

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Department of Music

HELIOS TRIO

Chi-Chen Wu, Piano
John Fadial, Violin
Beth Vanderborgh, Cello

Sunday
February 27, 2022

BCPA Concert Hall
3:00p.m.

Program

The Spirit and the Maiden (2004)

1st Movement
2nd Movement
3rd Movement

Elena Kats-Chermin
(b. 1957)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 49 in D minor (1839)

Molto allegro ed agitato
Andante con moto tranquillo
Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace
Finale: Allegro assai appassionato

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

Intermission

Piano Trio (1914)

Modère
Pantoum (Assez vif)
Passacaille (Trés large)
Final (Animé)

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Kats-Chernin: The Spirit and the Maiden (2004)

Elena Kats-Chernin (1957-) is an Australian pianist-composer, born into a Jewish family in Tashkent, when Uzbekistan was still part of the Soviet Union. She studied in Moscow from the age of 14, and in 1975 began studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. She has since distinguished herself in multiple genres including chamber music, orchestral, and operatic. In 2019, in recognition of her accomplishments, she was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia.

The Spirit and the Maiden, for violin, cello and piano was commissioned by the Macquarie Trio Australia and received its world premiere in Brisbane in 2004. Helios Trio will perform the composers revised (2013) version. The

work is representative of Kats-Chernin's minimalist style and is structured in three movements, each of which depicts a scene from a mystical tale. Program notes as presented in the Boosey and Hawkes score are as follows:

1st movement

Once upon a time in Russia there was a young girl whose job it was to carry water back and forth between her village and the well. Each day she carried two buckets suspended from a pole that she carried on her shoulders wearing a trail into the ground, as she walked bent over slightly by the weight. One summer's afternoon, as she put down her buckets and rested for a moment on the wall of the well, her turquoise shawl, a gift from her grandmother, who had been rumored to be a witch, slid from her shoulders and sank into the dark cold waters. When she reached down to grasp the last corner, to her surprise what she felt was not her shawl but a hand.

As she pulled it out, she gasped at the sight of a beautiful young man emerging from the water. He said to her, "for a thousand years I have lived in the well and no human hand has ever touched me," and she looked into his eyes and was transfixed with wonder. He was pale, almost blue, as beautiful as a stream and his voice was deep like a resounding waterfall and her heart beat so loudly, she thought her chest would burst.

2nd movement

The maiden laughed and began to dance with joy at her luck to find such a beautiful boy.

She began to tease him, poking her tongue as he chased her around the well.

Soon they were dancing together, twirling in the sunlight which glistened on his steaming skin, his hands running through her hair, making it wet and curly as she flirted with him. She was so happy she did not see him become paler and thinner, almost transparent, as he began to evaporate in the noon-day sun, until suddenly as she twirled to face him, he turned back to water and splashed to the ground. Cupping her hand she caught only a pearl-sized drop, and when she looked in it, she saw his eye looking back at her, slowly closing.

3rd movement

She cautiously walked to the well to place him back in the water, and as she was attempting to do this, the pearl-like drop became heavier and heavier until it dragged her down into the depths. Suddenly he was all around her, caressing her as she floated down in his embrace, deeper and deeper down into the dark cold waters. The two of them twirling down like a spiral, his eyes and hers joined together like mirrors, until finally they came to rest at the bottom of the well, where the maiden smiled at him as her lips turned blue.

And there she drowned in his arms, and when he realized what he had done, his grief was so great, his heart began to break. So he wrapped her in the turquoise shawl and swam back with her to the light, laying her body on the surface and summoning all his magic changed her into a water lilac.

And there she has bloomed ever since.

Mendelssohn: Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 49 (1839)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) was born in Hamburg. Felix was a true child prodigy, and by age 16 was composing works such as the String Octet Op. 20, and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Op. 21 (to be expanded in 1842 as incidental music to the Shakespeare play, Op. 61). By the time of the first Piano Trio he is a composer who

has absorbed the works of his predecessors, Beethoven and Schubert, and, with Schumann, is pushing composition toward the late romanticism of Brahms.

Mendelssohn's Piano Trio Op. 49 in d minor, from 1839, is the first of two mature works in the genre, and is the product of an artist at the pinnacle of his powers. It is a demonstrably romantic work that begins **Molto Allegro agitato**, with a first theme cello solo buoyed along by syncopations in the piano part. After a fortissimo statement of the first theme, the movement gives way to a gentle, sunny second theme in A major. The development section features all the lyricism and brilliance one might expect from Mendelssohn, but also with surprises. The Coda gives us a triumphant, fortissimo version of the second theme in the home key, and Mendelssohn tops it off with a spectacular return to D minor as the virtuoso piano writing flies through the final bars.

The second movement **Andante con moto tranquillo** is presented in the form (A-B-A) of an aria, or in this case, a song without words, the first reflective theme presented by the piano alone. After the strings have their turn with the tune, the cello leads into the dramatic B section in B flat minor. It is the violin that takes the theme at the return to the A section, joining with the cello and ultimately handing the theme back to piano for the close.

The third movement is a quintessential Mendelssohn Scherzo marked **Leggiero e vivace** that scurries along in transparent textures, transporting the listener to the fairy-like world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is ephemeral, vanishing into the ether.

The Finale **Allegro assai appassionato** is a tour de force, particularly as the piano writing is concerned, and is in this respect akin to the piano concerto finales of Mendelssohn and even Chopin. It is in the classic rondo form which derives fantastic momentum from thematic repetition and brilliant writing throughout. The return to D major in the Coda meets and perhaps surpasses the irresistible sweep and drive of the first movement as the piece careers to its end.

Ravel: Piano Trio (1914)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) composed his Piano Trio in A minor in 1914. He composed at a feverish pace so that he could enlist in the army, where he served as truck driver. He wrote to Stravinsky that he had done the work of five months in five weeks. The new Trio received its first performance and was published by Durand in 1915. It is dedicated to Ravel's counterpoint teacher André Gedalge, and is masterpiece of all manner of contrapuntal techniques. Ravel was a modernist in many ways, but remained rooted in formalism (largely classical) for his entire life, following in the footsteps of another of his teachers, Gabriel Fauré. The fluid contrapuntal style and use of modality indeed harken to Fauré (who was still very much alive and composing at this time).

The first movement of the Piano trio **Modéré** follows the classical sonata form with first theme in A minor, which forms the material of all the themes in the work, presented by the piano, then taken up by the strings. Very soon the music builds, and by way of accelerando and stretto, reaches an enormous, orchestral climax in only twenty measures. This gives way to a slower second theme, also in A, but tinged with D and G, modal, and ambiguous. After a brief development and recapitulation the movement fades to the rhythmic tattoo of the opening motto.

The second movement **Pantoum (Assez vif)** is not only another example of Ravel's highly coloristic orchestral writing, employing multiple extended techniques including pizzicato, glissando, and harmonics, but shows his

complete mastery of counterpoint. The Pantoum serves as the Trio's Scherzo movement, but is based on a form of Malaysian poetry in which the last line of one stanza overlaps with first line of the next. In this movement, Ravel writes music for one instrument that overlaps with music played by another instrument. In what would be the trio section (B, or middle section), the string parts remain in $\frac{3}{4}$ time while the piano part morphs into $\frac{4}{2}$ time, the ensemble only meeting at common downbeats every eight measures. This dizzying complexity is embedded in such a way that the music retains its rhythmic swirl, foreshadowing *La Valse* (1920).

In the third movement **Passacaille** in C sharp minor Ravel relies on the ancient form of variations over a ground bass. The tempo indication is *Très large* or very spacious. The timeless, drawn out theme is presented in the piano alone, then taken up by cello and violin, respectively. The movement builds to a monumental fortissimo climax spanning the range of nearly eight octaves, and descends back to the calm of the opening, again with the piano alone.

The Finale **Animé** emerges from the suspended final bar of the Passacaille with sparkling tremolo harmonics in the string parts with a tumbling theme written in fives and sevens. This is the music of *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912) in all its fervor, virtuosity, and vivid fauvist sheen. The form is again classic in its truncated rondo form, but asymmetrical rhythms and the glittering palette are as fresh and compelling as they were over a century ago. Indeed, Ravel was a great master, and his Piano Trio one of his greatest achievements.

--John Fadial

HELIOS TRIO

The Helios Trio is a dynamic ensemble comprised of artist faculty from the University of Wyoming. Their rich and diverse backgrounds as performers combine to produce probing and passionate interpretations of the great piano trio repertoire and have garnered international acclaim. In addition to their mountain west activities, Helios recently presented educational concerts as Ensemble in Residence for the Cheyenne Symphony, Heidelberg University, the Music for a Great Space series in North Carolina, at the Omaha Conservatory, and was the single United States representative ensemble invited to the International Debussy Centennial Conference in Oviedo, Spain in 2018. Wu, Fadial, and Vanderborgh are dedicated to building audiences for the future, and are highly involved in musical outreach, bringing world class music to rural areas, and into the schools throughout the great state of Wyoming.

Praised by Fanfare Magazine for her "astonishing" and "poetic piano playing" and "symphonic, expansive texture of breathless virtuosity" (Historical Keyboard Society), pianist **Chi-Chen Wu** has appeared as recitalist, chamber musician, and concerto soloist in the United States, Canada, France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Japan, Taiwan, China, Thailand, the Aspen Music Festival, Monadnock Music Festival, and the Boston Early Music Festival Fringe Concert Series. Her concerts have been broadcast on NPR's Simply Grand Concert Series and NPR-From The Top in Boston. Musicians and conductors with whom she has concertized include Karl-Heinz Steffens, Jonathan McPhee, Zuill Bailey, members of the Juilliard String Quartet, Takács String Quartet, musicians from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Boston Symphony Orchestra and New York Philharmonic. Chi-Chen's newest album of Schumann Fantasie and Carnaval has won a silver medal in the Global Music Awards.

At the age of eleven, violinist **John Fadial** performed as soloist for President Gerald Ford, and since has sustained a multifaceted international career as chamber musician, concertmaster, soloist and pedagogue, performing in

multiple styles, from the baroque to contemporary, earning critical acclaim: “Sparkling Technique,” (L’Est Republicain, France), “Wow! Great Stuff,” (The Washington Post). Fanfare states, “Fadial moves effortlessly among the composer’s subtle moods, voicing sentiment, melancholy, wistfulness and joyful lyricism with utter naturalness...these could hardly be bettered” (Brahms Sonatas, Centaur 2019). Fadial was a Grammy semifinalist for the disc *Where Does Love Go: Chamber Music of Mark Engebretsen* (Innova 2007) and collaborates regularly with leading musicians including Gerard Schwarz, Jennifer Higdon, and Libby Larsen. Visiting Guest Artist invitations have included, Interlochen Arts Academy, the French National Conservatory of Nancy, France, and Beifan University in Yinchuan, China. Fadial been honored by the Southern Poverty Law Center for his contributions to Social Justice.

Cellist **Beth Vanderborgh** maintains a vigorous performing, teaching and recording career. She was top prizewinner of the Washington Society for Arts and Letters Cello Competition, as well as the Baltimore Chamber Awards. The *Strad Magazine* (London) praised her recent recording of the music of August Nölck as “Lyrical and technically accomplished...eloquent and persuasive”, and the *Classical Voice* of North Carolina describes her playing as “Impeccable musicianship, rhythmic precision, technical expertise, and expansive, passionate musicianship. Gorgeous music, exquisitely performed, and I do not believe I have overdone the superlatives.” Vanderborgh’s recent recordings include discs of the *Chamber Music of Gwyneth Walker* for the Centaur Label, and *Chamber Music of Jennifer Higdon* (in collaboration with the Pulitzer prize winning composer) for Albany. She continues to enjoy her activities as artist faculty of the Eastern Music Festival and Principal Cellist of the Cheyenne Symphony. She was honored to represent the State of Wyoming in the 2019 National Senior Olympics where she reached the podium earning 5th place in both the 20k and 40k women’s cycling road races.

This is the 34th concert in the 2021-2022 UW Music Department Season.
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