

TRIO SOLISTI

MARIA BACHMANN, VIOLIN
ALEXIA PIA GERLACH, CELLO
JON KLIBONOFF, PIANO

Tuesday, February 9, 2010

~ PROGRAM ~

Trio Élégiacque No. 1 in G Minor

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF
(1873-1943)

Piano Trio No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 76

JOAQUÍN TURINA
(1882-1949)

Lento: Allegro molto moderato

Molto vivace

Lento: Andante mosso – Allegretto

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA
(1921-1992)

~ INTERMISSION ~

Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major, Op. 87

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Presto

Finale: Allegro giocoso

*The Trio Solisti appears by arrangement with Vantage Artists.
On the World Wide Web: vantageartists.com and triosolisti.com*

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943)
Trio Élégiacque No. 1 in G Minor (1891-92)

Rachmaninoff confusingly wrote two trios with the same name one year apart—the second dedicated to Tchaikovsky, a beloved mentor and friend, upon his unexpected and untimely death in 1893. The second trio is the famous one; but it is the first that is on tonight's program for reasons that will be clear when you hear it.

Rachmaninoff thought of himself as a composer, and it was for that that he was awarded the Great Gold Medal from the Moscow Conservatory of Music, upon his graduation at the age of 19. He was, at the same time a brilliant pianist; it was ultimately as such that he would, during his lifetime, have his greatest successes. He started out as the cherished son of a large, wealthy, land-owning and musical family. His father was a military officer whose fortune was owed to an ancestor who had helped Elizabeth, the eldest daughter of Peter the Great, ascend the throne in a bloodless coup. His mother, only daughter of a general in the Russian army, was able to provide no fewer than five estates for her dowry—five estates and all the souls living on them. Rachmaninoff's exceptional musical gifts were early apparent, prompting his parents to opt for a music rather than the usual military career. Along the way, however, his father managed to squander all five of his wife's estates; so by the time he was nine years old the parents separated. His mother took him and his siblings to live in St. Petersburg and within a few years he was placed in the home of the best piano teacher in Moscow. All this by way of explaining that despite a happy start, enormous gifts and the best family connections, Rachmaninoff's life turned out to be one of hardship and struggle. That he was ultimately forced to abandon Russia in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution did not add to his peace of mind, but a gloomy outlook is apparent in his music long before that. His musical training in Moscow was focused on the Western tradition, as opposed to the Nationalist Russian tradition which was gaining favor in St. Petersburg, seat of "The Mighty Five" (Balakirev, Cesar Çui, Mussorsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin). His compositions did not find favor with the Russian critics, who called his Romantic style "outdated," "a living corpse," "in bad taste," (too much of gypsy and salon music), and the composer himself—shame of shame—"the idol of the salon" (which, apparently he was). So he continued on in Russia as a conductor—with great success—composing a little in his spare time. As he would have nothing to do with the new trends coming out of the east and west—from Austria, France and Hungary—he persisted in composing "old-fashioned" music for the rest of his life: music which came as he once explained, from the heart, full of feeling and melody as he understood

it, much to the continued displeasure of critics and academics, but to the delight of audiences who flocked to hear him play it. It must be said that no one hearing his Symphonic Dances, composed in 1940-41, could fail to notice how much he had learned after all, from the French Impressionists.

The Trio No. 1 in G Minor was written while he was rushing to finish his degree at the Moscow Conservatory. The source for its inspiration is unknown. It clearly owes something to Tchaikovsky, who was at the time not only Rachmaninoff's favorite contemporary composer but an enthusiastic supporter and advisor. It is written in a single movement, an ultra-Romantic work quickly pulling the audience into a dark drama awash with color and saturated with lush sonorities. It evokes a sense of that famous Oriental excess of the upper-class Russian rich in the 19th century so vividly described in biographies of the time. An early work it may be, but there is no mistaking the Rachmaninoff sound and the gorgeous writing for piano. His youth at the time of its writing would explain, however, the less than expert writing for strings, and perhaps also the fact that there are 12 changes of meter in the course of its 15 minutes! It is nevertheless, a beautiful piece when played in the right spirit, and too rarely performed.

Since Rachmaninoff's death at the age of 70, his fame as a composer has surpassed his reputation as pianist, which was, in its day, huge (he was very fortunate to be able to make a great deal of money concertizing during his entire lifetime in the West). His reputation has even surpassed that of other contemporary composers. As one biographer put it, "with his death in 1943, his immortality began."

He is buried on the top of a hill in a cemetery near the Kensico Dam in New York State.

Program note © Nora Avins Klein, October, 2009

JOAQUÍN TURINA (1882-1949)

Piano Trio No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 76 (1926)

Joaquín Turina displays his musical identity through both his association with the music of the Basque regions and his own inclination towards incorporating the popular and the classical. He left his native Seville for Madrid at 20 and three years later ventured to Paris where he came under the influence of Debussy and Ravel, both of whom bowed to Spanish music. Despite his academic associations, a certain "sevillanismo" remains in his work stemming surely from his early interests. One of these was the *zarzuelas*, a form of Spanish opera infused with popular influences that included spoken words and

dance. Interestingly, as a young boy, he held a passion for the accordion, a close relative to Piazzolla's bandoneon.

Despite these influences, Turina sought to transcend Spanish nationalism more so than his Spanish contemporaries Albeniz, Granados and Falla. This is reflected in his Piano Trio No. 2 of 1926 which clearly reveals the influence of Debussy, Ravel and César Franck. Falla had advised him to look to Spanish folk music for inspiration, but that advice was merely a statement of Turina's natural style, since the music of his native Seville was strongly and undeniably in his blood. Within the parameters of classical style, Turina found his own voice rich in Sevillian grace, color, and the Basque *Zortzico* rhythms clearly evident in the Piano Trio No. 2.

The first movement of the Op. 76 Piano Trio reflects classic sonata form with three sections marked Andante and three marked Lento. Contrasting themes in major and minor keys enrich the highly emotive movement resplendent with beautiful melody. The middle movement is a *jota*, a national dance of northern Spain in rapid triple time, not unlike a waltz but with a Spanish imprint. Pizzicato chords from the strings suggest the castanets which accompany the *jota*. We hear and see, if you will, Spanish couples performing the dance, underscoring Turina's interest in things visual and literary. The dance is interrupted mid-way by a reference to the first movement.

If the middle movement is dance, the last movement is song. Despite this contrast, thematic material from the earlier movement is incorporated into this final movement, lending the piece unity as well as variety. A coda borrowed from the Lento theme of the second movement completes the work. Written in 1926, the Piano Trio was premiered at the Frankfurt International Festival of Chamber Music in 1927 and received the National Prize.

Program note © Lucy Miller Murray, 2009

ÁSTOR PIAZZOLLA (1921-1992)

Four Seasons of Buenos Aires (1965-70)

ARR. BRAGATO / BACHMANN

The immediate association one makes with Piazzolla's *Four Seasons* is Vivaldi's composition of the same name. While much of that comparison is intentional, it does not give the whole story. A first consideration is structure. In Vivaldi's work, each of the four seasons is treated in three movements, while in Piazzolla's they are given one movement within which there is variation of mood and character. In other words, Piazzolla bows to the Baroque structure he loved but explores it in entirely new ways relating to his own personal invention for which he so famous, the *nuevo tango*. In that invention, Piazzolla

took the tango from a popular street dance to a serious form of music. Like Bach's gavottes and Mozart's minuets, Piazzolla's tangos are not meant for dancing but for complex and virtuosic interpretation at the highest level of performance. Nor should we insist on programmatic interpretation of Piazzolla's *Four Seasons*, as we so often do with Vivaldi's.

Originally composed between 1965 and 1970 as four separate works, Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* has had numerous treatments from its original scoring for violin, electric guitar, piano, bass and bandoneon (Piazzolla's own instrument). Trio Solisti's interpretation is based on the arrangement by Argentinean cellist and composer José Bragato, a member of Piazzolla's famous Octeto Buenos Aires, who received a Grammy Award in 2002 for his arrangements of Piazzolla's music for string quartet. Maria Bachmann, Trio Solisti's violinist, made her own additions to Bragato's arrangement to include the startling string techniques and sound effects that so brilliantly flavor this recording as well as additions to the musical material. Many of these techniques such as the *glissando*, or slide, are practiced in traditional classical music, but here they are personalized to express Piazzolla's unique *nuevo tango* concepts. And seldom are they done the same way each time. The first sound heard on the recording, before any actual note of music, is something called a "cricket," loosely described by Maria Bachmann as "playing on the wrong side of the bridge as far back as possible and with hard—really hard—pressure." The cello is used for the knocking sounds that imitate various percussion instruments.

Piazzolla's *Seasons* shout with his originality and inventiveness—and with a certain national flavor. On the subject of nationalism, however, we should be careful. Piazzolla was no mere imitator of folk tradition. Like Dvorák and Bartók before him, Piazzolla took folk idioms and turned them into high art. The fascinating dissonances and abrupt tempo changes go well beyond the scope of folk music. That said, Piazzolla also effectively paints the seasons of his native country with its tumultuous spring, sultry summer, melancholy fall and dark winter. The order of the seasons, by the way, varies in the work's many arrangements, but Trio Solisti's makes musical sense even if does not honor Vivaldi's order.

Piazzolla's studies with Alberto Ginastera led him to studies in Paris with the legendary Nadia Boulanger. Piazzolla gives a wonderful account of his reluctance to admit to her that he played the bandoneon rather than the piano. He presented to her what he called his "kilos of symphonies and sonatas." She responded that they were "well-written," but that she could not find Piazzolla in them. Finally he played his tangos for her to which she responded, "You idiot, that's Piazzolla!" He commented, "And I took all the music I composed, ten years of my life, and sent it to hell in two seconds." The years of study and work, however, do not seem lost in Trio Solisti's treatment of *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*.

Program note © Lucy Miller Murray, 2009

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
Piano Trio No. 2 in C Major, Op. 87 (1882)

Some time in the year of 1885, the great violinist Joseph Joachim took part in a gripping performance of a recent chamber music work by Johannes Brahms. In the audience was young Andreas Moser (later Joachim's biographer) who could not contain his astonishment, for only two hours previously he had listened while Joachim poured out tremendous bitterness at his erstwhile friend Brahms. The two, in fact, were no longer on speaking terms, and had not been for several years. Brahms had helped Joachim's wife defend herself against what the composer saw as an unwarranted divorce suit precipitated by Joachim's irrational jealousy. Joachim lost the suit, but Brahms also lost his oldest friend, who felt betrayed. The young friend could only wonder how it was possible for Joachim to play Brahms's music so beautifully with so much ill-will in his heart. Joachim's answer also came from the heart: "I cannot do otherwise than to feel and perform this music with my entire being. It works on me like a force of nature."

Tonight's audience will have the chance to discover whether they feel with Joachim or not, for the piece in question is on the program, Brahms's Second Piano Trio in C Major, Op. 87. Written between 1880-82, almost thirty years after his first work for this combination, it dates from his period of greatest mastery, when he was in seemingly effortless control of the means to say what he had to say. The work abounds in power, economy, and clarity. The string parts are often in parallel octaves with each other, (sometimes even in unison, a marvelous and rich sound), and often as not, when they play different notes, violin and cello are rhythmically identical. The result is a lighter texture than much of Brahms's other chamber music. While this works to the piece's advantage now—it is among the most popular pieces in the trio repertory—for a long time this piece was considered even by Brahms's admirers to be a bit light-weight. One more general note: the outer movements are hardly notable for gorgeous melody, quite unlike many other Brahms pieces. What distinguishes them is their sonority—wonderful writing for the sound of the piano and strings—and the splendid use Brahms makes of every fragment of phrase in building his work and creating its motion.

The first movement is a well-shaped sonata-allegro form, two main themes in the right place and key. An unusual feature is a section of the development, which contains the first theme in complete disguise. Augmented (i.e. greatly stretched out), it acts as a slowed-down center in a part of the work where one would expect the contrary. Gradually Brahms adds rhythmic complexity and drive, and voila! we are at the re-exposition, now much compressed to allow for a powerful coda.

The second movement is a set of five variations on a Hungarian-style theme. (An unspoken peace offering to Joachim, who was Hungarian?) Most of the variations are lush and lyric, with the piano acting as if it were accompanying song.

The third movement is a brilliant scherzo, clearly showing Brahms's indebtedness to Mendelssohn ("I'd give all my stuff for the Hebrides Overture," he once told a close friend). Here Brahms's famous hemiolas (1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2) are easy to spot; they are more hidden in the other movements, but are there just the same.

The last movement is again in Brahms's beloved sonata-allegro form. And once again, the strings start in parallel octaves, with a sonorous theme, which is not exactly memorable. The second theme, chromatic and jagged, is even somewhat clumsy to the ear and to the player, and yet, played with the requisite dash and verve, this is a tremendously satisfying movement. It succeeds by its motion, at which Brahms is such a master. Pushing forward, coming to a surprise halt just before the re-exposition, there is an inexorability of harmony and motion, creating that very "force of nature" which Joachim was so unable to withstand.

Program note © by Styra Avins

Trio Solisti

Crowned "the most exciting piano trio in America" by *The New Yorker* magazine, Trio Solisti is comprised of three brilliant instrumentalists - violinist Maria Bachmann, cellist Alexis Pia Gerlach and pianist Jon Klibonoff. Trio Solisti has earned a reputation for its passionate performances marked by soloistic virtuosity, exquisite expression and seamless ensemble playing.

The members of Trio Solisti collaborate with many of today's leading composers. Chamber Music Monterrey Bay has commissioned a work for Trio Solisti by one of America's most gifted young composers, Kevin Puts. He is one of four composers chosen by CMMB's "Arc of Life" commissioning initiative, and the trio premieres his work in 2012. Violinist Maria Bachmann and pianist Jon Klibonoff performed the world premiere of Philip Glass's Sonata for Violin and Piano (2008), and cellist Alexis Gerlach performed the world premiere of Kevin Puts work for solo cello and string quintet in New York in 2009. Trio Solisti performed the World and New York premieres of *Vita Brevis* by Paul Moravec in 2009 with lyric soprano Amy Burton of the Metropolitan Opera.

Trio Solisti's members frequently perform as soloists with orchestras. In the 2009-2010 season, Jon Klibonoff performs Shostakovich's 2nd Piano concerto with the Virginia Symphony, and Maria Bachmann performs the

world premiere of Paul Moravec's Violin Concerto at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, PA, Bartók's Violin Concerto No. 1 with the Waukesha Symphony in WI, and Corigliano's *Red Violin* concerto in Chicago's Millennium Park.

Highlights of 2009-10 include performances at The Kennedy Center, where they make their debut on the prestigious Fortas Chamber Series, in Houston for the renowned Houston Friends of Music Series, and an all-Brahms concert at The Caramoor Center for the Performing Arts, as well as tours of the west coast and southern US. Trio Solisti performs at many festivals both as a trio and as individual guest artists throughout the United States.

Trio Solisti is the founding ensemble of Telluride MusicFest in Telluride, CO which celebrates its eighth season in 2010. The trio has made critically acclaimed debuts in New York City, in Washington, D.C., in Virginia and at the internationally renowned Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, Italy. Trio Solisti has appeared on the nationally broadcast radio show "St. Paul Sunday" and has been featured on NPR's "Performance Today" in numerous live performances from around the U.S.

Visit the Trio Solisti on the World Wide Web at triosolisti.com.