

Program Notes

Brett Walfish

Dissertation Recital, April 25, 2023

Composed by York Bowen while in his early 20s, *Sonata No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 18 for Viola and Piano*, was performed by York Bowen himself and violist Lionel Tertis. Representing the first of many collaborative efforts to pioneer viola as a solo instrument, this work was one of the few that was published during his lifetime. Having studied composition with members of the New German School and deeply inspired by the French Impressionists, Bowen's compositional language is similar to that of Liszt, Wagner, Franck, and Debussy. In this sonata, he is frequently found mixing various modes and scales, as well leaning into extended harmonies and exploring diatonic relationships. Written in three movements, the first movement, *Allegro Moderato* is a classic example of a Sonata form. Ominous and anxious in nature, yet masterfully tuneful and lyrical, the first theme is lightly contrasted by a warm and welcoming second theme. A comical closing theme marked *leggiero* lightens to overall serious and dramatic nature of the movement. The second movement, *Poco Lento e cantabile*, features a bittersweet, melancholy, and simplistic melody. Bowen makes several acknowledgements in this movement, including the famous "Morning Mood" motive from Grieg's Peer Gynt and Brahms' signature figuration of two against three. The final movement, *Finale. Presto*, boasts a distinctive Hungarian flare through the rustic and folky refrain that utilizes accented second beats. Written in a Sonata-Rondo form with recitative-like interruptions, this movement is by far the most demanding virtuosically. Bowen transforms the refrain using a variety of techniques – pizzicato, chords, scales, and glissandos – all to serve the purpose of showcasing the soloistic possibilities on the instrument.

The Second Movement of Atar Arad's Sonata for Solo Viola, *Alla bulgarese*, is a challenging and virtuosic work that is a stylistic hybrid between Bulgarian Folk Music and Bartok's Fifth String Quartet. Like the *Alla bulgarese* of Bartok's fifth string quartet, this movement follows an arch form - where the most tuneful or song-like melodies exist mainly on the edges. The movement begins with a striking introduction, invoking the final movement of Bartok's viola concerto. Then, the opening theme is heard, a beautiful, tuneful melody inspired by the folk songs heard in the village where Arad lived as a child in Tel Baruch, Israel. The inner sections use chromaticism to create intricate, virtuosic passages that use rhythmic modification to capture the folky essence. Other techniques used to create folk sounds include self-accompanying left hand pizzicato. The most emotional part of the movement is a nostalgic theme of double stop artificial harmonics. After making its way back through chromaticism and modal scales, the original theme returns to close the movement.

Compared to the more commonly performed J.S. Bach's Cello Suites, Telemann's *Viola da gamba Sonata in A minor, TWV 41:a6* offers much more improvisatory freedom. This is primarily achieved through ornamentation artistically chosen by the performer. The slower movements, *Largo* and *Soave*, provide ample space for trills, appoggiaturas, fills, slides, and dynamic swells such as *messa di voce*. The two contrasting fast movements, both titled *Allegro*, provides an opportunity for both the continuo and gamba (or viola) players to demonstrate their virtuosity in a concertante manner. Fugal references, altered elements of form, and the use of two against three figurations, clearly indicates the modernization of the times from the strict baroque rules of composition.

Le Grand Tango is a masterpiece that is characteristic of Astor Piazzolla's jazz-infused tonal language, lyrical nostalgia, and intricate rhythmic textures that supply addicting levels of energy. Written in a through-composed fashion, this work serves an homage to the tango genre that Piazzolla himself created, frequently using thematic material from his other compositions. The rhythmic drive is derived from several tango-specific stylistic elements: *marcato* (the simplest of the rhythmic accompaniments comprised of quarter notes), "tres, tres, y dos" or 3+3+2, and the *milonga* (commonly known as habanera). In order to do justice to Piazzolla's history and deep yet complicated relationship with the traditional Argentine tango, special effects must be elegantly imbued into the performance practice of any work by Piazzolla. Among those are a *latigo* (fast whip to a harmonic), *sirena* (fast upward glissando on a sixth or tritone), *fraseo* (rhythmic rubato), *la pelotita* ("bouncing ball" approach to even notes), *tambor* (pizzicato against the nail and fingerboard), and *chicharra* (cicada-like sound played behind the bridge). While none of these effects are written in, similarly to Baroque performance practice, these stylistic elements add an immeasurable amount of spirit and complexity to an already sophisticated composition