

Left Bank Concert Society
Sunday 9 November 2008

Notes on the program by Bonnie Jo Dopp

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Sonate pour violonelle et piano (1915)

By the time Debussy came to write his final chamber works, of which the Sonata for Cello and Piano was the first, France and Germany were in a devastating war that would not end in Debussy's lifetime. Debussy was a peaceloving patriot who declared as a kind of war protest that he wished to be remembered as a '*musicien français*.' He felt that for too many people, the word 'composer' was associated only with Germans; too many French composers based their work on German musical style. So Debussy studied the music of historic French composers, especially that of Jean-Philippe Rameau, and found it worth emulating, in hopes of presenting a French 'new beauty' that would outlast the temporary clamor of war. Although he had already developed his own 'modern' sound, he said of his Cello Sonata that it was deliberately "almost classical" in style and proportion. *French classical*.

The Sonata is in three parts:

Prologue

Debussy had edited a 1785 Rameau opera-ballet for publication in 1908. Composed in celebration of a French military victory, its opening 'Prologue' is titled *Le temple de mémoire* [The Temple of Memory]. Debussy pays homage to it and to the memory of Rameau in his Cello Sonata *Prologue* (an unusual name for a sonata movement). Beginning solidly in D minor, the movement has the shape of a classical sonata. It puts the instruments through some intense moments of minor-key angst (with Debussian harmonies and pentatonic scales). But the somberness is broken by a C-major recapitulation of the opening theme and the whole section ends in major mode victory via the use of an old-fashioned, Baroque-era gesture: a 'Picardy third' – an F-sharp in place of the expected F-natural that would be in a D-minor chord. (The term derives from Old French 'picart' – pointed, or sharp.) Rameau would have understood it.

Sérénade

Debussy's contemporary Louis Rosoor, a cello professor, claimed that Debussy gave *Pierrot fâché avec la lune* (Pierrot angry at the moon) as the 'unofficial subtitle' of the *Sérénade* of the Cello Sonata, which is followed immediately by the *Finale*. We have no evidence that the French composer had either heard or seen the score of Arnold Schoenberg's shockingly expressionist *Pierrot lunaire*, written in the spring of 1912, but he certainly knew of it. Was this his refined French 'answer' to that "virtually clinical study in morbid subjectivity," as Richard Taruskin calls it? Perhaps not, for Debussy had his own fascination with *Commedia dell'arte* stock characters Pierrot, Harlequin, and Columbine that he had musically expressed early, in his choice of poems to set for his *Chansons de jeunesse* [Songs of Youth] when he was in his twenties.

Rebecca Leydon thinks we can 'picture' in the Cello Sonata a fragmented Pierrot, by turns frantic, quietly mournful, and ultimately accepting of his imperfect world, because Debussy wrote this section as he might have prepared a film soundtrack. Her

convincing arguments for this include a 1913 quotation from Debussy's writings where he says the only way for composers to reach 20th-century audiences is "to apply to pure music the techniques of cinematography."

Finale

Immediately growing from the serenade idea, an arpeggiated figure with an ostinato bass line opens the last movement. Soon images crowded with Spanish castanets and tambourines come to mind. Short, soulful 'appassionato' tunes combine with dance rhythms, all within the framework of a classic sonata-rondo ending.

Lawrence Moss (b. 1927)

Korean Peaks: Improvisations for 2 Violins (2008) (World Premiere)

The composer writes:

This piece was especially written for David Salness and Sally McLain, and receives its premiere on this program. The improvisations that occur at the opening are not on a single folk tune, but rather attempt to capture with two violins what I heard on a CD devoted to Korean music. This collection of folk music contained some wild improvisations on various Korean folk tunes. Since I could not identify them, I contented myself with sounds that to me suggested the alternation of wild exuberance and poignant stillness that characterize Korean music. Eventually the piece gets to the hauntingly beautiful "Arirang" – rendered in the second violin against slowly descending sixths in the first violin.

Lawrence Moss, whose works the Left Bank Concert Society has performed in several seasons, received his Ph.D. in Composition at the University of Southern California. He went on to teach at Mills College, Yale University (1960 - 1968), and the University of Maryland, where he has been Professor of Composition since 1969. He is a recipient of the University of Maryland's Distinguished Scholar/Teacher Award.

Luigi Dallapiccola (1904-1975)

Tartiniana seconda: divertimento per violino e pianoforte (1956)

Regarding *Tartiniana seconda*, we may think of composer Luigi Dallapiccola as an archer, stretching back 200 years to his fellow Istrian Guiseppe Tartini for inspiration, in order to energize a 20th-century musical arrow that soars on to honor them both. In this he resembles Debussy's respect for the work of his countryman Rameau in the Cello Sonata that opens our program.

Photocopies of 1745 Tartini violin sonata manuscripts served as the basis for *Tartiniana seconda*. They had been brought to Dallapiccola, who was also a pianist, by his violinist friend and duo partner Sandro Materassi, with whom he had performed Tartini sonatas in recital, and for whom his first *Tartiniana* (1951), for violin and chamber orchestra, had been written. He created *Tartiniana seconda* as a work for violin and piano, though a violin with chamber orchestra version appeared a year later.

In his day, Dallapiccola was Italy's most illustrious composer, credited with being the first in his country to utilize serialism. In the process, he did not abandon tonality; besides Tartini sonatas, after the 12-tone system entered his repertoire Dallapiccola also edited music of Vivaldi and Paganini. He appreciated the discipline he was able to apply

to his own music “after each tonal episode,” he said, for he felt his “dodecaphonic procedures” profited from the strict attention to detail necessary for these projects.

As Richard Whitehose has written, in *Tartiniana seconda*, “...Dallapiccola was concerned not with evoking a past era, but in what relevance its music had for the present,” how it could be ‘translated’ for modern ears. Exploring counterpoint is Dallapiccola’s main interest in *Tartiniana seconda*, especially procedures using canons (not Tchaikovsky’s loud ones – think *canon law*). The *law* Dallapiccola strictly followed was laid down by Tartini. The violin plays what Tartini wrote (as slightly edited by Dallapiccola, and in a different order from the original); the later composer displays this music in a stunning new sound frame. Dallapiccola gives us here a 20th-century piano interacting with 18th-century violin lines by having the keyboard, mostly using the same notes, follow a measure after, or slow down the tune (augmentation), speed it up (diminution), play it backwards (crabwise), invert it, or a combination of these.

Tartiniana seconda is in four movements, the last being a seven-part theme and variations.

Pastorale: Molto calmo, ma senza trascinare [without dragging]

At the beginning, the solo violin presents the opening bars as Tartini composed them around 1745. As soon as the piano enters, we are in the 20th century, but Dallapiccola does not stray far from Tartini’s manuscript. He simply has the piano play the tune backwards, starting a measure after the violin begins its repeat.

Tempo de Bourrée

From the second movement of a different A-minor sonata in the manuscript collection, Dallapiccola chose this dancing melody. Since Tartini did not even hint at a bass line for the keyboard, the later Italian must have felt especially free to ‘realize’ the accompaniment in his own way, this time having the pianist begin by imitating the violin line, but upside down. In the second half of this binary form movement, the violin twice repeats the same note on different strings, as Tartini directed. The contrast in timbre is subtle, but effective.

Presto: leggerissimo [as light as possible]

Tartini’s third movement of Sonata XXV in D minor provides the violin music for this feathery exhibit. Again, Dallapiccola imagined his own accompaniment, this time having the piano line anticipate the violin’s in a lighthearted follow-the leader romp.

Variazioni

This A-minor theme-and-variations movement is taken from the third movement of Tartini’s Sonata VII (the same sonata that provided Dallapiccola’s opening for *Tartiniana seconda*). The theme’s rhythm and harmonies heavily echo what has just been heard in movement III.

a. *Decisamente*

The main idea here is harmonic progression (like a chaconne), with the theme presented in chords on the solo violin, the melody in the middle voice. This is not Tartini’s opening theme, but his ninth variation (of 21).

b. *Maestoso*

Taken from Tartini’s fourth variation, here the piano part is 18th-century violin music played backwards, note for note, measure by measure. The A major ending is a preview of things to come.

c. *Tranquillo*

In this conflation of two Tartini variations (seventeen for the violin and eighteen for the piano) Dallapiccola asks that the violin be muted; the better for us to hear the 12 distinct pitches he uses in the last measures of the accompaniment?

d. *Doloroso: Canon per augmentationem, contrario motu*

In this piano solo Dallapiccola plays canonic games with Tartini's theme. We hear four voices at different speeds with the lower two 'reflecting' the others: low, slow upward melodies combine with the same notes appearing as Tartini wrote them in his thirteenth variation as faster downward lines in the higher voices.

e. *Alla Sarabanda: Canon cancrizans* [crabwise]

This crab canon based on Tartini's eighth variation has the piano accompaniment presenting the melody backward, end to beginning. The violin is again muted.

f. *Deciso; duramente: Canon ad hypodiapason* [an octave lower]

We are now back to a loud presentation of Tartini's variation nine, with the piano playing a straightforward imitation canon beginning at the violin's third measure, as we do when singing a 'round.' This leads directly to Tartini's tenth variation, which Dallapiccola chose as his ending:

g. *Con gagliardia*

Tartini did not name the parts of his sonatas after dances, but Dallapiccola chose several Renaissance/Baroque dance forms for his titles. Galliards are athletic dances, so in asking for his final variation to be played 'like a galliard' and selecting the major mode for his strong final chord (the same 'Picardy third' device Debussy used to end the first movement of his cello sonata), we may imagine Dallapiccola saluting his compositional partner with a triumphant 'huzzah' across the centuries.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Trio pour piano, violon et violoncelle (1914)

Ravel began his only piano trio in 1913 and finished it in the summer of 1914, just as war broke out. Using traditional musical forms (sonata, scherzo & trio, variations), Ravel was able to express his interests in Basque culture, literary forms, modal harmonies and five-note scales in this virtuosic work, where all three players are equally important. Ravel did not leave us much chamber music. This gorgeous piece exemplifies the best of it. It is in four movements.

Modéré:

Ravel uses a Basque dance rhythm to open his Trio. (Ravel's mother was Basque and he spent his summers in Basque country.) The composer was working on a piano concerto based on Basque themes at the time he composed his Trio. The movement is in 8/8 but with irregular rhythmic emphasis, which keeps the listener somewhat off balance.

Contributing to the opening movement's mysterious atmosphere are its A-minor beginning, surprising excursions into other keys, contrasting dynamics, and use of string harmonics.

Pantoum: Assez vif

In a 1975 article Brian Newbould revealed that this movement follows the structure of a Malay verse form called *pantun*, which had been popular with French poets. Listeners will hear a familiar scherzo and trio with 'exotic' overtones. The poetic form called for two themes to be "pursued in parallel" from start to finish, with second and fourth lines

of one stanza becoming first and third lines in the next and a repeat of the first line as the last of the entire poem. Ravel approaches an analog of this intertwined form by using contrasting keys, pizzicato and legato sonorities, accent placement, recurring motifs, and even a trio section where the piano smoothly plays in 4/2 while the strings skip along in three-quarter time.

Passacaille: Très large

The Piano Trio is dedicated to André Gedalge, Ravel's counterpoint teacher, who told him that eight-bar tunes were the foundation of any good composer's output. Passacaglia is an old musical form: a set of variations on a ground bass line. In this 20th-century version the piano, in its lowest register, lays out an elegant eight-bar pentatonic tune that surely would have met with Gedalge's approval. The cello takes it up next and eight bars later, passes it to the violin, who begins to vary it. After the piano presents a fully harmonized version, the cello keeps the rhythm but introduces a new theme in the fourth variation. Every eight measures brings a fresh arrangement of voices. The movement ends with an inverted reflection of its beginning, with variations starring the violin, then cello, and finally, a breathtakingly quiet piano.

Final: Animé

Mark DeVoto praises the majesty of its harmonies but judges this movement to be "burdened with too many notes." Many commentators call it 'orchestral' in texture and suspect that Ravel had his piano concerto in mind at the same time he hurried to finish this work before war broke out. So perhaps he laid it on a bit thickly, especially for the piano. In any case, this crowded, urgent ending finally got its instrumental expansion when Yan Pascal Tortelier created a version of the whole Trio for orchestra.

For further exploration:

Debussy:

"Debussy's Late Style and the Devices of the Early Silent Cinema" by Rebecca Leydon. *Music Theory Spectrum*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 217-241
Available as a free online PDF file at:

<http://caliber.ucpress.net/doi/abs/10.1525/mts.2001.23.2.217>

Abstract: The article situates Debussy's late works within the context of the technologies of the early silent cinema. Cinematic techniques developed by French filmmakers during Debussy's lifetime can provide the basis for a model of continuity and succession in this music and suggest some new ways of approaching form in his late style. Cinema was of considerable consequence in France during Debussy's mature career, and the technical devices of the cinema constituted a markedly new way of representing time and space. Very few of the films from the late 1890s and early 1900s have survived, but the extant film reviews and contemporary criticism provide a vivid sense of the early cinema, its reception, and its characteristic devices. Particular cinematic editing techniques are noted as models for Debussy's own characteristic repertoire of musical devices. Finally, some of the connections are made between cinema and Debussy's nationalism in the years surrounding the first world war.

Lawrence Moss:

http://www.music.umd.edu/faculty/music_directory/music_theory_and_composition/lawrence_moss

Dallapiccola: *Tartinia seconda*

The manuscripts Dallapiccola worked with for *Tartiniana seconda* have been published in facsimile. The volumes (score and commentary) are available in lending libraries:

Tartini, Giuseppe, 1692-1770. *La raccolta di sonate autografe per violino*: manoscritto 1888 fasc. 1 nell'Archivio Musicale della Veneranda Arca del Santo in Padova . Edizioni dell'Accademia Tartinianana, c1976.

The first book in English about Dallapiccola's music is *The Music of Luigi Dallapiccola* by Raymond Fearn, University of Rochester Press, c2003

Ravel: Piano Trio:

Pianist Richard Dowling has posted the detailed preface to his edition of the Ravel Piano Trio on the World Wide Web, complete with 93 footnotes. The URL is: <http://www.richard-dowling.com/RavelTrio.html>

A daring late 20th-century orchestral version of the Piano Trio exists. Ravel was renowned as an orchestrator: think of *Bolero*! The symphonic version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* that most people know is Ravel's. Turnabout may be fair play, so you can find Yan Pascal Tortelier's recording on Chandos: CHAN 9114. The CD booklet outlines Tortelier's thoughts on orchestrating the Trio.

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Short bio:

Bonnie Jo Dopp (MLS, MM) is Librarian Emerita from the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library at the University of Maryland. She has been writing about music for more than thirty years.

Long bio:

Bonnie Jo Dopp (MLS, MM) is Librarian Emerita from the Michelle Smith Performing Arts Library at the University of Maryland. She has been writing about music for more than thirty years. Her substantial reviews of classical music books and video recordings have appeared in *American Music*, *Notes*, and *Educational Media Reviews Online*. In addition to writing for individual concerts and recitalists, she has annotated programs for the Theater Chamber Players, the Fairfax Symphony, and the Left Bank Concert Society. A member of the Music Library association, the American Musicological Society, and the Music Critics Association of North America, her article, "Numerology and Cryptography in the Music of Lili Boulanger: The Hidden Program in *Clairières dans le ciel*," (*The Musical Quarterly*, 1994) won the Pauline Alderman prize from the International Alliance for Women in Music for being the most important journal article about women in music for its time period. Bonnie lives with her husband, Peter Hurley, in Florida and Maryland. She may be reached at BJDmusic@aol.com.

