

Program Notes

Amanda Röntgen-Maier (1853–1894)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in B Minor (1874)

Composed in Leipzig, Germany in 1874, Amanda Röntgen-Maier's Sonata for Violin and Piano is a gem of the repertoire. Consisting of three movements, the sonata is rather reminiscent of the works of Schumann and Mendelssohn – particularly the rolling arpeggiations in the piano recall the opening of Schumann's first violin sonata. Written in standard sonata-allegro form, the first movement opens with a dark melody on the violin's G string that quickly opens up into the lush primary theme that the violin is reluctant to give to the piano. Dotted rhythms impart a tumultuous atmosphere to this movement.

The second movement opens with a sweet G Major melody in the violin that is then passed on to the piano. The two voices trade fragments of the theme back and forth before the piano accidentally sidetracks the ensemble into a quirky Allegretto. In flirtatious gestures, the two voices chase each other back and forth before launching into a canon that takes them back to the lilting opening melody. Happily back in G Major, the movement ends softly.

The piano begins the third movement with a witty off-beat texture beckoning the violin to take off in its coy melody. The accented syncopations in the melody as well as the insistent texture of the piano give this movement a breathless, rushing quality. A sweet middle section harkens back to the first two movements. Seemingly unwilling to end the piece in the dark colors of B Minor, Maier slides into the royal parallel major key. Textures build as both voices race towards the finish line.

Lera Auerbach (b. 1973)

***Lonely Suite: Ballet for a Lonely Violinist* (2002)**

Unlike most works in the solo violin repertoire, *Lonely Suite* seems insistent on avoiding most technical glitz and glamor of violin playing. Instead, according to Auerbach, it is “an exploration on the themes of loneliness and fragmentation,” dealing with “one's own fears, about silence, about facing oneself without escape.” In these six short movements, the violinist explores these themes in a variety of dialogues. In the first movement, *Dance With Oneself*, one can clearly hear the violinist dancing alone in a room in a quasi-waltz like motion, oscillating between pizz and arco as fancy strikes. After finishing her dance, the violinist quickly becomes bored and, instructed by the composer to play with a “dull sound,” mindlessly and repeatedly plays the same figuration in the second movement, *Boredom*. In a burst of energy, the violinist rails against the feelings of isolation in the third movement, *No Escape*. Here double stops, bariolage, and large intervals exemplify the unleashing of pent up energy. *Imaginary Dialogue* eases this skin-crawling energy in the fourth movement. With a muted flautando stroke, the violinist turns questioningly inward, but never finds an answer. The jarring interruption of a *Worrisome Thought* disrupts the serenity and ultimately the piece ends with *Question*, in which the violinist is stuck between G, F-sharp, and C-sharp without a time or key signature as a guide. The piece ends having never resolved the feeling that something is *missing*.

Program Notes

Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964) **Caprice for Solo Violin (2005)**

While dissonance plays a key role in Thomas' music, her work centers on vivid emotions and characters. She often says that her music "craves a listener." Incredibly detailed in her directions to the performer, Thomas instructs the violinist to play the Caprice for Solo Violin "like a jazz improvisation." The piece is written in five phrases, each graduating in length like a flower unfurling its petals. Much like a stone disturbing the surface of a serene lake, the caprice opens with a brilliant flourish which ebbs away quickly. The second phrase, an "unexpected interruption," wiggles gracefully into the air before playfully zig-zagging through large intervals and fading away once more. The third phrase begins much like the second, with the same wiggling motif, but played *sul tasto* (on the fingerboard) for a more distant and reflective character. Again, the phrase floats away. The fourth phrase, much longer than the first three, begins with a subito *ff* and the instruction to play vividly – virtuous flurrying spirals and leaps create a joyful eruption of music which fades as if the violinist loses her train of thought. The fifth and final phrase, "fearless," perhaps having grown frustrated with the trill openings of the prior phrases and the constant return to stillness, bursts forth boldly before getting side-tracked into a "mellifluous" and "mysterious" melody. It is a final glance backward before a passionate interruption brings the player back to the heroic character of the final phrase and the piece ends with the jarring dissonance of a major seventh. Reiterating the character in the last few bars, Thomas writes "intrepid," as if to emphasize that this time, the phrase knows where it is going. Caprice for Solo Violin was written for Rachel Barton Pine on the occasion of her wedding.

Dorothy Rudd Moore (b. 1940) **Three Pieces for Violin and Piano (1967)**

A short but musically dense work, Three Pieces for Violin and Piano exemplifies Moore's struggle to combat the critique of her work as "too serious." The first piece, *Vignette*, begins with a syncopated rhythm in the piano that is carried throughout the movement. The violin presents a nostalgic motif in 6/8 that quickly diminishes. The piano and violin lines clash metrically as each voice emphasizes different rhythmic breakdowns of the 5/8 and 7/8 measures. At the end, the violin returns to the wistful motif, ending on an atmospheric high E-flat as the piano pensively brings back the opening syncopation.

An incredibly slow tempo marking (quarter note = 40) in addition to the long held notes in the piano create an untethered feeling in the opening of the second piece, *Episode*. Slowly, staccato subdivisions begin to build, culminating in a high B-flat in the violin before both voices fade out to a near loss of pulse again. The sudden *agitato* section at the end of the piece spirals forth intensely, before leaving the violin speaking alone near the bottom of its register. The quick staccato subdivisions make a brief return in the piano, flickering out slowly as the piece ends.

In the final piece, *Caprice*, Moore creates a jaunty waltz-like dance which is interrupted by a brief sweetly melodic section. While the other pieces have been haunting and emotionally-charged, the last piece provides a frolicking contrast to what has come before. In this piece particularly, as well as throughout the work in general, Moore plays with large intervals and explores the rich color palette of the violin, demonstrating the lyrical versatility of the instrument.

Program Notes

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in A Major, Op. 13 (1875–76)

Arguably one of the most enduring chamber works of Gabriel Fauré, his Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Major is a seminal work of French chamber music. Composed in the summer of 1875 and completed in 1876, the sonata received its first performance in January of 1877 to much critical acclaim. Camille Saint-Saëns, Fauré's former piano teacher, remarked that "in this sonata you can find everything to tempt a gourmet: new forms, excellent modulations, unusual tone colors, and the use of unexpected rhythms. And a magic floats above everything, encompassing the whole work, causing the crowd of usual listeners to accept the unimagined audacity as something quite normal."

Fauré masterfully crafts the first movement of this sonata to confound the expectation of musical events by destabilizing pitch centers. The *Allegro molto* opens with an arduous piano theme and the hints of harmonic restlessness are explored throughout. With a robust athleticism that beautifully contrasts the lyric nature of the movement, the coda brings the *Allegro* to a musical finish. In the *Andante*, the second movement, Fauré's capabilities as a vocal composer are able to shine through in a dazzling manner. Slow and demure – a very typical fashion for the composer – the movement meanders along like a gondolier's barcarolle. The interplay of the opening key of D Minor with the closing key of D Major allows for early explorations of impressionist contrapuntal practices. The third movement is a clever *scherzo* that playfully intermingles quick passagework with pizzicato. Not in the typical triple meter of a scherzo, the 2/8 time signature gives the movement much more flexibility in metric manipulations, though Fauré is careful to place specific accents which underscore a more customary triple feeling. The fourth movement is a dramatic and emotional finale that obsessively oscillates around a reoccurring C-sharp, the defining pitch of A Major. Much like the third movement, Fauré plays with established ideas of meter.