University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

ScholarWorks@UARK

Concert Recordings Music

2018

Concert recording 2018-03-03

Dominic K. Na

Tomoko Kashiwagi

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.uark.edu/musccr

Part of the Music Performance Commons

Citation

Na, D. K., & Kashiwagi, T. (2018). Concert recording 2018-03-03. *Concert Recordings.* Retrieved from https://scholarworks.uark.edu/musccr/531

This Music Performance is brought to you for free and open access by the Music at ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concert Recordings by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact scholar@uark.edu.

Concert Program

Sonata for Cello and Piano in D Major . . . . L.V. Beethoven (1770–1827)
Op. 102, No. 2
- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio con molto sentiment d'affetto (attaca)
- III. Allegro – Allegro fugato

Sonata for Cello and Piano . . . . Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
- I. Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto
- II. Sérénade: Modérément animé
- III. Finale: Animé, léger et nerveux

Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven, Cello Sonata in D Major, Op. 102, No. 2

Beethoven's last cello sonata presents us with a more traditional layout of three movements, widely contrasting both in compositional style and in mood. A brisk and confident sonata-form first movement is succeeded by a deeply lyrical slow movement, and the sonata ends with a fugue.

The perky fanfares that open the work – four 16th notes and a big leap – prepare us for surprises but the cello immediately strikes a more conciliatory lyrical tone and the entire exposition proceeds in spurts, alternating between forthright bravado strutting cheek by jowl at close quarters with less aggressive melodic impulses. A development section is where you expect a composer to mix things up a bit but this movement's development section is actually where you start to feel for the first time the sweep of long phrases governed by an overarching harmonic unfolding in place of the expositions' stop-and-go pattern of delivery. This new 'can't we all just get along' mood continues into a recapitulation where the gaps are filled in and the pulse remains more continuous. The harmonic wanderings

of the coda promise mystery, but then – like an adult amusing a child by hiding his face behind his hands only to spring out gleefully into full view – Beethoven steers the movement at the last moment to a resolute cadence in the home key.

What follows is the only real traditional slow movement in all the cello sonatas, a place where the cello gets to display its lyrical gifts in a pool of light at center stage. The movement's solemnly paced melody of even 8th notes, with a pause at the end of each phrase, suggests a chorale tune, but the comparison is undercut by the oddly 'limping' dotted-rhythm accompaniment it soon receives from the piano. There is something 'not quite right' about this deep lyricism, with its eerie unisons and with melodic turns that are more worrying than graceful. Relief arrives in a middle section in the major mode that restores a happier tone to the proceedings. When the opening section returns, however, the gravity of its ominous message is reinforced by low-register rumblings in the piano, and its 'limping tic' has only got worse.

The last movement begins with a simple rising scale presented in turn by the cello and the piano, a musical gesture reminiscent of how a magician innocently shows you both sides of a silk handkerchief from which he is going to miraculously pull a flapping pigeon or a bouquet of flowers. The magic trick here is that this cheerful little melodic fragment, which comes as such a break from all the eye-brow-knitting seriousness of the slow movement, is soon revealed to be the start of a right proper, 'learned', fugue subject. It's as if you had just witnessed a circus clown pulling off his multi- colored uniform to reveal a diplomat's tie-and-tails outfit, complete with dangling medals, underneath.

This fugue subject is metrically a bit 'off' in the way that it weakens the first beat of the bar, giving it ample forward momentum but without a regular rhythmic patterning. It is a theme both dainty and merry, at the same time. The merriment gets a bit crowded after a while, though, like too many people crammed into a Volkswagen, and the counterpoint gets quite gritty, leading to a traffic jam of strettos in contrary motion. When the dust settles, a less jumpy, more serene countersubject in long note values arrives at the door to lead everyone into a concluding section vibrating with trills to celebrate the newfound spirit of contrapuntal amity with which the work ends.

– Donald G. Gíslason

Claude Debussy, Sonata for Cello and Piano

Debussy abandoned composition for almost a year following the outbreak of World War 1. He left his home in Paris for the countryside, not only because the city was now void of music and culture, but because he sought to recuperate his health, which had deteriorated since being diagnosed with cancer of the colon in 1909. He began to write again while staying in the coastal town of Pourville in Normandy. Not since the Quatuor à cordes of 1893 had Debussy written a substantial piece of chamber music, so his return to this medium would have provided a tabula rasa to help overcome his creative impasse. This choice was also a pragmatic one, as many of his musical friends had been enlisted in the armed forces.

Debussy planned a set of 'Six sonatas for various instruments', The first, Sonata for cello and piano, was completed in just a few months: "I'm writing like a man possessed, or one who must die the next morning", with the Sonata for flute, viola and harp following quickly afterward. However, Debussy completed only three such sonatas; the third, for violin and piano, was the last work he completed before he died of the cancer he had suffered with for many years. Ever the nationalist, 'Claude Debussy, musicien Français', as he signed these works' title pages, characterized this 'late' period with a return to the traditional forms and idioms of the French Baroque. 'I like [the cello sonata's] proportions and form, which are almost classical in the best sense of the word." The opening of the Prologue, with its stately ornamentation, recalls the keyboard works of Jean-Philippe Rameau or François Couperin.

However conservative the form is, the music is decidedly modern, angular and colorful, with the cello imitating a flute, lute and bass guitar. The music critic for the Times wrote of the première: 'The first [movement] has an exceedingly appealing principal theme for the violoncello, which is developed as far as it is possible for Debussy to develop anything. For he seems determined never to commit himself to a positive statement or to let his music go beyond the realm of tentative suggestion. The serenade [...] is the most elusive movement of the three.'

In 1916, Louis Rosoor, cello professor at the Bordeaux Conservatory, gained a copy of the sonata and suggested to its composer that he had subconsciously based it on 'Pierrot Lunaire' the sad clown, and other figures from the Italian commedia dell'arte. Though Debussy was quick to repudiate this, when Rosoor performed the piece he subtitled it 'Pierrot faché avec la lune', and published a short narrative in his programme notes. Although it is well documented that this programmatic interpretation did not emerge from Debussy's imagination, it persists in scholarly writings on the sonata to the present day. Indeed, I too find its charm irresistible, and thus reprint it here.

> **[Prologue]** Pierrot wakes up with a jolt, shakes off his sleepiness, and remembers fondly the charm of his beloved...
>
> **[Sérénade]** ...to whom he goes to play a serenade; but the most beguiling entreaties leave her unfeelingly cold towards him...
>
> **[Final]** Pierrot consoles himself meanwhile, by singing a song to freedom, but not without some regret...

– Daniel Edwards