Marshall University Music Department Presents a Senior Recital, Michael Wilcoxon, violin

Michael Wilcoxon

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Senior Recital
Michael Wilcoxon, violin
assisted by
Stephen Daming, piano

Sunday, January, 2016
7:30 p.m.
Joemie Jazz Center Forum

This program is presented by the College of Arts and Media through the School of Music and Theatre with the support of student activity funds. For more information about this or other music events, please call (304) 696-3117, or view our website at www.marshall.edu/cofa/music.

Program Notes

Twelve Variations, K359, was written by Mozart during a most critical point in his professional life. During the year 1781, Mozart traveled to Vienna after being summoned by Archbishop von Colloredo to perform for the Emperor. However, Mozart grew tired of being treated as a servant and his wages being less than he had earned in Salzburg. Soon, after an altercation with the Emperor, Mozart was forcefully dismissed. From this point, he became a freelance musician, composer, and teacher in Vienna. This newfound freedom allowed Mozart to compose what he wished.
The variations are based on a French folksong called *La Bergère Célimène*, which translates as *The Shepherdess Célimène*. *La Bergère Célimène* was originally in G minor but Mozart converted it to G major. The structure of the theme, as well as each variation, is compound ternary form. The violin and piano pass the melody back and forth throughout the variations.

There are, however, certain variations that stray from this pattern such as Variation III. In this variation the violin is absent which allows the pianist to be rhythmically free. Variation VII is drastically different. Unlike all other variations within this work, Variation VII is in the key of G minor as is the original folk song. In the final variation, Mozart changed the meter from cut time to 6/8 time.

Perhaps one of the most well-known contemporary composers is John Williams. Williams is primarily a film score composer. Many of his compositions have earned prestigious awards. Williams’ works can be heard in many of Hollywood’s most iconic films of the latter half of the 20th century, including *Jaws*, *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars*, and *E.T.* However, there is one particular work that stands out from the rest.

As Stephen Spielberg was working on his 1993 film, *Schindler’s List*, he asked Williams to compose the score for the film. *Schindler’s List* is about a Nazi officer who bribed his commanders to allow Jews to work in factories rather than to remain in the concentration camps during the Holocaust. Williams agreed to write the score for the film. He then asked world-renowned violinist Itzhak Perlman to play the main theme for the film. Perlman, having Jewish heritage, became emotionally tied to the music. Not only was the piece related to the Holocaust, it also paid tribute to traditional Jewish music.

The violin and piano version heard tonight begins with a tragic D minor theme. This theme is continuously heard throughout the piece and grows with intensity as it progresses into higher registers. In the middle of the piece there is a short section in which the piece hits its emotional peak. The piece then returns to the original theme concluding its ternary form. This theme modulates to the key of A minor. This is the point in which the piece is in the highest register. 32nd note runs interrupt the main theme. This continues to the end, as the piece grows quieter; ending on a lonely high A.

Arvo Pärt was born on September 11, 1935 in Paide, Estonia. After finishing his mandatory military service, Pärt enrolled into the music conservatory in Tallinn, Estonia in 1958. During this time, Pärt also worked in the music division of the Estonian radio. He began to be recognized when he won first place in the All-Union Young Composers’ Competition, with two of his earliest works.

Pärt soon developed an interest in 12-tone music, *Nekrolog* (1960) being his first experiment with the concept. This interest continued throughout the nineteen-sixties but in 1971 Pärt began to display a new musical direction with *Symphony No. 3*. This happened during a period in which Pärt spent hours on end in meditative silence, known as his “years of silence.”

Although he was developing his own style in the nineteen-seventies, it wasn’t until later in the decade when his works began to take on a “Partian” sound, especially his string compositions. *Fratres* is one of the leading examples. This is also one of Pärt’s works in which he utilizes the *Tintinnabuli* principle.
In Schumann’s teen years, his father passed away, leaving him an inheritance with the condition that he attend a university. He enrolled in a university in Leipzig where he studied law, and continued piano studies with Friedrich Wieck. It was not long before he met Wieck’s daughter Clara. As time went by Robert and Clara became close and, to Wieck’s disapproval, decided to marry. Schumann soon had to abandon his pursuits as a professional pianist which he attributed to an unstable middle finger. Even though he fell short of his original pursuit, Schumann was quite successful as a music critic, novelist, and composer. He also made the acquaintances of many other influential composers, one of whom was Johannes Brahms, who became a lifelong friend.

To all appearances, Schumann was thriving. However, there was a much darker side to Schumann’s personal life. As Schumann entered his 30’s he began to show signs of mental illness. He displayed obsessive and compulsive behavior and experienced spells of depression. Regardless he still pressed on and obtained a job at Düsseldorf as a conductor, but it was short-lived. Three years after he was hired, Schumann was relieved from the position because of his unstable behavior. At the age of forty-four, Schumann’s illness took over. He began hearing voices that first sounded beautiful but then turned into grotesque sounds of “hyenas,” as he described them. As the incidents became even more severe, Schumann voluntarily admitted himself to an infirmary for the protection of his family.

Sonata in A minor was composed in 1851 which was the peak of Schumann’s turmoil. Normally when Schumann wrote a piece he went into deep self-examination. This work was no exception. The first movement opens with a rich yet eerie melody in A minor on the violin. Meanwhile the piano plays 16th-notes, adding texture to the piece. Then the piano begins to play the same melody only in a higher register before the violin can finish. The piece briefly modulates to D minor then to F Major. These frequent modulations attest to the restless and unsettling spirit Schumann had during his last days. Soon the piece recaps with the same melody as the beginning. It remains, for the most part, the same until the end of the movement which consists of a fiery ending.

The second movement, in stark contrast, is in F Major. The melody is more at ease; possibly representing tranquil time in Schumann's life. Although the melody is tranquil, it is also inconclusive. This theme is soon followed by a folk like melody. Soon after, the work immediately returns to the opening material. This process repeats twice throughout the movement. As the ending approaches, the melody fades and ends with two soft pizzicato chords.

The third movement obliterates the relaxed feeling the second movement creates. It spirals its way into madness in the key of A minor. The melody consists almost entirely of 16th notes. After the relentless opening theme, the work modulates to a lighter A flat major theme. This melody is short-lived and soon returns to the torment of 16th notes. Towards the end, the violin faintly echoes the opening theme of the first movement before continuing its 16th note spiral to the tragic end.

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