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VIOLIN I

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# AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

*Richard Tognetti, Leader*

*Guest Soloist: David Leisner, Guitar*

Lillie and Roy Cullen Theater  
Gus S. Wortham Theater Center  
March 16, 1993 8:00 p.m.

## PROGRAM

**BÉLA BARTÓK**  
(1881-1945)

### **DIVERTIMENTO for strings**

*Allegro non troppo*  
*Molto adagio*  
*Allegro assai*

**LEO BROUWER**  
(b. 1939)

### **TRES DANZAS CONCERTANTES**

*in three movements*  
soloist: David Leisner, guitar

## INTERMISSION

**PETER SCULTHORPE**  
(b. 1929)

### **NOURLANGIE**

**for solo guitar, strings, and percussion**  
*in one movement*  
soloist: David Leisner, guitar

**LEOS JANÁČEK**  
(1854-1928)

### **KREUTZER SONATA for string orchestra**

arranged by Richard Tognetti  
from String Quartet No. 1  
*Adagio (con moto)*  
*Con moto*  
*Con moto (Vivace-Andante)*  
*Con moto (Adagio)*

*The Australian Chamber Orchestra appears by arrangement with  
The Aaron Concert Management, Boston, Massachusetts.*

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## PROGRAM NOTES

### BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

#### Divertimento for strings

- I. *Allegro non troppo*
- II. *Molto adagio*
- III. *Allegro assai*

The year 1938 was a troubled and unproductive one for Bartók, partly because of his deep disturbance at the political tide threatening to engulf his homeland Hungary. A Swiss friend, the conductor Paul Sacher, prescribed a change of scene, and offered Bartók the use of his Alpine chalet at Saanen. There, Bartók found the time and inclination to work again.

In a birthday greeting to his son (18 August 1939), the composer describes his new surroundings:

'Somehow I feel like a musician of olden times -- the invited guest of a patron of the arts. For here I am, as you know, entirely the guest of the Sachers: they see to everything -- from a distance. In a word, I am living alone -- in an ethnographic object: a genuine peasant cottage.'

It was summer, and he found the surrounding countryside pleasant. However, as he went on to explain:

'I cannot take advantage of the weather to make excursions: I have to work. And for Sacher himself -- on a commission (something for string orchestra); in this respect also my position is like that of an old time musician. Luckily the work went well, and I completed it in 15 days (a piece of about 25 minutes). I just finished it yesterday.'

This new work was the Divertimento, and Sacher must have been extraordinarily pleased with it. Not only had he been successful in getting the composer to write again, but he now had a major new work to perform with his Basle Chamber Orchestra. And, as its title suggests, Bartók may indeed have found the Divertimento a temporary respite -- or a 'diversion' -- from his many preoccupations.

Hungarian folk modes and rhythms plan an important role in this reaffirmation of Bartók's spirit. The first movement begins with a kind of round, its theme heard first in unison and then entering on each group of strings in turn. The second movement is an example of Bartók's 'night music'. In the course of its long, arching crescendo the violins one-by-one remove their mutes. Cross-rhythms and brisk contrapuntal writing characterize the sensuous but extroverted finale, which includes the occasional humorous 'Intruder', like a Gypsy violin tune or a 'pizzicato polka'.

Bartók's relief was shortlived. Only fifteen days after the Divertimento was finished was broke out, and by June 1940, when it was premiered by Sacher and his orchestra, German troops were advancing on Paris. As a Basle critic wrote in his review of the performance:

"While we are writing these lines, a storm is approaching and the thunder of guns can be heard in the night . . . Thinking back to the concert, it seems unreal and ghostly. Will the creative forces which stirred here . . . be able to survive against the raging forces of annihilation, the violence that leads to total extermination of life?"

So far as Bartók was concerned, the answer was a resounding "No." Before the year was out events forced him to leave Hungary for exile in the United States. He found his new surroundings alien; he was despondent, and increasingly unable to compose. By the time he completed his first of his handful of 'American' works, the Concerto for Orchestra in 1943, he was already terminally ill. Strictly speaking a non-combatant, but

nevertheless in one sense a 'casualty of war', he died in New York in September 1945 not having had the opportunity to return to his newly-liberated Hungary.

Program Notes by Graeme Skinner.

### LEO BROUWER (b. 1939)

#### Tres Danzas Concertantes

*in three movements*

soloist: David Leisner, guitar

Tres Danzas Concertantes was completed by Leo Brouwer in 1958, when he was a 19-year-old student. It shows remarkable confidence and originality for such a young composer and is a piece worthy of becoming a part of the mainstream guitar concerto repertoire. Scored for guitar and string orchestra, it is in three lively movements each of which incorporates melodic and rhythmic elements of Cuban folk and popular music.

The first movement is in simple A-B-A form. The middle section is slower and lighter than its surrounding sections, which are more driven and excited. It ends efficiently with a brief coda. An eerily beautiful passage for muted strings opens the second movement, which is a mostly quiet and quirky nocturnal dance. A very few musical motives are discussed, dissected and passed from one instrument to another. Lovely counterpoint abounds. A solo guitar cadenza quietly intervenes before the strings take over and dominate the final measures. The last movement, a Toccata, is a vivacious exploration of syncopated rhythms, and it swings! During a brief interruption in the middle by a calmer contrapuntal section, a viola subtly introduces the theme that dominates the remainder of the piece. The opening material returns and is varied. Then a faster tempo brings the work to its swift conclusion.

Program Notes by David Leisner.

### PETER SCULTHORPE (b. 1929)

#### Nourlangie

for solo guitar, strings and percussion

*in one movement*

soloist: David Leisner, guitar

Early this year I spent some time around Nourlangie Rock, in Kakadu National Park. A place both powerful and serene, it houses some of the best aboriginal rock art in the area. Flying over it, one can see across the floodplain to Port Essington, to the Arafura Sea and to the Torres Strait. From the air one can also see the site of a proposed uranium mine which lies just to the east of the rock.

It was inevitable that I should write a piece about Nourlangie. This work, in one movement, is more concerned with my feelings about the area than it is concerned with an actual description of it. All the same, the work contains many bird-sounds, and, in order to give a sense of place, the main melody contains some characteristics of the music of the Torres Strait.

Program notes by Peter Sculthorpe.

LEOS JANÁČEK  
(1854-1928)

Kreutzer Sonata for string orchestra

arranged by Richard Tognetti  
from String Quartet No. 1

I. Adagio (con moto) III. Con moto (Vivace-Andante)  
II. Con moto IV. Con moto (Adagio)

After the early *Suite for String Orchestra* (completed in 1877 when he was 23 years old), and *Idyll* of the following year, Janacek never again wrote for orchestra strings alone. The resulting lack of string orchestral music in his more familiar later style is a matter of particular regret when one considers what the composer of the two late string quartets (subtitled respectively *Kreutzer Sonata* and *Intimate Letters*) might have done with a larger body of strings.

Unfortunately, it seems that no one thought to ask Janacek whether or not he would approve of performing either of the string quartets with larger forces. He died in 1928, and for the fifty years afterwards there was a strict copyright control on all his works. Since 1978, however, Janacek's instrumental music has entered the public domain, and it is now legally possible for musicians to partake of the hitherto forbidden pleasures of arranging Janacek as they please.

In 1917 Janacek -- a married man of 63 -- conceived a passionate friendship with a 25-year-old, Kamila Stossiova. Though Janacek's wife was less than happy with this development, there is no evidence that his fixation on the young woman (herself married) ever proceeded beyond a chivalrous impasse. Janacek wrote to Kamila ten years later saying: 'It is just as well that it is *only* I who am infatuated'; and he finally excused the affair to his wife as a 'harmless fantasy'. It was, nevertheless, a fantasy 'as necessary to my life as air or water', and Kamila's continuing friendship was an inspiration in the extraordinary creative burgeoning which marked this composer's final decade.

Under the influence of Kamila (or the idealized woman addressed in over 800 letters he sent to her), Janacek wrote many of his greatest works, beginning in 1917 with *The Diary of One who Disappeared* ('While writing the *Diary* I thought only of you . . .'), the operas *Katya Kabanova* in 1920-21 (*My Katya* grows in her; in her, my Kamila . . .) and *The Cunning Little Vixen* of 1922-23. The First String Quartet of 1923, while not specifically linked with Kamila in any of the letters, nevertheless also reflects Janacek's continuing obsession. This is clear from the work's subtitle, *Kreutzer Sonata*, a reference to Leo Tolstoy's novella of that name, which also deals with a friendship between a musician and a married woman.

In Tolstoy's story, a husband tells of his jealousy of a violinist whom he has introduced to his wife. One evening the musician and the wife, a pianist, together perform Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' Violin Sonata (Op. 47). The husband is so moved by the music as temporarily to forget his jealousy. However, returning home from a business trip and finding the two together, he convinces himself that the relationship is adulterous and murders his wife. One wonders if it was, likewise, part of Janacek's real-life 'fantasy' that Kamila's husband (an antique dealer, well-disposed towards the composer) also harbored the suspicion that an adulterous relationship was going on under his nose, or that therefore Kamila was under threat of violence. Unfortunately, the music does little to make this clear. Nor, in any obvious fashion, does it seem to trace the outlines of Tolstoy's story. A single, fairly well-hidden exception, is the opening theme of the third movement,

which recalls a fragment of melody from Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' Sonata.

Janacek wrote the work quickly between 30 October and 7 November. In doing so, he may have re-used some ideas from his own earlier treatment of the same Tolstoy story, a piano trio dating from 1909 (long before he met Kamila), but this connection cannot establish for certain as the trio is now lost. Though all four movements of the Quartet are confusingly marked *Con moto* ('with motion') each has its own distinctive tempo and character. The first alternates slow and fast passages; the second is a polka; and the third is the slow movement. The finale provides a summation of the whole work's musical argument by recalling the opening theme from the first movement.

Program notes by Graeme Skinner.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### AUSTRALIAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The Australian Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1975, is a national orchestra with an outstanding international reputation for artistic excellence. A colorful and vibrant ensemble, it comprises a core group of seventeen string players which, depending on repertoire, is augmented by specialist players and soloists. In addition to international touring, the Australian Chamber Orchestra has gained an international reputation for its recordings. In September 1991, the ACO entered into a seven-year exclusive recording contract with Sony Classical. Their first release, featuring Janacek's *Kreutzer Sonata* for Strings, Barber's *Adagio* for Strings, and Walton's *Sonata* for Strings, broke sales records among Australian classical groups.

### RICHARD TOGNETTI, violin

As leader of the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Richard Tognetti has rapidly developed a reputation for being one of Australia's finest violinists. Richard was born in Canberra and commenced playing the violin at the age of five. His studies started with William Primrose and his wife Hiroko Primrose, and later Alice Waten at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music. Over the past few years, Richard has developed a keen interest in the performance of early music with the aim of taking these concepts of interpretation through the whole violin repertoire, from Biber and Paganini to Janacek and Hollinger.

### DAVID LEISNER, guitar

David Leisner began his musical career primarily as a concert guitarist and actively performed on stages throughout North America and Europe in the late 70's and early 80's. In 1984, a hand injury caused Leisner to withdraw from the concert stage. His energies were then primarily focused on composing and teaching. But in 1991, this gifted musician successfully adapted his technique to his injury and returned to the stage, recapturing the excitement and acclaim of former performances. A widely sought-after teacher as well, Leisner is currently serving on the faculty of New England Conservatory of Music.

The Houston performance of the Australian Chamber Orchestra is generously underwritten by BHP Petroleum.