Concordia Chamber Players

April 23, 2017
Trinity Church
Solebury, Pennsylvania
Concordia Chamber Players

SUNDAY - APRIL 23, 2017

Program

Michelle Djokic, Artistic Director

Meditation and Processional

Ernest Bloch
(1880-1959)

Meditation: Andante
Processional: Moderato

Piano Trio in G minor, Opus 15

Bedřich Smetana
(1824-1884)

Moderato assai
Allegro, ma non agitato - Altertanivo I: Andante - Alternativo II: Maestoso
Finale: Presto

— INTERMISSION —

Piano Quartet in C minor, Op. 60

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo
Scherzo: Allegro
Andante
Finale

ARTISTS

John Novacek – piano
Carmit Zori – violin
Dimitri Murrath – viola
Michelle Djokic – cello
lyricism of the viola to prevail. This is rich musical lyricism at its best. Toward the end there is a modest outburst of intense melodic outpouring before a calm cadence.

*Processional* has a more march-like feeling, as if the enigma of the *Meditation* has been resolved and we are now seeing the procession of the Torah scroll through the Temple. There is a strong rhythm *Die Moldau* and from the beginning, the two instruments work together to create an imitative, contrapuntal texture in which the viola begins and the piano immediately answers. This is reminiscent of traditional European musical traditions such as the fugue. Soon the texture builds to a point where both instruments combine to create regal processional music.

**Program Notes**
by Michael Grace

Colorado College

*Meditation and Processional, “Two Pieces for Viola and Piano”*

*Ernest Bloch*

(1880–1959)

Ernest Bloch was born in Geneva, Switzerland. After studying in Europe, he came to the United States in 1916 and spent most of his life here teaching (in Cleveland, San Francisco and Berkeley) and composing. He became a US citizen in 1924.

Many of his works, as can be seen from their Hebraic titles, were inspired by his Jewish heritage. His father had considered becoming a rabbi and brought up Ernest in a very Jewish household. So it is no wonder that as he became a mature composer he felt that expressing his Jewish identity was “the only way in which I can produce music of vitality and significance.” And indeed, he is best remembered for his music which celebrated Judaism, especially the often-played *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra. When he arrived in the United States, his compositional style turned to a more neoclassical style that often had less to do with his Jewish heritage, but that heritage still remained “lurking between the lines.”

The “Two Pieces for Viola and Piano” were composed in 1951 when Bloch was 71. By this time he had been settled for 10 years in Agate Beach, a small coastal town in Oregon, and was teaching at the University of California at Berkeley.

The first of the two pieces, *Meditation*, opens with an extended, broadly phrased melody for the solo viola. It could be heard as a meditative cantorial chant exploring a philosophical and spiritual quandary. Its alto range fits the rich tone color of the viola perfectly. When the piano joins in, it enriches the harmonies but allows for the

**Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 15**

*Bedřich Smetana*

(1824–1884)

Bedřich Smetana was born in Bohemia, a relatively independent region of what is now the western part of the Czech Republic. He was brought up speaking German although he did have knowledge of Czech traditions – music, stories, dances, etc. His father was an amateur musician who encouraged Bedřich even though he really wanted him to go to Law School. But the young man was an especially talented pianist and set out on a career that he hoped would be like the great pianist-composers of the 19th Century, Chopin and Liszt. However, when his performing career ceased to expand, he focused more and more on composing. He quickly became the favorite Czech nationalist and wrote works that were quickly known around the world. Perhaps most famous is the set of tone poems called *Má vlast* (“My Country”), one of which is the concert chestnut *Die Moldau* which describes the main river in the Czech Republic. Another is the popular opera, *The Bartered Bride*, based on a story set in a country village with realistic folk characters, and with styles that are often reminiscent of Czech folk music.
But on this program we hear a different side of Smetana, one that resulted from personal tragedies which marred his otherwise idyllic life. He had married his beloved Kateřina Kolářáva and with her had four children. Two of them died as infants. The oldest daughter named Bedřiška (after him) was a talented prodigy and he devoted his attention to her. She died of scarlet fever when she was four and a half. And Kateřina died a few years later of tuberculosis. What had been a life of happiness and success turned to one of sorrow and tragedy.

Now composers are not always slaves to their personal lives when it comes to their music. Beethoven wrote his joyous 2nd Symphony at his height of despair over his oncoming deafness. But in Smetana’s case, we know that he was compelled to express his grief in his music at this time, and the Piano Trio in G minor was to purge some of the sorrow which filled his soul. As he later wrote to one of his doctors, “the death of my eldest daughter, an exceptionally talented child, motivated me to compose... my Trio in G minor. It was performed the same year in Prague [the composer took the piano part]. The audience was unresponsive and the critics hated it.” Fortunately, at another performance a year later it received a much warmer reception. This was in Smetana’s home, again with him at the piano, but with the famous Franz Liszt in the audience. Liszt was profoundly impressed and immediately began to arrange for additional performances in Germany and Austria.

The first movement, *Moderato assai*, opens with the violin alone presenting the principal theme. Set in a minor key, it is played only on the lowest string of the instrument, and its descending contour, with little sobbing rests, immediately casts a tragic mood. Shortly, the significantly more positive second theme arrives in the cello in a major key. It has a sweetness at first that gives way to positive rhythmic intensity. There follows a beautiful development which works the two themes together and in which all three instruments participate equally. There is one particularly charming bell-like variant of the second theme in the high range of the piano. At the end of the movement the tragic aura of the opening returns.

The second movement is actually divided into five sections. The opening *Allegro ma non agitato* could be heard as a tribute to the light-hearted spirit of a young child. But some of the sadness of the theme which opened the first movement lurks beneath the surface. The next section, *Alternativo I (Andante)*, is in a tender and delicate mood, with a lovely melody heard first in the violin and then the cello. After a return of the *Allegro ma non agitato*, the *Alternativo II (Maestoso)*, casts a very different mood. It seems a noble expression of grief with stately dotted rhythms in the piano and elegant, long-breathed melodic phrases in the strings. The *Allegro ma non agitato* returns at the end to round out this movement with a lovely denouement.

The third movement, *Presto*, opens with rhythmic excitement as we hear three against two, i.e. triplets played at the same time as the regular duple eighth note motion. While not all in the audience will hear this intricacy, all will hear the rhythmic excitement. This music was actually borrowed from an earlier piano sonata by Smetana. Soon a beautiful lyrical melody is given to the cello and subsequently the violin with a simple piano accompaniment. The movement alternates between these two ideas which might be said to represent the tragedy he suffered and his moving on to tender and nearly happy feelings. It ends with a heroic and climactic coda which, to this listener at least, seems like the composer has come to grips with this tragic period of his life.
Werther shot himself because of his unrequited love for a married woman whose husband he admired. Robert Schumann was a composer Brahms much admired. Certainly his intimate relationship with Schumann’s wife, Clara, made this identity with Werther all the more personal and intense. And the fact that Robert Schumann died at about the same time Brahms was composing the first version of the quartet must have intensified his personal angst.

Much of this quartet reveals the composer’s tragic feelings. The first movement, Allegro non troppo, opens with a stark chord in the piano, followed by poignant “sighs” and descending syncopated lines in the strings. As Brahms biographer Malcolm MacDonald has pointed out, the sigh, made up of a descending half step, seems to speak the name “Clara!” After this melody proceeds through a series of thematic ideas, a second melody appears that is quite distinctive for its traditional lyricism. It is presented in the piano and again forces the listener to think of Clara, this time not as the object of guilt-ridden love, but as the virtuoso pianist that she was. This melody is subsequently the subject for a series of four variations. There is next a very strenuous development of the first theme, followed by a free recapitulation of all the original material. The movement, though not easy to comprehend formally, is charged with Brahms’s profound feelings.

The second movement, Scherzo, is a marvelous example of Brahms’s dynamic rhythmic style. Propelled forward by the driving triplets (actually a fast 6/8 meter) in the piano, one awaits an emotional eruption that never occurs. There is a more lyrical second theme, but the driving rhythms recur. At the end, a rather remarkable four-measure trill in all the strings over the ongoing rhythmic excitement in the piano, aptly prepares the listener for the dramatic closing.

The Andante should sate the appetite of even the most inveterate lover of Brahmsian lyricism. It opens with a languid, flowing melody for solo cello that is given a melancholy cast by its small intervals and occasionally unexpected downward turns. Then, the violin takes up the melody while the cello presents a rapturous counter-melody of equally lyrical suavity. This is all just too much! There is a second theme, marked dolce (as if the first wasn’t sweet enough), divided among all three string instruments. The stunning closure of this movement, with a return to the opening theme, leaves the listener with a sense of emotional relief and total calm.

The Finale, Allegro comodo, is vintage Brahms. Although there is a prevalent mood of resigned fatalism, compositional procedures and intriguing tonal interrelationships draw some of the listener’s attention away from feelings and into the music itself. For example, the movement opens with a classical sounding melody in the violin accompanied by running eighth notes in the piano. Most notable, however, is the fact that the phrases in the piano are introduced by three repeated notes. Later, when Brahms develops this passage, one realizes that it is an overt reference to the famous motive (dah dah dah dum) of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, now treated in Brahms’s own inimitable style. (Recall that Beethoven once referred to that famous motive as “Fate knocking at the door.” Is this fate knocking at Brahms’s door?) There is also a striking second theme in this finale. When it is first heard, it sounds like a hymn melody presented in the three strings with flippant responses in the piano. At the very end of the movement, the piano presents the theme in strident chords to which the strings respond with the same flippant answers.

Although this movement is rich in musical intrigue, one never forgets the tragedy of the piece. The closing few pages especially return the listener to Brahms’s “Werther” mentality and almost suggest that he, like his literary model, pulled the trigger!

“Straight-away the ideas flow in upon me, directly from God, and not only do I see distinct themes in my mind’s eye, but they are clothed in the right forms, harmonies, and orchestration.”

— Johannes Brahms

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Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor — Reynaldo Hahn


February 11, 2018

Divertimento in E-flat Major for viola, cello and bass — Michael Haydn
Till Eulenspiegel einmal anders! — Richard Strauss/Franz Hasenöhrl
Septet in E-flat Major, Opus 20 — Ludwig von Beethoven


April 8, 2018

Snapshot, Circa 1909 for string quartet — John Corigliano
Obrigado for mandolin and string quartet — Clarice Assad
String Quartet No. 2 in E-flat Major — Erich Wolfgang Korngold

David Benedict – mandolin, Danbi Um, Siwoo Kim – violin, Juan Miguel Hernandez – viola, Michelle Djokic – cello

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Michelle Djokic
Artistic Director
cello

Cellist Michelle Djokic is Founder and Artistic Director of the Concordia Chamber Players. Since its inception in 1995 this series has brought together the brightest talents of the chamber music world in thoughtful and adventurous programming with their performances broadcast regularly on WWFM in Princeton, NJ. Concordia Chamber Players commissioned “Obrigado”, Quintet for mandolin and string quartet by young Brazilian superstar, Clarice Assad, which received its world premier in the spring of 2011 with Mike Marshall on the mandolin. Michelle joined pianist, John Novacek at the 2011 Festival Mozaic for the world premier of Novacek’s “Sin- gular Piece” for cello and piano commissioned by the Seattle Commissioning Project. Her recording with Quartet San Francisco entitled “QSF Plays Brubeck” earned a 2010 Grammy Nomination in Best Classical Crossover. In 2007 she became a member of the New Century Chamber Orchestra with whom she released the highly acclaimed recording “Together” in 2009. Upon moving to Northern Cal- fornia from the East Coast in 2005 Michelle served as Assistant Principal Cellist of the San Francisco Symphony for two seasons.

Her greatest passion is chamber music collaborations with her colleagues around the world and sharing in the development of young musicians. Previous concert seasons have included collaborations with Brooklyn Chamber Music Society, Festicamara in Medellin, Colombia, Ensemble Matheus of France, Princeton Festival, Mainly Mozart, Music in the Vineyards and the Mozaic Festival.

Michelle made her debut as soloist with Philadelphia Orchestra at the age of 12 and made her Carnegie Hall debut as soloist with the New Jersey Symphony in 1985. She was awarded the coveted People’s Prize in the 1981 International Casals Competition and the Prince Bernard Award for Excellence at the Scheveningen International Cello Competition in addition to capturing first prize in numerous young artist competitions in the US.

Michelle received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music Degrees from The Juilliard School as a student of Leonard Rose and Channing Robbins.

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John Novacek
piano

Pianist John Novacek regularly tours the Americas, Europe and Asia as solo recitalist, chamber musician and concerto soloist; in the latter capacity he has presented over thirty concerti with dozens of orchestras.

John Novacek’s major American performances have been heard in New York City’s Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts’ Avery Fisher Hall and Alice Tully Hall, 92nd Street Y, Columbia University’s Miller Theater, Merkin Concert Hall, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Symphony Space, Washington’s The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Boston’s Symphony Hall, Chicago’s Symphony Center and Los Angeles’ Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, Hollywood Bowl and Royce Hall, while international venues include Paris’ Théatre des Champs-Élysées, Salle Gaveau and Musée du Louvre, London’s Wigmore Hall and Barbican Centre, as well as most of the major concert halls of Japan. He is also a frequent guest artist at festivals, here and abroad, including New York City’s Mostly Mozart Festival and those of Aspen, Cape Cod, Caramoor, Chautauqua, Colorado College, Mimir, Ravinia, Seattle, SummerFest La Jolla, Wolf Trap, BBC Proms (England), Braunschweig (Germany), Lucerne, Menuhin and Berbier (Switzerland), Majorca (Spain), Sorrento (Italy), Stavanger (Norway), Toulouse (France) and Sapporo (Japan).

Often heard on radio broadcasts worldwide, John Novacek has appeared on NPR’s Performance Today, St. Paul Sunday and, as both featured guest composer/performer, on A Prairie Home Companion with Garrison Keillor. He has also been seen and heard on television, including The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, Entertainment Tonight and CNN International.

John Novacek is a much sought-after collaborative artist and has performed with Joshua Bell, Matt Haimovitz, Leila Josefowicz, Cho-Liang Lin, Yo-Yo Ma, Truls Mork, Elmar Oliveira and Emmanuel Pahud, and, as well as the Colorado, Harrington, Jupiter, New Hollywood, St. Lawrence, SuperNova and Ying string quartets. He also tours widely as a member of Intersection, a piano trio that includes violinist Kaura Frautschi and cellist Kristina Reiko Coooper. Mr. Novacek has also given numerous world premieres and worked closely with composers John Adams, John Harbison, Jennifer Higdon, George Rochberg, John Williams and John Zorn.

John Novacek took top prizes at both the Leschetizky and Joanna Hodges international piano competitions, among many others. He studied piano with Polish virtuoso Jakob Gimpel at California State University, Northridge, where he earned a Bachelor of Music degree, summa cum laude. Subsequently, he earned a Master of Music degree from New York City’s Mannes College of Music, where his instructors were Peter Serkin in piano and Felix Galimer in chamber music. Mr. Novacek’s coaches in composition included Frederick Werle, Aurelio de la Vega and Daniel Kessner.

John Novacek’s own compositions and arrangements have been performed by the Pacific Symphony, The 5 Browns, Concertante, Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo, Harrington String Quartet, Ying Quartet, Millennium, Quattro Mani and The Three Tenors. He has recorded over 30 CDs, encompassing solo and chamber music by most major composers from Bach to Bartók, as well as many contemporary and original scores. Mr. Novacek records for Philips, Nonesuch, Arabesque, Warner Classics, Sony/BMG, Koch International, Universal Classics, Ambassador, Pony Canyon, Four Winds, Arkay, Virtuoso and EMI Classics. CD titles include Road Movies (2004 GRAMMY nomination as “Best Chamber Music Performance”), Great Mozart Piano Works, Spanish Rhapsody, Novarags (original ragtime compositions), Classic Romance, Hungarian Sketches, Intersection, Romances et Méditations and, with Leila Josefowicz, Americana (GRAMOPHONE: “Editor’s Choice”), For the End of Time, Shostakovich and Recital (BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE: 5 stars/June 2005’s chamber choice).
Firmly established in her native Israel as an important young musician, violinist Carmit Zori was chosen at age 13 by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation to perform on the international television special “Music from Jerusalem”. Two years later, at the recommendation of Alexander Schneider and Isaac Stern, she came to the United States to study at The Curtis Institute of Music, where her teachers included Ivan Galamian, Jaime Laredo, and Arnold Steinhardt. Since then Ms. Zori has appeared with a wide variety orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Rochester Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra. She has performed throughout Latin America, Europe, Japan and Australia, where she premiered the Marc Neikrug Violin Concerto. Carmit Zori’s recital engagements include her critically acclaimed recital in New York City’s Lincoln Center, as well as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Dame Myra Hess Series in Chicago, Boston’s Gardner Museum, the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, Paris, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem. An active chamber musician, Ms. Zori appears regularly with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. She has performed as guest artist at New York’s Chamber Music at the “Y” series, the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico, the international Bruckner Festival in Austria, the Mostly Mozart Festival, the La Jolla Summerfest, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, the OK Mozart Festival, the Sitka Festival in Alaska and at Chamber Music Northwest in Portland, Oregon. She has been a regular participant at the Marlboro Music Festival and has been featured on many “Music from Marlboro” tours. Miss Zori is one of the musical directors of Bargemusic, New York City.

Ms. Zori’s numerous honors include the Leventritt Foundation award, top prize in the Waiter W. Naumburg International violin competition and the Pro Musicus Foundation Award. Carmit Zori can be heard on various recording labels, including Arabesque, Koch International and Elektra-Nonesuch. A 1997 recording of works by Bartok, Harbison, Dahl and Parker was released on the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music label. Reviews described it as “a splendid disc … exciting but polished”.

Born in Brussels, Belgian violist Dimitri Murrath has made his mark as a soloist on the international scene, performing regularly in venues including Jordan Hall (Boston), Kennedy Center (Washington), Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Royal Festival Hall (London), Kioi Hall (Tokyo), the National Auditorium (Madrid), and Théâtre de la Ville (Paris).

A first prize winner at the Primrose International Viola Competition, Dimitri Murrath has won numerous awards, including second prize at the First Tokyo International Viola Competition, the special prize for the contemporary work at the ARD Munich Competition, and a fellowship from the Belgian American Educational Foundation. In 2012, he was named laureate of the Juventus Festival,
an award recognizing young European soloists. He is a recipient of the 2014 Avery Fisher Career Grant.

With repertoire extending from Bach to contemporary music by Ligeti, Kurtag and Sciarrino, Murrath is particularly keen on performing new works. He has taken part in the Park Lane Group New Year Series in London to great critical acclaim, as well as commissioned, given the world premieres, and recorded several solo works.

An avid chamber musician, Murrath is a member of the Boston Chamber Music Society. He has collaborated with Miriam Fried, Pamela Frank, Richard Goode, Gidon Kremer, Menahem Pressler, Mitsuko Uchida, and members of the Mendelssohn, Takacs, Guarneri, Cleveland, Jerusalem, and Juilliard String Quartets.

Festivals include IMS Prussia Cove, Ravinia’s Steans Institute for Young Artists, Verbier Festival, Caramoor Rising Stars, Chamberfest Cleveland, Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, Juventus Festival, and Marlboro Music Festival.

He has performed concertos with orchestras including Orchestre National de Lille, Toho Gakuen Orchestra, Tokyo Philharmonic, Brussels Philharmonic and London Mozart Players.

Dimitri Murrath began his musical education at the Yehudi Menuhin School studying with Natalia Boyarsky, and went on to work in London with David Takeno at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He graduated with an Artist Diploma from the New England Conservatory as a student of Kim Kashkashian.

He is on the viola faculties of New England Conservatory and Bowdoin International Music Festival.

Dimitri Murrath participates in the Music for Food project, which raises awareness of the hunger problem faced by a large percent of the population, and gives the opportunity to experience the powerful role music can play as a catalyst for change.

“(…) the warm and noble tone of Mr. Murrath’s viola glowed fiercely – for me the highlight of the concert.” New York Times
Stand Partners, is a unique program which allows Foundation Academy Charter School students the opportunity to play with and learn from professional musicians. The program brings together world class musicians to train and inspire honors music students. Michelle Djokic, cellist and a founder of the Concordia Chamber Players, guides the program and teaches master classes at the school, preparing string players for their recital at Ellarslie Mansion. At this annual event, students share the stage with professional musicians from Concordia and together, promote chamber music in Trenton.
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