



SPHINX COMPETITION WINNER: ELENA URIOSTE, VIOLIN

Jonathan Coombs, piano

Sunday, November 15, 2009, at 3pm

Sunday Salon Series | Foellinger Great Hall

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PROGRAM

Sphinx Competition Winner: Elena Urioste, violin
Jonathan Coombs, piano

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Rondo Brilliant in B Minor, Op. 70, D. 895

Richard Strauss
(1864-1949)

Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 18
Allegro ma non troppo
Improvisation: Andante cantabile
Finale: Andante; Allegro

20-minute intermission

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891-1953)

Sonata No. 1 in F Minor for Violin and Piano, Op. 80
Andante assai
Allegro brusco
Andante
Allegro; Andante assai, come prima

Jenő Hubay
(1858-1937)

Fantasie Brillante on Bizet's Carmen, Op. 3, No. 3

Program subject to change

Franz Schubert
Born January 31, 1797, in Vienna
Died November 19, 1828, in Vienna
Rondo Brilliant in B Minor, Op. 70, D. 895

To explain Schubert is to explain a miracle, and we should attempt it only with the reminder that he said of himself: "It sometime seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all." Indeed, he belonged to it so briefly that the size and impact of his output are astonishing. Within his short lifespan of 31 years, he composed no less than nine symphonies, 20 string quartets, two piano trios, a variety of other significant chamber works such as the famous "*Trout*" Quintet, the *Cello Quintet*, numerous operas, 21 piano sonatas, as well as other solo piano works including the *Wanderer Fantasy*, two glorious sets of impromptus, and the beautiful *F Minor Fantasy* for four hands. Looming over all this is his vast catalogue of over 600 songs. Despite illness, depression, and persistent financial troubles, the last five years of Schubert's life were remarkably productive: the song cycles *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, *Symphony No. 9*, the great *Quintet in C Major*, the last three piano sonatas, and the remarkable *Rondo Brilliant* for violin and piano written in the autumn of 1826, just two years before his death.

Schubert published only three of his many chamber music works during his lifetime, the *Rondo Brilliant* being one of them. Somehow neglected in the violin repertoire, it was written as a showpiece for the Bohemian violinist Josef Slavjck and pianist Maria von Bocklet, who gave its premiere in one of the few public performances of Schubert's music outside his household Schubertiads. A critic described it as displaying "a fiery imagination" blown by "a mighty

hurricane" and then rocked "by gentle waves." The *Rondo* received its Carnegie Hall premiere on January 12, 1894, with Bronislaw Huberman, violin, and Elly Ney, piano. The title, somewhat of a misnomer, was assigned to it by the publisher. In reality, the work includes an introduction marked Andante followed by a five-part (ABACA) rondo marked Allegro and concludes with a rousing coda.

Yet form does not tell all. A bravado opening soon becomes a lyrical song displaying the best of Schubert's talents. From the piano we hear a rippling accompaniment figure that also marks Schubert's style. Piano and violin pass the leading role back and forth with the piano offering powerful chords and the violin showing dramatic string techniques. Contrasting moods also mark the work. Sadness is suddenly dispelled by moments of happiness—even a lively dance. Both instruments indulge in virtuosic displays before they return to Schubertian lyricism. After a joyful climax, Schubert returns to the bravado opening statement and then races to a breathtaking conclusion. Misnomer or not, the word "brilliant" aptly describes the piece.

The reason for the work's relative neglect could very well be its virtuosic challenges, its unexpected harmonic changes, and its searing Romanticism, though couched in Classical style, that was surely ahead of its time. We stand reminded of musicologist Alfred Einstein's statement that Schubert was "a Romantic Classicist who takes his rightful place in the ranks of the truly great together with Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven." Interestingly, Einstein adds that Schubert did not suffer the excess of Romanticism or, in his words, "the impotent exaltation which Grillparzer accused German Romantics of suffering

from and which permeated their poetry and the greater part of their music." What is suggested here is the perfection and emotional breadth of Schubert's music that transports us into the better world he longed for. Surely the *Rondo Brilliant* does that.

Richard Strauss
Born June 11, 1864, in Munich
Died September 8, 1949,
in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany
Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 18

Richard Strauss' long and successful career was one uncommonly comfortable for a composer. He came from a secure family who saw that his brilliant gifts were grounded by an excellent education and favorable contacts in the music world. His early works were so admired that by 21 he was declared the successor to Brahms and Wagner. While he moved in and out of tonality (*Elektra* to *Der Rosenkavalier*) and had his own form of daring, he never really bore the controversy associated with the Second Viennese School. The banning of his opera *Salome* for lasciviousness only resulted in its popularity and the financial success that enabled Strauss to build the villa at Garmisch where he and his wife, soprano Pauline de Ahna, lived from 1908 to the end of their lives. Even death was kind to him, as he remarked to his daughter-in-law Alice Strauss in his final hour, "Dying is just as I composed it in *Tod und Verklärung*."

The cloud that hangs over Strauss' life is his association with Nazism. This has been painted in various hues from nonpolitical naivete to calculated opportunism. One way or the other, in 1933 Strauss

was named president of the Reichsmusikhammer (RFK), the Nazi music council responsible for such serious matters as the purging and even execution of Jewish musicians and such ridiculous matters as the "Aryanized" version of Mendelssohn's incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Strauss was joined in the Nazi association by Wilhelm Furtwängler, Herbert von Karajan, and Elisabeth Swartzkopf. Fortunately, Strauss showed his colors by refusing to condemn the Jewish writer Stefan Zweig and was removed from his dubious post in 1935. From that point on, he was merely tolerated by the Nazis. There is record of an obsequious letter to Hitler, but it seems that Strauss was seeking protection for Alice, his Jewish daughter-in-law, and her children rather than for himself. He refused to take Nazi victims into his villa but presumably did not do so more in the name of wanting to be left alone to work than for any philosophical or moral objections. The destruction of the Munich Nationaltheater and the opera houses of Dresden, Weimar, and Vienna finally revealed the enormity of the tragedy to Strauss. In 1945, he wrote *Metamorphosen*, an elegy for the German musical life in which he had fared so well. In fear of "denazification," he and Pauline went into voluntary exile in Switzerland at the end of the war. He was acquitted of Nazi collaboration, was lionized in London by Sir Thomas Beecham, and returned to Garmisch in 1949, just four months before his death on September 8, 1949.

Strauss wrote his famous violin sonata between 1887 and 1888 at the age of 23, when he had just fallen in love with his wife to be, Pauline. Surely it is a romantic passion that governs the work, yet we should also note Strauss' thorough knowledge of

both the violin and the piano. The two instruments work as one, have their separate grand moments, and somehow share a concerto style. And let us not omit the operatic quality of the piece. Put all those effects together, and one has a work that justly deserves its fame and favor among virtuoso violinists.

A triumphant opening turns lavishly Romantic in the first movement. Unexpected harmonic changes lend the movement a hint of dark underpinnings, and the strong and lyrical singing of both instruments touches the heart. Downward and upward leaps color the movement's virtuosic impact. After a quieter middle section, soaring melodies return for a conclusion echoing the triumph of the opening statement.

Although it is somewhat ambiguous, the improvisation of the second movement occurs in the development section with its cadenza-like passages for the piano. Before that, the movement is sweetly lyrical except for momentary slips into the minor that give it an edge of sadness.

The dramatic Finale reveals the work's showpiece qualities for both instruments as they execute their daring arpeggios, once again in a form that suggests a double concerto with a full orchestra. The passion and warmth of the movement rise to a brilliant conclusion.

That Strauss wrote no other sonatas after the *Sonata for Violin and Piano* might be explained by his belief that program music was his true form of expression. He would turn from Classical sonata form to write his operas and his famous tone poems such as *Death*

and *Transfiguration* and *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. In a letter of 1888 he wrote, "I have found myself in a gradually ever increasing contradiction between the musical-poetic content that I want to convey and the ternary sonata form that has come down to us from the Classical composers. This is only possible through a program."

Sergei Prokofiev

Born April 27, 1891, in Sontsovka, Ukraine

Died March 5, 1953, in Moscow

Sonata No. 1 in F Minor for Violin and Piano, Op. 80

By his own admission, Prokofiev's music is Classical in form, innovative, propulsive, lyrical, and grotesque. If there is conflict inherent in this grouping of characteristics, we can only assume that it was an intentional by-product of his abrasiveness and brilliance. How a man so inspired could be engulfed with ordinary homesickness for a country he both feared and loved is further conflict in Prokofiev. In Russia, he was both adulated and condemned and only returned as a permanent resident in 1936 after the dissolution in 1932 of the Russian Association of Proletarian Musicians, which sought to rid Russian music of "decadent foreign influence" and to promote "socially responsible, realistic music in the service of the Soviet state." In 1948, Stalin's condemnation broke Prokofiev's spirit and contributed to his physical decline. He died of a brain hemorrhage on the day of Stalin's death in 1953. Because of the throngs gathered in Red Square to mourn Stalin, for three days it was impossible to transport Prokofiev's body to the Soviet Composer's Union headquarters for a funeral. Since so many musicians were engaged to play for

Stalin's memorial, a taped recording of the funeral march from *Romeo and Juliet* was used at Prokofiev's service. David Oistrakh and Sviatoslav Richter, however, did manage to play the first and third movements of *Violin Sonata No. 1*.

Prokofiev worked on the sonata between 1938 and 1946, with *Violin Sonata No. 2* intervening in 1944. The work is as dark as the years in which it was written. In fact, music has seldom better expressed bleakness and isolation. The dark opening by the piano initiates a relentless tension that does not abate until the final notes of the movement. Its stark simplicity, however, does not negate its technical challenges for both instruments. The strange sliding scales offered by the violin at the end of this and the final movement were described by Prokofiev as "wind passing through a graveyard."

The second movement, *Allegro brusco*, is just that—brusque, daring, and even grotesque, suggesting an angry joke. Yet contained within is a show of lyricism giving the movement a kind of dark brilliance. Virtuosity is also evident with both instruments having their separate moments of display.

The third movement, *Andante*, is a new story, still dark but now the anger is gone and sadness prevails. Is there a ray of hope? Perhaps in the shimmering loveliness we don't always associate with Prokofiev. Despite this, a bleakness persists.

The last movement brings a certain sense of exhilaration, perhaps suggesting the end of World War II, which destroyed so much of Prokofiev's life. Its technical challenges are of the highest order for

both instruments, and its force recalls an incident associated with its premiere by violinist David Oistrakh and pianist Lev Oborin. At a rehearsal, Prokofiev insisted that Oborin play a certain passage more aggressively. Oborin remarked that he was afraid of overpowering the violin, but Prokofiev replied, "It should sound in such a way that people jump in their seats and say, 'Is he out of his mind?'" Near the end of the movement, the sliding scales return, a curious insert into this more celebratory moment. The work ends with a sadly lyrical statement by the violin.

Violin Sonata No. 1 was first written for flute but transcribed by Prokofiev at the suggestion of David Oistrakh for the obvious reasons.

Jenő Hubay

Born September 15, 1858, in Pest, Hungary

Died March 12, 1937, in Budapest, Hungary

Fantasie Brillante on Bizet's Carmen, Op. 3, No. 3

Eugen Huber honored his Hungarian heritage by changing his name at the age of 21 to Jenő Hubay, as we know him today. By that time, he had already spent five years of study, first with Joseph Joachim and later with Henri Vieuxtemps. He served as principal professor at the Brussels Conservatory and then returned permanently to Budapest, where he taught at the National Conservatory and became his father's successor as director of the Academy of Music from 1919 to 1934. Hubay composed no less than eight operas and four symphonies, but it is for his violin showpieces, among them the "Hejre Kati" from his *Scènes de la Csárdá* and the *Fantasie Brillante*, that he is best remembered.

Hubay was not the only composer inspired by Bizet's opera. Others include Franz Waxman and the most famous, Pablo Sarasate, with his *Carmen Fantasy* for violin and orchestra of 1833. The appeal for composers certainly lay in the highly Romantic nature of Bizet's music and his treatment of Spanish themes, which was a going thing for many composers of the time, namely Hubay's French contemporary Maurice Ravel. The larger question of why composers were drawn to opera for violin showpieces probably rests in the popularity of violin recitals in the 19th century and in what Robert Maxam in *Fanfare* (May/June 2008) described as "the excitement earlier audiences likely felt in hearing familiar melodies in dazzling new settings." Fortunately, this performance preserves the great tradition of the violin recital and resurrects our auditory pleasure as described by Maxam. It also brings, relatively speaking, one of the lesser-known treatments of Bizet's opera, one that is every bit as challenging as Sarasate's or Waxman's.

The "dazzle" of Hubay's *Fantasie* is immediately evident, first of all, by his use of popular themes from Bizet's opera and, secondly, by his employment of virtuoso violin techniques with Hungarian style. Nor does he neglect the piano in his display of virtuosity. Lyricism is handed back and forth between the two instruments in a lovely balance of technical prowess and emotional effectiveness. If Hubay's *Fantasie* is a showcase for virtuosity, it is also more than that. That said, we cannot fail to be astounded at the multiple stops (playing of more than one string at once), the fast bow work, the dramatic slides, and the daring leaps. At the same time, we are treated to the pleasure of hearing Bizet's memorable moments

in *Carmen* from the famous overture through the seductive *Habanera* and, of course, to the infamous *March of the Toreadors*. Relish the moments.

Program notes © 2009 by Lucy Miller Murray

Lucy Miller Murray is the founder of Market Square Concerts in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and served as director of the chamber music series from 1982 to 2009. Her book, Adams to Zemlinsky: A Friendly Guide to Chamber Music, was published by Concert Artists Guild of New York and is available at Amazon.com.

ELENA URIOSTE, VIOLIN

Elena Urioste, selected by *Symphony* magazine as an emerging artist to watch, has been hailed by critics and audiences alike for her rich tone, the nuanced lyricism of her playing, and her commanding stage presence. Since making her debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra at age 13 as the winner of the Greenfield Competition, she has appeared as a soloist with major orchestras throughout the United States, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Pops, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Atlanta, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, New Mexico, and San Antonio Symphony Orchestras, as well as Hungary's Orchestra Dohnanyi Budafok. Upcoming performances include debuts with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Buffalo Philharmonic.

As one of three recipients of the prestigious London Music Makers Award, a three-year international career development award, Urioste will make her Wigmore Hall debut in 2009. As the first-place laureate in the junior and senior divisions of the Sphinx Competition, she debuted at Carnegie Hall in 2004 and has returned annually to that esteemed venue's Stern Auditorium as a soloist. In 2009, Urioste also made her debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall with the award-winning conductor Alondra de la Parra. She has collaborated with the acclaimed pianists Christopher O'Riley and Ignat Solzhenitsyn; conductors Robert Spano, Keith Lockhart, Carlos Miguel Prieto, and Michael Stern; and violinists Shlomo Mintz, Cho-Liang Lin, and David Kim, among others. A featured artist in the Ravinia, La Jolla, Sarasota, and Kingston Music Festivals, the International Young Artists Music Festival, and Switzerland's Sion Valais International Festival of Music, Urioste has been most recently invited to

participate in the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival next summer.

The 2007 first-prize winner of the Sion International Violin Competition, Urioste was also awarded the audience prize and the prize for the best performance of the competition's newly commissioned work.

Urioste's media appearances include multiple performances on the popular radio programs *From the Top* and *Performance Today*, as well as on Telemundo. She has been featured in the Emmy Award-winning documentary *Breaking the Sound Barrier* and in numerous magazines, including *Symphony*, *Strings*, *Careers and Colleges*, and *Philadelphia Music Makers*. Urioste's first CD was recently released on the White Pine label.

Urioste is a graduate of the esteemed Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Joseph Silverstein, Pamela Frank, and Ida Kavafian, and she also completed graduate studies with Joel Smirnoff at the Juilliard School. Other notable teachers include David Cerone, Choong-Jin Chang, Soovin Kim, and the late Rafael Druian.

The outstanding violin being used by Urioste is a Michelangelo Bergonzi, Cremona, circa 1750, which is on extended loan through the generous efforts of Society for Strings Inc., Meadowmount School of Music, from the private collection of Dr. Charles E. King.

JONATHAN COOMBS, PIANO

The American pianist Jonathan Coombs began his musical studies at the age of three and has since been the recipient of many national and international awards. Described by Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* as “soulful and unbuttoned,” Jonathan has elicited enthusiastic responses from audiences and critics alike.

Making his orchestral debut at the age of 11, Jonathan has performed under the direction of leading conductors, including Migel Harth Bedoya, Joseph Silverstein, Keith Lockhart, Robert Henderson, Kory Katseanes, and Bundit Ungrangsee. Shortly after his 15th birthday, Jonathan was named the recipient of the Guimar Novaes award, given by the Brazilian ambassador to a young citizen of the United States for distinguished accomplishments in the field of fine arts. Jonathan has competed at both the national level and the international level and has garnered many top honors, including the silver medal for the solo competition and the gold medal for the ensemble competition at the 2002 Inaugural New York Piano Competition under the auspices of the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation. Jonathan’s participation has been viewed nationally in the documentary *Speaking with Music*, a behind-the-scenes look at the competition, shown on PBS.

In 2000, Jonathan was recorded live at Boston Symphony Hall on the nationally syndicated radio program *From the Top*. On January 15, 2003, he was featured on *The McGraw-Hill Companies’ Young Artists’ Showcase*. Hosted by Robert Sherman on WQXR, the classical music station of *The New York Times*, Jonathan’s performance was broadcast live.

Jonathan has given solo, chamber, and orchestral concert performances in numerous prestigious arts venues throughout the United States, including Alice Tully Hall, Abravanel Hall, Boston Symphony Hall, the Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Temple Emanu-El, the Tabernacle, Hann Hall, and Maurice Gusman Hall.

He is an alumnus of the Music Academy of the West International Music Festival, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal. Jonathan received both his Bachelor of Music degree and his Master of Music degree from the Juilliard School as a student of Robert McDonald.