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Program Notes for DMA Recital, April 22nd, 2024

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach – Duet No.1 in G major for Two Violas

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784) was the eldest son of Johann Sebastian Bach and Maria Barbara Bach. Born in Weimar, where J.S. Bach was employed as an organist, he received the most extensive musical education from his father compared to his five other sons that received a musical tutoring. When his father was chosen for the position as Cantor at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig in 1723, W.F. Bach was able to become a student at the Thomasschule and then went on to study law at the University of Leipzig. He later went to the University of Halle to continue his studies in law and mathematics.

W.F. Bach went on to hold a number of positions as organist, including positions in Dresden and Halle. After a number of years employed in church positions, he decided in 1764 to become a freelance organist and composer and ended up moving to Berlin. According to accounts from this time, he had eccentric behavior which may have been caused from excessive drinking and an inflated opinion of his abilities. His reputation persisted even after his life, in the subject of a novel by Albert Emil Brachvogel (1824-1878), where the son is trying to escape the reputation of his father. His freelancing was not as successful as he hoped it would be and ended up leaving his wife and daughter with very little money when he passed away.

W.F. Bach's education from his father can be documented in the *Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*, which contains, among other works, the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier and the two and three-part Inventions. While J.S. Bach's music is now seen as one of the focal points of the Baroque period, his sons composed in a style that is sometimes

called “pre-Classical” or, more accurately, “Galant”. The Galant style would influence composers such as Haydn and Mozart who were of the next generation of composers, whose style would be referred to as being a part of the “Classical” period beginning in the 19th century.

As the Galant specialist Robert Gjerdingen has written, “Galant was a word much used in the eighteenth century. It referred to a collection of traits, attitudes, and manners associated with the cultured nobility.” In the visual arts, the movement is often referred to as the Rococo style. In music, this meant a simplification of the overt counterpoint of the Baroque period and many of its musical forms. Music in the Galant style is often reduced in compositional complexity by relying on a number of repeated musical patterns that are based on the stepwise motion of the scale degree. Like the majority of his contemporaries, W.F. Bach made sure that his music was always up to date in the latest style to appeal to the current tastes of his audience.

W.F. Bach composed three duets for two violas, most likely after 1775, when he was a freelance musician in Berlin. The Duet No.1 in G major is in three movements, Allegro, Lamento, and Presto. The opening Allegro movement starts with canonic entrances, which evokes his father’s viola writing in the sixth Brandenburg Concerto. The slow Lamento movement is chromatic with moments of sharp piercing dissonance between the two instruments. The last movement is cast in a fast 6/8 time in the style of a gigue with more canonic entrances between the instruments. It is fortunate that this work survives, as much of W.F. Bach’s music from his time in Berlin was only rediscovered in 1999 by the Bach scholar Christoph Wolff, who tracked down an archive of his manuscripts from the Berlin Singakademie in storage in Kiev, Ukraine.

Carl Philipp Stamitz – Duet No.1 in C major for Two Violas

Carl Philipp Stamitz (sometimes spelled Karel Stamic in its Czech form, or partially as Karl Stamitz) was born in Mannheim in 1745 as the eldest son of the composer Johann Stamitz (1717-1757). Along with his father as his brother, Anton Stamitz (1750-c.1809), he is regarded as being an integral part of the "Mannheim School", employed in the court orchestra of Elector Palatine in Mannheim. The style of the Mannheim School is in the Galant fashion of this time, and many of the stylistic choices that the Mannheim school made during this time became famous in Europe and much imitated by their contemporaries.

Among the members of the Stamitz family, Carl Stamitz was the most cosmopolitan of the group of composers. He played violin, viola, and viola d'amore at the court orchestra in Mannheim, but left Mannheim to live in Paris in 1770 with his brother, Anton. He toured as a soloist in the 1770's across Europe as far north as England and the Netherlands. Since he played so many string instruments, one of his tricks while on tour was to play his Viola Concerto in D major, Op.1 on any string instrument that was handed to him, including the cello and double bass. In 1794 in became the conductor of the court orchestra in Jena, Thuringia and passed away in 1801.

Stamitz was very prolific as a composer throughout his life. He composed more than 50 symphonies, 60 concertos, and a large number of chamber music. His viola concerto is still considered a part of the standard repertoire for the instrument. As with many works by the Stamitz family, it is sometimes difficult to know which member of the family composed the works in manuscripts when only the surname was written. It's thought that both Carl and Anton

wrote duos for the violin and viola, with Carl Stamitz writing over 20 works in the genre and his brother writing 12. The three viola duets by Carl Stamitz are likely the only contributions the family made to the viola duet repertoire. He was very much the type of composer to write new music for a new concert or event. His years freelancing made him flexible to producing new works, sometimes very quickly, but his years touring made him heavily in debt. Towards the end of his life he experimented with alchemy to try to produce gold to pay off his debt from past years.

Stamitz's three duos for two violas are written in the galant style that his famous symphonies were known for. The Duo.No1 in C major is cast in three movements: Allegro, Andante, and Rondo. As was typical with many of Stamitz's works, the first two movements are in binary form with repeated A and B sections, and the Rondo is composed with the repeated A section reoccurring with variations. These forms would become important to solidify the Classical style in Vienna with composers such as Haydn and Mozart emulating what they heard from the Mannheim school.

Isang Yun – Contemplation for Two Violas (1988)

Isang Yun was one of South Korea's most celebrated composers in the 20th century. Born in 1917 during the Japanese occupation of Korea, he first studied in Osaka and Tokyo with the composer Tomojirō Ikenouchi. Upon returning to Korea, he was active in the resistance to the Japanese occupation and was imprisoned and tortured in 1943. After the Korean War ended in 1953, he was able to leave the country to move to Paris and later Berlin to study more

contemporary techniques with composers such as Boris Blacher. His international reputation started in 1966 with the performance of his orchestral work Réak in Donauschingen. The work refers to the idea of “proper music” from Confucius and is a combination of Korean ceremonial music with modernist Western techniques. The following year, the Korean secret police abducted him and took him from Berlin to Seoul where he was tortured and charged with high treason. He was sentenced to life in prison, but following international protests from fellow musicians, as well as a formal protest from West Germany, he was released from prison in 1969.

After he was released, he made his home in Germany and became a German citizen in 1971, holding professorships in Hanover and Berlin. He believed in a unified Korea and before North Korean started the total ban of South Korean musicians in 1990, he founded the Isang Yun Music Institute in Pyongyang in 1984. His visits to North Korea and the institute drew criticism for being friendly to the government of Kim Il Sung. Isang Yun’s music drew inspiration from traditional Korean music and European post-war modernism and much of his music imitates the sounds of Korean instruments. The tragedy of Isang Yun’s life and work would be that he would never return to the unified Korea that he longed for and died of pneumonia in Berlin in 1995. His personal political history, as well as pieces protesting the martial law in South Korea, made him never fully accepted by the South Korean government. Even while he refused to denounce his former actions publicly, his reputation remains as one of South Korea’s most important composers.

Contemplation for Two Violas was written in 1988 and was premiered in the chamber music hall of the Berlin Philharmonie by violists Eckart Schloifer and Brett Dean. Composed in Sveg, located in central Sweden, the original title of the piece was “Stille am See” (Silence by the

Lake) and is supposed to reflect the “calm and clarity of the Nordic lake landscape”. The piece floats around different tonal centers that evoke familiar ideas of major and minor, but often modified with additional tones (such as minor thirds with an additional 2nd) to create ambiguousness about referring to traditional tonality. The piece is centered around the opening pitch A, but never lands on a clear tonal center. Instead, the two instruments develop around different pitch centers and create a tonal landscape evocative of the physical landscape that Isang Yun imagined when composing this work.

Frank Bridge – Lament for Two Violas

Frank Bridge was born in Brighton, England in 1879. Born into a working-class family of 12 children, his father was originally a printer but changed his profession to teaching violin and conducting towards the middle of his life. Bridge’s father ended up getting a job as the music director of the Empire Theatre, conducting the orchestra in light music and variety acts there most nights during the week. Frank Bridge’s interest in music started from the age of 12, when he attended the Brighton School of Music. He learned how to play the violin and received a scholarship at 17 to attend the Royal College of Music to study violin. During his time at the Royal College of Music he was offered a scholarship to switch majors to composition, where he ended up studying with Charles Villiers Stanford.

Shortly after graduating from the Royal Academy of Music, he started playing the viola and found work in a number of string quartets such as the Grimson Quartet and English String Quartet. Bridge was active as a performer around London until he became friends with the

wealthy patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, who let Bridge dedicate his time to composing. While Bridge did not have an official teaching position, he sometimes taught composition privately. His most famous pupil was the composer Benjamin Britten, who would become a close friend of his. He passed away in 1941 in Eastborne, England.

The Lament for two violas has an interesting story behind it, as the music was almost completely lost after it was premiered. Bridge composed a composition called Caprice and Lament in 1911 to perform with the famed viola soloist Lionel Tertis in Wigmore Hall in 1912 in a concert that would also feature compositions by York Bowen, Cyril Scott, and Benjamin Dale. The musicologist and Bridge specialist Paul Hindmarsch was able to reconstruct the Lament movement in 1981 from sketches that survive in the reference library of the Royal College of Music. Among Bridge's sketches are three leaves that contain a draft that is nearly complete, but the first movement Caprice only exists in small fragments and cannot be completed.

It's fortunate that the piece could be reconstructed, as Frank Bridge's Lament has become an important part of the viola duo literature. The expressive, haunting style of its opening and ending shows the capabilities of the lyrical side of the viola. Because Bridge was a violist, he was able to write that was both impressive to listeners yet idiomatic to the instrument, while showing its expressive qualities.