

## PROGRAM NOTES

Le 6 décembre 2023 à 16 h / December 6, 2023 at 4:00 pm

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Classe d' / Class of André Roy

*These program notes are written by the student performing, and are presented by the student in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course. Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.*

This diverse program of romantic and contemporary works explores the abundant and endless emotions and sound worlds present in the music of master composers. The works of Persichetti, Glinka, Fuchs, Britten, and Brahms all highlight the different aesthetics of their respective time periods and pushes the envelope of modern viola technique, while drawing upon older styles and traditions. Inspired by sonata form, Renaissance songs, storytelling, and more, each composer brings their unique voice and takes us on a journey with a nod to its origins.

It was only after **Mikhail Glinka's (1804-1857)** sudden death where his achievements and contributions to Western classical music were immortalized. He was a key figure in Russian music and culture of the Romantic era, and those around him in those institutions feared that he would be left forgotten and overshadowed by others. During his lifetime, he was left in the shadows without much about him in print. As people started speaking up one by one, Alexander Serov (aspiring composer, music critic, and friend of Glinka) claimed that "Russia had lost a musical giant whom it hardly knew."<sup>1</sup>

Born to a family of a well-known name, his father was an army captain; his other relatives of the Glinka name were recognized in academia and poetry, or served for the tsar. In his upbringing, he heard folksongs and Russian tales from servants and peasants, as well as church choirs and bells. At a young age, he played the piano, violin, and piccolo, and even acted as a conductor in local ensembles. In fact, he did not go on to have a traditional conservatory-style music education: in 1818, he attended the Noble Boarding School in St. Petersburg. The boarding school curriculum was to provide foundational knowledge that would allow him to pursue further specialized studies. During this time, he received a mixed bag of violin and piano lessons until finally settling on studying with Charles Mayer, a German pianist and composer. He also received voice lessons from Belloli in 1824, adding to his musical arsenal. From 1824-1828, Glinka worked for the Board of Communications in civil service with the goal of networking with the literary and musical circles of Russia. Sadly, he had been absent for a large portion of it due to illness. Glinka's hypochondria and constant illnesses in his adult days were a result of his grandmother's care during his childhood, who kept him in an overheated room.

During his time in civil service, Glinka composed his unfinished **Sonata in D Minor (1825-1828)** which became a staple in viola repertoire. It only consists of two movements, *Allegro moderato* and *Larghetto ma non troppo (Andante)*. The first movement was completed in 1825, and it was not until after a three-year hiatus he then composed the second movement in

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<sup>1</sup> Daniil Zavlunov, "Constructing Glinka," *The Journal of Musicology* 31, no. 3 (2014): 326.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2014.31.3.326>.

1828. Glinka mentions in his own notes that he was planning to write a rondo as the third movement. One hundred years later, violinist Vadim Borisovsky discovered Glinka's manuscripts (though none of them were completed), reconstructed the sonata, and premiered it in 1931. Glinka's music is often reminiscent of the classical style from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and fused Russian nationalism and realism with the continuing progression of Western art music in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He showed mastery in instrumentation, and motivic and contrapuntal writing. The first movement (*Allegro moderato*) is in sonata form; indulging in the romantic style, the melodies are expressive and beautifully embellished in this work. On the other hand, it still has characteristics of the classical style with repeated eighths and Alberti bass figures. This work strikes the balance between lyricism and sparkling passage work. Operatic in nature, the second movement (*Larghetto ma non troppo (Andante)*) alternates between song and declamatory interjections.

American composer, educator, and pianist **Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987)** was a well-versed professional performer. He frequently performed on the radio, in churches, and in recital. Studying piano, composition, and conducting at prestigious institutes including the Philadelphia Conservatory and Curtis Institute, he later taught at the Philadelphia Conservatory and the Juilliard School. Notable mentors include Russell King Miller, Olga Samaroff, Paul Nordoff, and Fritz Reiner. A decorated composer, Persichetti's merits include three Guggenheim Fellowships as well as grants from National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities and the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He was frequently invited as a guest lecturer at many American schools.

Persichetti's early works are influenced by composers which include Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith and Copland, though he found his unique musical voice later in the 1950s. His music explores texture, gestures, contrasts, and emotions through rhythm, and expansive pandiatonic and polytonal harmony. **Parable XVI for Solo Viola, Op. 138 (1974)** is one of twenty-five parables that Persichetti composed, all for unaccompanied solo instruments. Traditionally, parables find their roots in storytelling, defined as "a usually short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle," often emphasizing "an instructive example or lesson."<sup>2</sup> Persichetti uses this word in a new way, defining it as a "non-programmatic musical essay about a single germinal idea."<sup>3</sup> From the first five notes of this entire work, Persichetti masterfully transforms short motif in endless permutations. With almost each phrase containing an expressive marker, each gesture and phrase sets up a different atmosphere.

**Lillian Fuchs (1902-1995)** is a renowned American violist and pedagogue. She was born into a musical family: her father, Philip Fuchs, was an amateur violinist; her brothers Harry and Joseph played the cello and violin respectively. Inspired by Joseph, she first studied violin with the violist of the Kneisel Quartet, Louis Svecenski. Later on, she studied violin with Franz Kneisel and composition with Percy Goetschius at the Institute of Musical Art which later became the Juilliard School. Her switch to viola was led by her eagerness to play chamber music in 1926 when she joined the string quartet of Kneisel's daughter, Marianne. She was one of the

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam-Webster, Online, s.v. "parable."

<sup>3</sup> Walter G Simmons, "Persichetti, Vincent," in *Grove Music Online* (2001), accessed October 22, 2023. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021384>.

first violists to record J. S. Bach's Cello Suites on viola. Fuchs was very dedicated in her teaching, as she joined the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, the Juilliard School, as well as summer festivals, particularly the Aspen Music Festival and School.

**Sonata Pastorale (1953)** is written for unaccompanied viola, and is the only concert work amongst Fuchs's output for viola. This work showcases the tonal and technical abilities of the viola, and rose to popularity with her students learning and performing the work. Fuchs premiered her own work in 1953 at the Town Hall in New York. The first movement, *Fantasia*, begins with broad chords that evoke a wide, open space, both sonically and in terms of imagery. There is interplay between the thematic material and different transitional passages. The main theme of the *Fantasia* wanders around, bringing a searching quality to the music. Fuchs often presents thematic materials paired with an open string, creating a drone. The second movement, *Pastorale*, alternates between quiet and slow melodic material, and fast and energetic passages. Violist David Bynog suggests that this slow and quiet material represents Fuchs's frequent travels to rural Pennsylvania to her family farm. Some of the more energetic passages resemble the transitions in the first movement, which create a cyclic structure.

The youngest of four children, **Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)** was exposed to music at a young age. His mother played an instrumental role in his musical upbringing: she was his earliest music teacher, and musical soirées were a regular event at the house. Britten started his first musical studies at the age of seven, and received instruction from several teachers throughout his training – notably Frank Bridge, Arthur Benjamin, and John Ireland. In addition to his conservatory studies, he also worked for the General Post Office Film Unit where he wrote music for documentary films. It was through this job that he learned to write quickly and to adapt to working under different circumstances. Perhaps it was through his being exposed to writing for film that he was inspired to produce many operas. Even though his first opera *Paul Bunyan* (1941) was not well received, his next opera *Peter Grimes* (1945) was extremely successful. Opera in England had been dormant since the Baroque era, but following *Peter Grimes*, he composed fourteen more operas, leaving a mark on British musical history.

Britten, Peter Pears, and Eric Crozier came together to create the annual Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts, first held on June 5-13, 1948. **Lachrymae: Reflections on a Song of Dowland (1950)** was a product of the Aldeburgh Festival. Britten met the legendary Scottish-American violist William Primrose (1904-1982) while he was performing in the United States in 1949. Britten offered to write a new piece for Primrose, on one condition: he would participate in the third iteration of the Aldeburgh Festival. Primrose agreed and felt that it was a great privilege to have a work written for him by Britten. The two premiered *Lachrymae* in June 1950 at the festival. While the work was completed, it did not have a definite title when the programmes for the festival were printed; the programme read: "A New Work for Viola and Pianoforte," "to be given its first performance by William Primrose, for whom it was specially written."<sup>4</sup>

While this work has a strong connection to the music of John Dowland (1593-1626), Britten brings his own compositional style and makes it his own. The title *Lachrymae*, which translates to "tears," leads us to several places when tracing its roots through Britten's choice of

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<sup>4</sup> David M. Bynog, *Notes for Violists: A Guide to the Repertoire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 81. E-book, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=A786798&scope=site>.

title and musical material. The most obvious connection is to Dowland's collection of seven pavaues *Lachrimae or Seven Tears* (1604), but these pavaues do not contribute to the musical material. Another direction we are pointed in is the origin of the main theme. The theme is based on Dowland's song "If My Complaints Could Passions Move," from the collection "Songs or Ayres" which were published along with the *Lachrimae* collection. Interestingly, this song's text contains no mention of tears, though it does convey a melancholic mood. Britten uses a variety of colours specific to the viola, like the deep and rich C string, crystalline harmonics, and icy *quasi ponticello* (somewhat on the bridge), to name a few. Surprisingly, this work is structured in a peculiar way: while it is in theme and variations form, the theme is only presented its original form at the very end after a tumultuous final variation. All the melodies and harmonies point to derivations of cells from Dowland's song. The piano part plays an important role as the melody is also threaded through both parts, thus completing hidden statements.

**Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)** was a highly educated individual and an outstanding musician. He was a bookworm who had a library of approximately 800 well-loved books. A skilled pianist who showed dazzling athleticism, Brahms studied piano with Otto Cossel and Eduard Marksen. He also learned to play violin in the gypsy style with Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi as he sought refuge in Hanover during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Brahms's personal relationships were of utmost importance in his musical journey. In that same year, Brahms also met Austro-Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim. Joachim's performance of Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the Hamburg Orchestra left an impression on Brahms. Joachim played a central role in Brahms's life. It was through him that Brahms met the Schumanns, with whom he developed a deep relationship.

The ***F-A-E Sonata* (1853)** for violin and piano is a four-movement collaborative work written by Schumann, Brahms, and Albert Dietrich for Joachim, which highlights the friendship and connection between these four key musicians of their day. This project was spearheaded by Schumann as a reaction to Richard Wagner's essay "Artwork of the Future" (1850). Wagner argued that "the solitary individual is unfree" ("*Der Einsame ist unfrei*") and that a community of like-minded individuals need to come together in order to create meaningful art. Additionally, Wagner indirectly calls out Schumann by claiming that genres like songs without words and operas without texts (e.g., instrumental genres) are dead, with nothing being able to surpass Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor (for orchestra and choir). Joachim adopted the motto "*Frei aber einsam*" (free but alone) as a first rebuttal to Wagner's statement. Its abbreviation, F-A-E, was what Schumann and his friends used as the unifying musical motif in this sonata. This also served as a cornerstone that represented the strong belief in a cultural community.

Brahms's third movement (***Scherzo***) is the most popular movement as it was published separately. The tonality and opening motif of the three eighth notes and dotted quarter are a subtle nod to Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, with Brahms's treatment being in compound instead of simple time. Obscuring metrical hierarchy, this first gesture begins on a downbeat but is misleading because our natural instincts prefer to hear the dotted eighth note with a metrical accent, thus throwing off the written metrical hierarchy. This energetic movement begins with a sense of urgency as we begin on the dominant (G major) and travel through different keys in search of the tonic. The many expressive leaps found in the melodic lines create a sense of grandiose and triumph.

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