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Tue • October 2, 2018 • 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College
Program

Trio for violin, viola and cello (1926) ................................................................. Jean Cras (1879-1932)
   I Premier mouvement
   II Lent
   III Animé
   IV Très animé

Phantasy for Piano Quartet, H 94 ................................................................. Frank Bridge (1879-1941)
   Andante con moto - Allegro vivace - Andante con moto

Piano Quartet in A Major, Op. 26 ................................................................. Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
   I Allegro non troppo
   II Poco adagio
   III Scherzo: poco allegro
   IV Finale: Allegro

Program Notes

Trio for violin, viola and cello by Jean Cras
“I strongly recommend Jean Cras’ String Trio for public performance. Nor should experienced amateurs overlook this challenging but outstanding work.” So wrote the highly respected critic Wilhelm Altmann in his Handbook for String Players.

Nearly forgotten now for more than a half century, Jean Cras (1879-1932) stands out in stark contrast to virtually every other French composer of his generation. He was born in the coastal town of Brest into a family with a long naval tradition. Although his affinity for music and his talent showed itself early, he was, nevertheless, enrolled at the Naval Academy in 1896. But, in his spare time, he studied orchestration, counterpoint and composition. Feeling he could go no farther alone, he sought out a respected teacher, Henri Duparc. Duparc was astounded by Cras’s talent and meticulously exposed him to compositional techniques of Bach, Beethoven and his own teacher, César Franck. These were Cras’s only lessons in composition.

As a composer, Cras’s greatest problem was a chronic lack of time to devote to his art as he became a fully commissioned officer in the French Navy. He loved the sea, but served in the navy only out of a sense of patriotism and family tradition. Unlike Rimsky-Korsakov and Albert Roussel, both of whom had begun careers in the navy but later resigned, Cras never left the navy and eventually rose to the rank of Rear-Admiral. His maritime experiences sowed the seeds of an imagination and introspection which enabled him to understand profoundly the alienation of the human condition. And it is this which truly provides the key to his music.

Although he was, like so many of his contemporaries, drawn to cyclical composition pioneered by Franck, he employed it with a unique iconoclastic language of his own. It was a meticulous and sophisticated autobiographical synthesis of the things which were paramount in his life: the sea, the Church, his native Brittany, and the exoticisms discovered on his many voyages. He reached the peak of his powers during the 1920s and it was then that Cras composed some of the most inventive compositions of the twentieth century, of which his String Trio is among the foremost.
Dating from 1925, the opening movement—which is without any tempo marking other than a metronome indication—begins with a searching melody over the pulsating 8th notes of the cello. After a reprise, one hears a series of jazz rhythms as the development proceeds. The second subject is gentler but is interrupted by a search light call from the viola. The extraordinary second movement, Lent—there is nothing like it in the trio literature—is a serious of unrelated episodes. The first is religious; the strings create a soft, meditative organ-like sound that one might well hear in Church. Next comes a peasant dance, perhaps a musette with just a touch of the exotic. Then, the violin is given a long wailing solo in the exotic sounds of the Levant and beyond. This is in turn followed by a haunting viola solo. The movement closes much as it began. A quick movement, Animé, presents a broad panorama of traveling music. The lower strings strum, guitar-like, as each voice takes turns bringing out a bright melody. The development introduces an exotic element. Then the tempo begins to increase until it reaches a wild, whirling, feverish pitch before the main theme is reprised. In the finale, Tres animé, the cello begins a Bach-like etude which as it goes along morphs into a Gaelic dance which must have come from his native Brittany. A lyrical second theme is sung over the soft ponticello voices in the background.

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Phantasy for Piano Quartet, H 94, by Frank Bridge

“I know of few things in British Chamber Music more satisfying than Bridge’s Phantasy for Piano Quartet... the work at times is filled with a serene dignity, which is none to common nowadays. The tonal coloring is first rate and very original as are the individuality and imaginativeness of the ideas.”

Dr. Ernest Walker, British composer and chamber music scholar

The Phantasy for Piano Quartet by Frank Bridge (1879-1941) was, like his other works bearing this title, composed for the annual and prestigious Cobbett Competition. These competitions were designed to encourage the younger generation of British composers to write chamber music. Its founder and benefactor was the chamber music aficionado Walter Wilson Cobbett. The rules of the competition provided an alternate format, the old English Fancy for Fantasia from the time of Purcell, to the traditional four-movement work which had developed from Haydn onwards. While there was to be only a single movement, there are several sections, each embracing a different of mood, tone color and tempi while at the same time retaining an inner unity. It was composed in 1910.

Born in Sussex, Bridge learned to play violin from his father, and had much early exposure to practical musicianship, playing in theatre orchestras his father conducted. He studied violin and composition, the latter from Charles Stanford at the Royal College of Music. He later played viola in prominent quartets and was a respected conductor. When Bridge’s chamber music first appeared, it was a revelation to amateurs as well as professional players. Interestingly, the revival in interest in his music that took place during the last part of the 20th Century has concerned itself exclusively with his more “radical” works, dating from 1924 onwards. Ironically, these works did nothing to create or further enhance the firm reputation he had established with both professionals and amateurs. Rather, it was works just like the Phantasy for Piano Quartet and several other of his Phantasy works which contributed to his success.

The opening Allegro moderato, after a boisterous, brief introduction, begins with a march-like subject. The second melody has an almost Latin American quality to it, with a lovely lyrical tune over the cello’s quasi arpeggio figure. The main theme of the Andante moderato is reminiscent of the song “Londonderry Air,” which Bridge also arranged for string quartet. Again, the highly romantic second subject has a Latin American mood to it. The final section, Allegro ma non troppo, begins in sprightly fashion with a very updated tonality for the time. It leads to a very attractive and more lyrical second subject which alternates with first.

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Piano Quartet in A Major, Op. 26 by Johannes Brahms

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) completed his Piano Quartet in G Minor, Op.25, and his Piano Quartet in A Major, Op. 26, in the fall of 1861, after working on both concurrently for four years. Both quartets were premiered successfully in Vienna about a year later, with Brahms at the piano. The two quartets have some similarities, including finales both influenced by Brahms’s exposure
Program Notes continued

to the music of the Roma (which Brahms, like many others at the time, mistakenly called Hungarian music) through his concert tours with Hungarian violinist Remenyi. However, the overall moods of the two quartets could hardly be more different. The tragic darkness of Op.25 is contrasted in Op.26 with some of Brahms’s most sublimely sunny music. While one can see the influence of Beethoven’s intensity in Op.25, a relationship to the lyricism, expansiveness and dramatic sensitivity of Schubert could just as easily be noted in much of Op.26. There is a particular serene warmth that pervades much of the A major quartet. And while the Finale of Op.25 has a certain desperate wildness to it, the Finale of Op.26 displays as much energy but generally with a dance-like and joyous exuberance.

Steve Larson

About the Artists

Sally Pinkas (piano), since her London debut at Wigmore Hall, has been heard as soloist and chamber musician throughout the world. Among career highlights for this Israeli-born musician are performances with the Boston Pops, the Aspen Philharmonia, Jupiter Symphony and the Bulgarian Chamber Orchestra, and appearances at the festivals of Marlboro, Tanglewood, Aspen and Rockport, as well as Kfar Blum in Israel, Officina Scotese in Italy, and Masters de Pontlevoy in France. In 2019 she will be making her Indonesian debut, performing Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto with the Bandung Symphony.

Pinkas’ solo discography includes works by Schumann, Debussy, Rochberg, Perez-Velazquez and Wolff for the MSR, Centaur, Naxos, Albany and Mode labels. Long drawn to the music of Fauré, she followed her critically acclaimed release of Fauré’s 13 Nocturnes (Musica Omnia) with a recording of Fauré’s Piano Quartets and his 13 Barcarolles (MSR), earning the title “A Fauré Master Returns” on an enthusiastic review by ClassicsToday. The Wall Street Journal noted her “exquisite performance” in her “superlatively well-played” recording of Harold Shapero’s Piano Music (Toccata Classics, UK), and Gramophone hailed her as “the scintillating force...” in a recent Mozart release (MSR).

Praised for her radiant tone and driving energy, Pinkas commands a wide range of repertoire and continues to explore rarely glimpsed musical realms. In 2015 she made her debut in the Philippines, performing 19th-century Filipino “salon music” for the University of the Philippines’ Centennial celebrations. In collaboration with her husband Evan Hirsch, Pinkas’s well-established Hirsch-Pinkas Piano Duo has toured extensively throughout Europe and Southeast Asia, and has premiered and recorded works by Rochberg, Pinkham, Child, Dong and Oboe Lee. With Ensemble Schumann, an oboe-viola-piano trio, Pinkas has released two acclaimed CDs featuring the music of Mozart, Klughardt, Schumann, Kahn and Loeffler. Other collaborations include the Adaskin String Trio, the Apple Hill String Quartet and the Villiers Quartet in the UK.

Pinkas holds performance degrees from Indiana University and the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Ph.D. in Composition from Brandeis University. Her principal teachers were Russell Sherman, George Sebok, Luise Vosgerchian and Genia Bar-Niv (piano), Sergiu Natra (composition), and Robert Koff (chamber music). Pianist-in-residence at the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College, she is Professor of Music in Dartmouth’s Music Department.

Adaskin String Trio (Emlyn Ngai, violin, Steve Larson, viola, Mark Fraser, cello) since 1994 has won over audiences with exuberant playing and programming that blends classical masterpieces with unexpected treasures. Critics agree; their playing has been hailed for “vigor, precision and stylistic certitude” (Charleston Gazette) as well as “spontaneity, intensity and charm” (Peninsula Review). Wrote Classical Voice of New England, “The audience was immediately on its feet to acknowledge the superb playing... If you are a lover of chamber music and the Adaskin is performing in a venue near you, make sure you’re in the audience!”
The trio has toured throughout the USA and Canada performing at venues such as the The Frick Collection in New York, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC and the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, and in Boston, Los Angeles, Toronto, Montreal and Chicago.

This dynamic ensemble commands an impressive string trio repertoire ranging from Haydn and Schubert to Dohnányi, Villa-Lobos, Schnittke and composers of today including Chick Corea, Paul Simon and Michael White. Gramophone Magazine hailed the trio’s “superb playing” on their two-CD set of the five Beethoven String Trios, the cornerstone of the repertoire. A particular pleasure for the trio is introducing audiences to gorgeous and rarely heard gems by undeservedly neglected masters such as Taneyev, Martinu, Rozsa, Berkeley and Klein.

Special collaborations are an exciting part of many of the trio’s concerts, from quartets with oboe or piano by Mozart, Elgar and Brahms to quintets with clarinet or accordion by Golijov and Piazzolla. Their MSR Classics release of the two piano quartets by Gabriel Fauré with pianist Sally Pinkas was hailed as “worth celebrating ... splendid” (Classical Voice of New England).

Although the Adaskin String Trio is currently based in New England, the members of the trio are all originally from Canada. They met in Montreal where they each studied chamber music with founding Orford Quartet cellist Marcel Saint-Cyr. They later completed two years as ensemble-in-residence at The Hartt School under the guidance of the Emerson Quartet. The trio is named in honor of Murray Adaskin, one of Canada’s most loved and respected composers, and two of his brothers, violinist Harry Adaskin and producer and music educator John Adaskin.

Emlyn Ngai (violin), in addition to his role on modern violin in the trio, is a highly respected historical violinist. He is Associate Concertmaster for the Carmel Bach Festival Orchestra and Concertmaster of the Philadelphia baroque orchestra and chamber ensemble Tempest di Mare. He has performed with these and numerous other renowned ensembles throughout Europe and North America. As first prize winner at the 1995 Locatelli Concours Amsterdam, Ngai recorded a solo CD for Vanguard Classics and has since released many other highly praised discs for Musica Omnia, ATMA, Centaur, Eclectra, Koch, New World Records and Telarc. Currently he teaches modern and baroque violin, chamber music and performance practice at The Hartt School where he also co-directs the Collegium Musicum.

Steve Larson (viola) performs regularly in duo with his wife, violinist Annie Trépanier, and throughout the Americas and Europe with their chamber groups Avery Ensemble and Cuatro Puntos. He is also a member of the acclaimed oboe, viola and piano trio, Ensemble Schumann. Praised for a singing tone and flawless intonation, Larson performs and teaches each summer at the Wintergreen Festival in Virginia and has performed as a guest with esteemed ensembles such as the Emerson String Quartet and Lions Gate Trio. Also a former member of the Alcan String Quartet, Larson won second prize at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition in 1997 in Great Britain, receiving the award for his performance of the commissioned work. Currently Senior Artist Teacher at The Hartt School of the University of Hartford in Connecticut where he has served both as String Department Chair and Chamber Music Chair, Larson holds degrees from McGill University, the University of Montreal and The Hartt School. He plays an exceptional 17-3/8-inch viola made by Helmuth Keller in 1981.

Mark Fraser (cello), originally from Montreal, studied with Walter Joachim, Aldo Parisot, Yuli Turovsky and David Finckel; and he holds degrees from McGill University, l’Université de Montréal and The Hartt School. For many years he was the founding Artistic Director of Project Renaissance, an arts festival near Montreal. Fraser also performs frequently as a soloist and in recital; his recording credits include a CD of works by Bach, Schumann and Prokofiev with pianist Sooka Wang, and a 2013 CD of three of the Bach Suites for Solo Cello. In 2014 he became Executive Artistic Director of Mohawk Trail Concerts, a 45-year-old chamber music series based in Western Massachusetts, where he now lives.
Upcoming Events

Sphinx Virtuosi
Music Without Borders
Tue • October 9 • 7 pm
Music seeking harmony in the face of conflict and hardship, from a chamber orchestra with a mission to make classical music more inclusive.

Orlando Consort
Voices Appeared
Wed • January 23 • 7 pm
Stellar vocal ensemble’s live score for silent film masterpiece about Joan of Arc transports us back to the 15th century.

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