, Bruch was an extremely popular composer with a catalog of over two hundred works that included three operas, three symphonies, five concertos, dozens of other orchestral pieces, sacred and secular choral works, art songs, and chamber music. He was a well-regarded conductor and one of the most sought-after composition teachers in Europe: Ottorino Respighi and Ralph Vaughan Williams were among his more famous pupils.

The Double Concerto was composed in Bruch’s 70s as a collaboration with his son, who had just started his career as a professional clarinet performer and who premiered the piece. It is an intimate conversation between two instruments. Tunefully rich and opulently romantic in style, it quotes several melodies drawn from earlier works, in particular his orchestral Suite No.2 ‘Nordland’.

The Double Concerto was originally scored for clarinet, viola, and orchestra. Bruch regularly made the practice of adapting his large scale works as chamber music, in this case providing a piano reduction so that the work could be played as a trio.

The music here is reflective rather than impassioned and highly evocative of Brahms’s Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, Op. 115. Like Brahms’s Quintet, the opening movement of the Concerto is lyrical and deeply plaintive, featuring cascading arpeggios.

The second movement, marked *Allegro moderato*, has a waltz-like triple meter that fills the music with a captivating pensiveness; it concludes with a touching plagal cadence familiar from church hymns as an “Amen”. Both the first and second movements display Bruch’s absorption with folk music, here through suggestions of Swedish folksongs.

The finale, marked *Allegro molto*, is cast in strict sonata form and is much more outgoing than the earlier movements. The work is unusual in that the orchestral (piano) influences are enlarged for each movement, so that segments of the finale sound unpredictably radiant and brazen. The coda is exceptionally showy, as the two soloists soar up to their highest registers.

notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

² cf., Robert Schumann, *Märchenerzählungen*, Op. 132

68TH SEASON

2024-2025

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