

Date du récital/Date of recital: May 3, 2019, 14h30

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Classe de/Class of: Matt Haimovitz

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Suite for Solo cello No. 1, Op. 72

Born and deceased in Suffolk, England, Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was a precocious musical spirit who studied composition with Frank Bridge and John Ireland. He is most known as a writer of vocal music and opera, but he also wrote instrumental and chamber works throughout his life. Britten was a master of simplicity borne with complex undercurrents. He wrote mostly tonally, never veering into the avant-garde aesthetic, hoping for his music to be “of use to people, to please them”. Considering his lack of concern about writing for posterity, ironically, he remains one of the most widely performed composers of his generation. Despite his outwardly accessible manner as a composer and person, Britten was a solitary soul who valued nighttime and silence. His work bears consonant charm bound with deep sadness, his wounded child heart meeting humanity’s dark follies with elegance and complex humour.

As with all of his cello works, the three cello suites were born out of a bond with the great cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. After hearing Rostropovich perform the six Bach cello suites, Britten intended to respond with six suites of his own, but died of congestive heart failure before completing the cycle. Written in 1964, Suite no. 1 evokes an Old World sound with three watery elemental Cantos interleaved among three pairs of two movements. The Fuga displays a Bachian intellect, while the Lamento evokes the mournful Sarabande of Suite no. 5. The Serenata exudes a Debussy-esque playful complexity, the Marcia linkable to Britten’s admiration of Mahler. The concluding perpetual motion unifies preceding apparitions in a gale of dream blender poignant soul memory.

Vež

Originally from Serbia, composer Ana Sokolovic (b. 1968) now resides in Canada, where she is an influential figure in the contemporary music world. In addition to music, her artistic background includes training in theatre and classical ballet, and her compositions imaginatively channel a fascination with different forms of art. She has received many awards (including a 2019 JUNO for Classical Composition of the Year), notable commissions, and is a professor of composition at the Université de Montréal. Sokolovic wrote the following about her piece: “*Vež* in Serbian means embroidery, needlework. This piece is inspired by traditional Balkan music. Repeated notes, irregular rhythms and tiny “embroidery” between accented structural pitches are in the main features of this piece.” *Vež* was commissioned by the CBC in 2005 for cellist Yegor Dyachkov.

Blue Yellow White

Emerging American composer TJ Cole (b. 1993) has been commissioned by the Cincinnati Symphony, the Louisville Orchestra, the Baltimore Symphony, Time for Three and the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, among others. She also served as composer-in-residence at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in 2014, and is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music. TJ is currently based in Philadelphia, where she is half of the dream-pop duo Twin Pixie. She provided the following note about *Blue Yellow White*:

As I've grown to take on adult responsibilities, I've become more and more nostalgic for childhood. When writing this piece, I was thinking about different ways to maintain a sense of childlikeness in the music, especially in how performers play their instruments. I played both piano and cello when I was younger, and remember the feeling of approaching both instruments before having enough experience to play them in a "trained" way. This piece was an attempt to embody some of that feeling from childhood, as well as some of my nostalgia as an adult.

Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano

Often referred to as an impressionist for his use of colour and alternative harmonic relationships, Claude Debussy (1862-1918) rejected this label and rather drew much more inspiration from symbolist art and literature. Disinterested in continuing the Austro-German tonal tradition, he wrote that he aimed to write "music that could evoke, as it will, the improbable places, the unquestionable and chimerical world which works secretly on the mysterious poetry of the night." After a two-decade streak of larger works with symbolic references, in 1915 he was distressed about the war and his progressing cancer. He did not touch a piano or write a single note for two months. He spent the summer in Normandy, where the *Sonate pour Violoncelle et Piano* was his first return to writing chamber music since his 1893 string quartet.

Debussy was very interested in Baroque music at this time, and the cello sonata was the first in what he intended to be a series of six sonatas for various instrumental combinations, a nod to the music of Couperin and Rameau. In this piece, Debussy combined elements of early music with techniques and harmonies that were either very modern for their time or inspired by the music of other cultures. This is apparent when the Prologue opens with Baroque-esque ornamental turns in the piano, followed by the cello veering into a strikingly more pentatonic universe. The spontaneous quality of the whole movement is like that of an improvised Baroque prelude. Debussy loved serenades. There is a rumour of questionable veracity that the title originally intended for this serenade was "Pierrot fâché avec la lune" ("Pierrot Angry at the Moon"), referring to Pierrot of the *Commedia dell'arte* cast of characters. The *Sérénade* and light and nervous *Finale* are played without pause in between. In negotiating the royalty contract with his publisher Jacques Durand, Debussy wrote, "A sonata for cello and piano doesn't sell like hot cakes". And indeed, with the quirky turns of character, tempo, and technique, this piece was not intended to appeal to the amateur musician. Debussy completed three of his six sonatas before dying of cancer in Paris, 1918.

Blues in A Minor

This tune is from the Modern Jazz Quartet's 1973 album *Blues on Bach*, which includes five arrangements of pieces by J.S. Bach interspersed with four original blues pieces whose names spell out B-A-C-H (B is B-flat and H is B-natural). Thus, *Blues in A minor* is the A of B-A-C-H, and appropriately, is somewhat a passacaglia in 12-bar blues form. The Modern Jazz Quartet was established in 1952 by members of Dizzie Gillespie's big band rhythm section. John Lewis directed the group, which was one of the first small jazz ensembles to perform in concert halls instead of nightclubs. Lewis is a prime example of a composer in the "Third Stream," a style combining elements of both classical and jazz. The members at the time of recording *Blues on Bach* were Milt Jackson (vibraphone), John Lewis (piano, harpsichord), Percy Heath (bass), and Connie Kay (drums). This arrangement by David Sanford for two celli of "Blues in A Minor" first appeared on the Matt Haimovitz and Uccello 2010 album *Meeting of the Spirits*.