

the firm 2003

CONCERT ONE

ANTHONY HUNT

LANGBEIN STRING QUARTET

and WINDS

Anthony Hunt piano
Ales Rajch oboe
Haigh Burnell clarinet
Malcolm Stewart horn
Leah Stephenson bassoon
David Sharp conductor

Langbein String Quartet

Michael Milton violin 1
Minas Berberyan violin 2
Rosie McGowran viola
David Sharp cello
Michael Robertson guest viola

Please join the performers and living
composers after the concert for
complimentary drinks and a selection of
Tortes by Gabriele.

MONDAY MAY 19, 2003

LEOS JANACEK

"Zdenka" Variations (1880)

PAVEL HAAS

Suite for Oboe and Piano (1939)

DAVID KOTLOWY

for clarinet & string quartet (2002)

RAYMOND CHAPMAN SMITH

Notturmo for String Quintet (2001)

LEOS JANACEK

Concertino (1925)

LEOS JANACEK

A Recollection (1928)

"Our art consists in being dazzled by the truth:
The light upon the grotesque mask as it shrinks
back is true, and nothing else."

Franz Kafka.

Leos Janáček (1854-1928) was born in Moravia and spent most of his life in the city of Brno. The influences of the folk music of the region is a feature of his style, but there are many other ingredients of a more strongly individual – and one could say eccentric – nature that combine to give his music a distinctive personality. He wrote a number of operas and a large body of choral, orchestral and chamber music; most performed in his lifetime, though he achieved no wide fame until his final years.

In 2003 Leos has kindly agreed to be our Posthumous Composer-in-Residence and so the Firm is programming a number of his works, including his two great piano cycles and his Piano Sonata.

We hope that you will enjoy becoming familiar with our kind, mischievous, reflective and dramatic Czech friend throughout the year.

LEOS JANÁČEK

"Zdenka" Variations in B flat Op. 1
for piano

Janáček's first 'official' work was composed in February 1880 during his brief period of study in Leipzig. A gift for the fourteen-year-old Zdenka Schulzova, who would soon become his wife, the theme and seven variations are clearly modeled on Schumann and Brahms, but offer several glimpses of the terse phrasing and unique textures that would characterise Janáček's mature style.

PAVEL HAAS

Suite for Oboe and Piano, Op.17

Pavel Haas (1899-1944) was a native of Janáček's home city of Brno, and studied with the great composer at the Brno Conservatorium. Some of his work, such as the second string quartet From the Monkey Mountains and his Four Songs on Chinese Poems (written in a concentration camp) are sometimes performed but most of his output is infrequently heard. He was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1941, and murdered by them in 1944.

The Suite for Oboe and Piano was written in 1939 under German occupation. Much of the material was developed for a planned set of songs for tenor and orchestra which was never realised.

Tonight we are hearing the final of its three movements: marked Moderato.

DAVID KOTLOWY

for clarinet and string quartet

Unlike many of my compositions that are structured upon the physical act of an individual's breathing, the idea and structure at work here is that of ensemble breathing.

The piece is a fifteen-minute meditation, a following of the breath, an awareness of its turning. It is kept in movement by a non-rhetorical variation that leads to the creation and maintenance of an "atmosphere" generated by the ensemble. The differences between literal and apparent repetitions are obscured. Melodic gestures are reduced to a minimum, and become like metaphors of melodies. Rhythmic patterns congeal between pairs of instruments, then dissolve.

RAYMOND CHAPMAN SMITH

Notturmo for String Quintet

Allegretto, quasi andante

Lento

Vivace, ma non troppo

Vivace

My Notturmo was written and first performed at the end of 2001. In August of that year I had stumbled upon a method that enabled me to employ the resources of tonality while still staying in touch with my more usual serial procedures. This was the first of a number of pieces that still take me somewhat by surprise, not least for their rather relentless insistence on being realised despite the stylistic disquiet they seem to have caused in some esoteric quarters.

Having slightly revised the piece, this concert seemed a good opportunity to present the Notturmo in its final form. A Czech connection, for anyone searching for such allusions and deeply committed to the exploration of oblique and tortuously temporal stylistic osmosis, might be found in the music's slight semblance of that Brahmsian (Breitkopf) house-style which had an undoubted impact on Dvorak and continued to make shadowy appearances even in Janacek's late and most original works.

LEOS JANACEK

Concertino for piano, horn, clarinet, bassoon, two violins and viola.

Moderato

Piu mosso

Con moto

Allegro

This rarely heard example of Janáček's condensed and intensely evocative late style deserves a place alongside the contemporary and far more familiar "Sinfonietta". The composer did us the service, in his very gnomic manner of describing the Concertino's "programme":

"An intimate expression of the artists reminiscences of his youth, of serious experiences, among them the bitterness and difficulties at the beginning of his creative work".

"It was in the spring, when we once blocked the entrance of a hedgehog's house in a linden tree. It was beside itself with anger! It just could not understand it... Should the hedgehog stand on its hind-legs and burst into an elegy? No sooner had he put his snout out, than he had to roll up again [first movement (prelude) piano/horn]. The squirrel chattered away, as it jumped from the top of one tree to another. Later, it moaned in a cage like my clarinet, but turned around and danced to amuse the children [second movement (scherzo) piano/clarinet].

The wide-open eyes of little owls and big owls stared insolently out from the strings of the piano, as did those of the remaining critical nightfolk [third movement]. In the fourth movement everything seems like the penny that one quarrels about in fairy tales. And the piano? Someone must, surely, be in command. I believe that every movement has three motifs."

LEOS JANACEK

A Recollection

Janáček's last piano piece, the minute-long "Recollection", was commissioned by a Serbian music magazine and first printed in 1928. It could easily serve as a motto for his entire piano output. Robert Cowan has described it as: "A sort of DNA sampling that holds within its minute proportions the essential components of Janáček's piano style."

"Although hardly prophetic of Minimalism (save perhaps for the superficial aspect of repeating rhythmic patterns), Janáček's piano music anticipates the compressed keyboard tone poetry of such feted modern masters as György Kurtág and Arvo Pärt.

"They are, for the most part, honest fragments of personal biography, utterly uncompromising and securely grounded in the land of their birth. There is nothing contrived about them, absolutely no empty striving for effect, and yet their force of utterance is formidable. They confirm the mastery of a creative force who was, by turns, afflicted or infatuated by life."

"The crows maintain that a single crow could destroy the heavens. There is no doubt of that, but it proves nothing against the heavens, for heaven simply means: the impossibility of crows."

Franz Kafka.



Pilgrim Church provides wheelchair access
via the rear (northern) doors

Toilets can be accessed through the door
on the left of the performance area.

the firm

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