

Chamber Music Society - November 4, 2018

Tessa Lark, *violin*
Andrew Armstrong, *piano*

Suite Italienne (1932)

Igor
Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Introduzione
Serenata
Tarantella
Gavotta con due variazioni
Scherzino
Minuetto e Finale

In 1919 Stravinsky was asked to arrange music by the early classical composer, Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, for Diaghlev who wanted to create a ballet based on an early 18th-century *commedia dell-arte*. Stravinsky at first resisted but after studying the scores, he changed his mind. He exercised great skill creating a charming whole from a collection of individual pieces by a clever succession of textures, dynamics, harmonies and instrumentation. Using Pergolesi's tunes and basses, he occasionally altered the formal symmetry by shortening, extending or repeating phrases; he added ostinatos and occasionally altered the rhythm of traditional harmonic patterns—not much, but just enough—to play on conventions. In the final comparison, it is actually surprising to see how little he actually changed or altered Pergolesi's original work. In 1922, the composer adapted a suite for orchestra from the numbers in the opera, and then two suites for violin and piano (*Suite*, 1925 and *Suite italienne*, 1933). In addition an adaptation for cello and piano was made by Stravinsky with the cellist Gregor Piatigorsky.

Pulcinella is envied in the neighborhood because all the girls are in love with him and so his neighbors plot to kill him. At first, he pretends to die but when the boys start flirting with the girls, he puts on a sorcerer's robe and springs into life as his double. However, in the end not being a vengeful person, he forgives them, arranges for their marriages and marries Pimpenella.

Pulcinella, a ballet with song in one act, with choreography by Léonide Massine and costumes and scenery by Picasso, was first performed by the Ballet Russe in Paris on May 15, 1920. The work marked the beginning of Stravinsky's neoclassical phase as a composer. He wrote that "Pulcinella was my discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible. It was a backward look, of course—the first of many love affairs in that direction—but it was a look in the mirror, too."

The Introduction is a straightforward ternary form with the character of an "entrada" or procession. Listen for the ostinati and extended phrases, occasional rhythmic "twists."

The Serenata floats along on a steadily rocking 6/8 meter. The ternary form is repeated a couple of times with gentle variations of both accompaniment and melodic material.

The Tarantella is in a rapid 6/8, and evokes the fast, frantic hopping dance said to have

originated in Taranto, Italy as a cure for the fever caused by the bite of a tarantula.

The Gavotte was originally a folk dance popular at the court of Louis XIV where it was most often danced in duple meter. In this context, it is the number that is most “flavored” with “period” elements including trills, fast delicate runs, decorated cadences, especially in the first variation. This movement is the most rhythmically regular.

The Scherzino is perhaps the oddest of the movements, the one with the fewest period elements – except that it has that “baroque” obsession with rhythmic constancy: a moment in perpetual motion. Its phrases are like Mobius strips—it’s as though one phrase has begun before the previous one has ended.

The Minuetto and Finale are fine contrasting movements. The first is steady, projecting a settled if not particularly danceable minuet in which the ends of the phrases often either are cut short or extended to turn into a contrasting one. The Finale is fast and whimsical, light and repetitive, in a frivolous moment brilliant and racy with rhythmically intriguing “lapses” or “fixations.” A few brief recalls from earlier movements bring a sparkling finish.

Appalachian Fantasy for solo violin (2016)

Tessa Lark (b. 1989)

In one movement

A native of Richmond, Kentucky, Ms. Lark has developed a reputation as a versatile soloist and collaborative artist demonstrated by the number of interesting and varied performances that can be seen on the internet.

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Tessa Lark, who grew up in Richmond, Kentucky, has developed a career as a versatile soloist and collaborative artist demonstrated by the number of interesting and varied performances that can be seen currently on the internet. Among these vignettes, she can be seen playing her “Appalachian Fantasy” on a short YouTube recording from Strings Magazine, which interestingly enough follows a performance of the first movement of Ysaÿe’s Sonata No. 5 for solo violin. In “Appalachian Fantasy,” she refers to old-time tunes, including, “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Midnight on the Water,” and a section of "Bonaparte's Retreat" that Aaron Copland also used in "Hoedown."

Sonata in A Major for Violin and Piano

César Franck (1822-1890)

Allegretto ben moderato

Allegro

Ben moderato: Recitativo-Fantasia

Allegretto poco mosso

In 1886, to celebrate his wedding, the famous Belgian violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe, commissioned César Franck to compose a piece. The work arrived only shortly before the date, yet in spite of its many demands, Ysaÿe managed to perform it for his wedding guests, and he repeated it so many times during his career that it became a standard of the violin repertoire. Indeed, Jascha

Heifitz performed the work on his farewell recital. The Sonata is a fine example of Franck's intention to combine a rich harmonic language and recurrent musical themes within a modified classical structure. Each of the four movements has an individual poetic ideal that requires an individual approach to form and the four are linked by themes that cycle through from one to the other. Some themes appear in all the movements, usually transformed by the surroundings, occasionally quite radically so. Vincent d'Indy, always a proponent of Franck and his works/ideas, referred to this Sonata as a "True musical monument."

Considering the work as a whole, two large parts, movements one and three serve as contemplative counterparts to the more energetic second and fourth movements. The first principal theme heard in the violin becomes a major source of thematic material throughout the work. Analysis reveals that this theme—like other, subsequent ones—is sometimes deeply transformed, or sometimes hardly at all, as it reappears throughout the work. In the hands of other composers (like Liszt, for instance) this procedure became a principle of free form, but in the case of Franck's Sonata, the only movement that embraces such freedom is the third movement, where both segments (Recitative and Fantasia) are "forms" but only in the sense that they shape and provide "roadmaps" for improvisations.

The first movement has two themes, the first one heard principally in the violin and the second in the piano. The chords and tentative rising intervals in the piano seem to invite the violin to enter, which it does with a gentle tune in a flowing 9/8 meter. *Sempre dolce* and piano until the very end, the exposition of this quiet theme hardly gives a hint of its importance for the work as a whole. The second theme, provenance of the piano, is an essay in contrast; it is forceful, even flamboyant. Beginning on an upbeat, it is much grander in character than the first tune. There is little else to this movement and while it is cast in something more complex than a simple ternary form, it is hardly dynamically charged enough for creating the semblance of a sonata form.

The first iteration of the theme of the second movement is embedded in the rush of notes in the piano but it rings both familiar and clear when repeated by the violin. A complex movement, all aspects of the phrasing and rhythm enhance the formal structure. Franck strengthens the thematic character in many ways, for instance, in the lengths of phrases. While in the first movement, phrases tended to be regular (4 measures or 2+2 measures), here they are both shorter (3 measures) and longer (10 or 14 measures), respectively they constitute the a and b elements of the first segment (aba). When after a transition to a secondary key area (recalling the cyclic theme), a new quite impassioned thematic idea in the piano and violin ends in a transition to the development section which begins with an extraordinary variation of this movement's first theme. These large quiet chords—*pp*, *quasi lento*—represent a total turnabout in terms of thematic character. The development is a complex and extended working out of both first and second themes of the movement and the recapitulation follows the thematic order of the exposition, albeit a bit shortened in preparation for the extended coda. Listen for thematic "tags," the syncopation in the secondary themes, irregular phrase lengths, and, especially for the large quiet chords in the development and the explosive coda at the end. You will not be disappointed!

The third movement has three distinct sections. The first opens with an invitation in the piano (ref. the first movement) that the violin "rejects" choosing to answer with a flourish. From there, we move to something like a *rapprochement* to end with a cadential passage, *Molto Lento*. The second section begins as the first but develops more satisfactorily into a song-like segment—the Fantasia—that makes numerous references to earlier themes and eventually ends

with the same Molto Lento cadence

The last movement is a kind of rondo that opens with what becomes a ritornello in which the violin and piano are in strict canon—the one following the other at the octave at the distance of 4 counts. A cheerful, march-like miniature ternary form, this ritornello returns five times (ABACADAEACoda). Contrasting (non-canonic) motives from the earlier movements are recalled in the intervening passages. In the fifth reiteration of A and the following segment, E, the canon is disrupted—fragmented, treated motivically—and modulations to distant keys prevail bringing a sense of development to the movement that is confirmed by the strong recapitulation-like return to the tonic key and canon in the final A. A coda, more brilliant than the earlier one finishes this extraordinary work.

Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 47 in A Major

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Adagio sostenuto-Presto
Andante con Variazioni
Variation I.
Variation II.
Variation III. Minore
Variation IV. Maggiore
Finale. Presto

Beethoven's own title for his work, "Sonata per il Pianoforte ed uno Violino obbligato in uno stile molto concertante come d'un concerto," that is, "Sonata for Piano and obligato Violin in a highly concerted style, like a concerto" succinctly captures the determining features of this work for piano and violin, its technical difficulties, unusual length and emotional character. With this comment, Beethoven wanted to draw attention to his work as a composition that would be appropriate for a large audience, like one that would attend a concert of orchestral music with virtuoso performers. Until this period in time, music for very small ensembles, such as a violin duo, was intended for "house music," and generally was meant to be performed by amateurs. This Sonata was commissioned for a travelling virtuoso, the African-Polish violinist, George Bridgetower, but when they had an argument, Beethoven rescinded the dedication and, having found another well-known performer, he dedicated it anew to Rudolphe Kreutzer, a French violin virtuoso. Ironically, Kreutzer did not like the work and never performed it.

This grand sonata in three movements was composed in May 1803 and thus precedes the composition of the "Eroica" Symphony, No. 3, which places it in one of Beethoven's most interesting creative periods, the time when he is expanding in all directions: finding creative outlet by extending form, harmony, and evolving new ways of dealing with time. Like the close contemporaneous works, Eroica and the "Waldstein" Piano Sonata in C, op. 53, the Kreutzer Sonata is an enormous challenge for performers and listeners because of its length, technical demands and dimensions.

Although it is described as being in A Major, only the last movement is actually in A Major. The first movement after a slow introduction in A Major continues and ends in A Minor and the second movement is in F Major. The apparent reason is that having received a commission to compose the work for Bridgetower for a certain date, he was pressed to finish on schedule and used a last movement in A Major that he had previously composed but had not

used. He then added a slow introduction to the first movement so that the work also starts in A Major.

Adagio sostenuto. To open the first movement with four measures of solo violin was unprecedented. The series of full-bodied chords on the violin in a definitive A Major is answered by a chord sequence in the piano that ends most surprisingly on a G[♯] chord—that is, quite unexpected for such a passage in an A Major work. This is the first sample of something that becomes a feature of the introduction and eventually of the whole movement: avoiding the expected harmonic movement particularly at a structural point in the form. Other features to note in the introduction that resonate with elements in the main body of the movement are the intervals of a falling third and rising and falling minor seconds, variety of rhythmic patterns (silences or rests), unanticipated changes in texture (from chords to single pitches), and the gradual lightening of texture and increase in the sense of tempo because of the increase in quicker, that is, smaller note values.

Presto. The theme which emerges directly out of the introduction in the violin is urgent and the two 9-measure phrases, first in the violin, then copied immediately in the piano both end with a grand flourish and fermatas, surprisingly on a C[♯] Major chord. Immediately a secondary theme picks up the tempo and moves directly to a fast-moving secondary principal theme in A minor. One consequence of this odd move is that it creates the sense that the introduction extends beyond the change in tempo and into the opening of the exposition, which starts only now with this new material. The formal consequence of this odd circumstance is that because the opening theme of the exposition—those two identical 9-measures phrases first in the violin and then in the piano—has not been developed or extended as in the traditional opening of a sonata form, there has been nothing yet to drive the exposition forward to a second key. The recourse is to have this secondary theme take the movement to a secondary key. Here again Beethoven changes course and tames the forward rush with a new hymn-like chordal theme in E Minor. Again the expectation of thematic exposition and development is delayed until a second theme in E Minor comes later, its rising half-step recalling the same gesture in the introduction and the opening pitches of the first theme.

The development uses all elements—especially the rising half-step, the changes of texture and rhythmic motion. Eventually it climaxes at the end of the development in a grand pause that invites an excursion during which the instruments come into their “own”—a fairly literal counterpart to a cadenza in the concerto form—before moving on to the recapitulation which follows a relatively regular sonata form—so that Beethoven can insert the surprises in the coda.

Andante con Variazione. Despite the complexity, these variations are marvels in constraint and clarity. Many small and notable touches of elegance are woven throughout each one as it elaborates on the one before it; the rhythms become progressively more delicate, until finally, time seems to simply dissolve in trills.

Finale. The calm of the second movement is broken by a crashing A major chord in the piano, ushering in the virtuosic and exuberant third movement, a 6/8 tarantella in sonata form. Typically, works that take on the characteristics of a tarantella do not have great distinctions between the sections of the form. Here after moving through a series of slightly contrasting episodes, the theme returns for the last time, and the work ends jubilantly in a rush of A major. However, along the way there are some notable details to listen for: the “tempo detours” just before the closing theme (in both exposition and recapitulation) when suddenly measures of steady eighth-notes in 6/8 time turn into measures of quarters in 2/4 time. There are also two

short unexpected Adagios before the beginning of the final cadential coda. Perhaps a chance to catch one's breath? Finally, the length, difficulty of both parts, and the sustained challenge by the instruments to each other speaks to recognition of the sonata as a work with the stature of a concerto for two instruments.

- Program notes by Dr. Jean Christensen