

**BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC
PRESENTS**

BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY ORCHESTRA

Leon Botstein, Music Director

Andrés Rivas, Assistant Conductor

UPSTREAMING

Sosnoff Theater

Fisher Center at Bard

Saturday, March 13, 2021

8 pm

**FISHER
CENTER**

Bard

PROGRAM

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864–1949)

Serenade in E-flat Major, Op. 7 (1882)

ELLEN TAAFFE ZWILICH (b. 1939)

Prologue and Variations for String Orchestra (1983)

Andrés Rivas, conductor

WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895–1978)

Ennanga for Harp, Piano, and String Orchestra (1956)

Sara Magill, harp

Chung-Yang (Francis) Huang, piano

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)

Divertimento for String Orchestra Sz. 113 (1939)

Allegro non troppo

Molto adagio

Allegro assai

Bard College Conservatory Orchestra

Leon Botstein, Music Director

Andrés Rivas, Assistant Conductor

Erica Kiesewetter, Director of Orchestral Studies

Wind and Brass Ensemble

Keisuke Ikuma, *coach*

Flute

Jillian Reed

Isabela Cruz-Vespa

Oboe

Kamil Karpiak

Michal Cieslik

Clarinet

Eszter Pokai

Anya Swinchoski

Bassoon

Anna Pem

Gabrielle Hartman

Contrabassoon

Chloe Brill

Horn

Liri Ronen

Alberto Antonio Arias Flores

Natalia Dziubelski

Zachary McIntyre

String Orchestra

Violin I

Zongheng Zhang, *concertmaster*

Laura Pérez Rangel

Anna Hallet Gutierrez

Blanche Darr

Narain Darakananda

Lap Yin Lee

Violin II

Shaunessy Renker, *principal*

Ana Aparicio

Sarina Schwartz

Tristan Flores

Nándor Burai

Viola

Rowan Swain, *principal*

Jonathan Eng

Weilan Li

Mikhal Terentiev

Mercer Greenwald

Mengshen Li

Cello

Lily Moerschel, *principal*¹

Alexander Levinson, *principal*^{2,3}

Sarah Martin

William Pilgrim

Grace Molinaro

Sophia Jackson

Nick Scheel

Bass

Elizabeth Liotta, *principal*¹

Michael Knox, *principal*^{2,3}

Rowan Puig Davis

Piano

Chung-Yang (Francis) Huang

Orchestra Manager and Video Director

Hsiao-Fang Lin

Stage Manager

Stephen Dean

Nora Rubenstone

Video Engineer

Daniel Carr

Cameras

John Gasper

Audio Producer/Recording Engineer

Marlan Barry

¹ Zwillich

² Grant Still

³ Bartók

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

by Peter Laki, Visiting Associate Professor of Music

Serenade in E-flat Major, Op. 7 (1882)

Richard Strauss

Born in Munich, Bavaria, in 1864

Died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, in 1949

On March 30, 1881, the Munich Court Orchestra, led by its music director, Hermann Levi, performed a symphony by a 17-year-old composer whose father played principal horn in the orchestra. This performance launched the career of a young man who was to become one of the greatest composers of his time. By the next year, Richard Strauss scored his first success outside his native city of Munich when members of the Dresden Court Orchestra played the present serenade at the Three Ravens Hotel in the Saxon capital. This occasion proved to be prophetic, as most of Strauss's operas, including *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*, were to receive their world premieres in Dresden.

In this early work, one may discern few signs of the Strauss the world soon came to know. The one-movement wind serenade is undoubtedly a student composition, albeit a brilliant one. We shouldn't forget that in 1882, the modernism that would change the musical landscape hadn't been born yet. Wagner was still alive, and Brahms had completed only two of his four symphonies.

At 18, Richard Strauss was a traditionalist who stood clearly on Brahms's side in the Wagner-Brahms controversy that divided musical opinion in Germany. His "conversion" to Wagner did not occur until later. The serenade was strongly influenced by Mozart's Serenade No. 10 in B-flat Major ("Gran Partita") for winds (K. 361/370a). The regular symmetry of many musical phrases in the work was definitely a Mozartean legacy, as was the observance of classical sonata form. The dense orchestration and the rich, chromatically inflected harmonic language, on the other hand, are Romantic attributes reflecting Strauss's own time. And the young man, having grown up in the house of a horn player, had already developed a highly personal approach to wind writing.

One of the serenade's most interesting qualities is precisely its relationship to tradition. Strauss treated the past with love and tenderness, yet he also viewed it

from a certain distance. This distance may be seen, for instance, in the daring harmonic progressions underneath the first flute's haunting arpeggios (broken chords). Occasionally, one senses the same nostalgic look at the past that characterizes *Rosenkavalier*, still 30 years in the future.

It was through this serenade that Strauss first came to the attention of the great pianist-conductor Hans von Bülow. Bülow had known Strauss's father for years, although he did not exactly count him among his friends. The two had a falling out back in the 1860s, when Bülow was preparing the first performances of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*. Franz Strauss played his solos superbly, but he did not hide his distaste for Wagner, whom Bülow passionately championed in those years. (Bülow himself became estranged from Wagner after his wife, Cosima, the daughter of Franz Liszt, left him for the composer of *Tristan*.) But all of this was water under the bridge by the time Bülow performed young Richard Strauss's serenade with his orchestra at Meiningen. Later he invited Strauss to be his assistant there—and the rest is history.

Prologue and Variations for String Orchestra (1983)

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich

Born in Miami, Florida, in 1939

Ellen Taaffe Zwilich was the first woman to earn a doctorate in composition from the Juilliard School (1975), and the first to be awarded a Pulitzer Prize in music (1983). Her compositions build on foundations laid by 20th-century composers as diverse as Dmitrii Shostakovich and Aaron Copland. From the first, she took what one of her most perceptive critics, the late K. Robert Schwarz, described as a certain “dark-hued intensity”; from the latter, her ability to create original structures from very simple building blocks, using, in particular, wide melodic leaps and clear, transparent harmonies.

Prologue and Variations was written for the Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra, which premiered it under Richard Cormier in 1984. It is music that speaks its mind in a straightforward manner, expressing complex thoughts in simple language. The main motivic idea of the prologue (D – E-flat – high D) is present throughout the four variations that follow, but Zwilich has pointed out, “These are not variations in the traditional sense. In the classical variation form the structure of the initial theme is maintained in all the variations,” whereas here, in the words of critic Richard Dyer,

“each [variation] develops a different aspect of the prologue.” These aspects—in turn agile, contemplative, playful, and mysterious—add up to a miniature symphony in four movements. The variations are played without pause; variations 1 and 2 are linked by a bridge passage, which is repeated between variations 3 and 4. The bridge consists of an expressive melody played by the violins in a high register. Zwilich, who was a professional violinist before turning to composition, exploited the possibilities of the string orchestra to great effect in this attractive work.

***Ennanga* for Harp, Piano, and String Orchestra (1956)**

William Grant Still

Born in Woodville, Mississippi, in 1895

Died in Los Angeles, California, in 1978

William Grant Still, the first African American to have a piece performed by a major orchestra, was a trailblazer for the generations that came after him. He and his contemporaries Florence Price and William Dawson offered a belated response to Antonín Dvořák who, in the 1890s, had urged American composers to draw on their national heritage in their compositions. Yet Still had also studied with Edgard Varèse, one of the greatest *avant-gardists* of the 20th century, and his style absorbed European, American, and African influences alike.

Written for harpist Lois Adele Craft, *Ennanga* got its title from a traditional harp from Uganda, and Still said the three-movement work—scored for harp, piano, and strings—was inspired by African folk music. Many of the melodies use the pentatonic scale, which is found in traditional musical cultures all over the world. Still enlivened the texture by frequent syncopations, and the harmonic language, while rather simple for the most part, is peppered with many delicious dissonances.

The “moderately fast” first movement includes a slower middle section with expressive solos for violin and piano; the subsequent recapitulation features an extended virtuoso cadenza for the harp. The central slow movement is the very image of peace and calm. Still almost completely avoided using any sharps or flats throughout, except in the more poignant middle section, after which the simpler opening music returns. The final movement is a vigorous dance, introduced by a few solemn chords played by the harp. The harp takes center stage in another, shorter cadenza before the exuberant ending.

Divertimento for String Orchestra Sz. 113 (1939)

Béla Bartók

Born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary [now Sânnicolau Mare, Romania], in 1881

Died in New York City, New York, in 1945

The *Divertimento* was the third Bartók work commissioned by Paul Sacher, conductor of the Basel Chamber Orchestra and one of the greatest arts patrons of the 20th century. After the success of *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* and the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, Sacher requested a work for string orchestra. He arranged for the composer to spend a month in a small country house at Saanen in the Swiss Alps. The time was August 1939, that fragile historic moment in Europe when peace was still intact but was increasingly threatened by the specter of the inevitable war.

Bartók had long seen the handwriting on the wall. For some time, he had been contemplating emigration from Hungary; he was, however, reluctant to leave his aging mother behind. (After her death in December 1939, Bartók and his wife decided to relocate to the United States.)

Bartók's goal in *Divertimento* was to write a piece that was easier to play than his earlier Sacher commissions; the idea of alternation between orchestral soloists and entire sections (derived from the Baroque concerto grosso) was also part of his plan from the start. The title, which means “entertainment” in Italian, denotes an 18th-century musical genre prominent in the works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his contemporaries. In the words of the Hungarian musicologist and critic György Kroó,

The title [Divertimento] alludes to the mood of the two Allegro movements, but it also expresses the transient “intermezzo” character of Bartók's three-and-a-half-week stay in Saanen amidst the tragic events of the era. The slow movement . . . is a premonition of the tragedy to come.

The first movement opens with a graceful yet energetic theme, consisting almost entirely of melodic ornaments around a central note. The second theme, in sweet parallel thirds, is introduced by the solo string quartet. Soon, however, the lyrical melodies run into what Kroó aptly characterized as a “stone wall”—extremely loud repeated notes, played in several octaves in a striking rhythmic pattern. Much of the

movement revolves around this conflict between the lighthearted divertimento style and its harsh interruptions. The movement, which follows classical sonata form, ends with a tranquillo (calm) closing section, proposing an idyllic solution to the conflict. In this coda, some of the earlier themes reappear in inversion (a technique, dear to Bartók, that involves turning the melody upside down by substituting ascending intervals for descending ones and vice versa).

The second-movement Molto adagio reopens and intensifies the struggle. It is stylistically related to the third movement of *Music for Strings*, with which it shares a tortuous, chromatic melodic style, and a progression from sadness to dramatic outburst. Yet the outburst, which takes the form of a menacing two-note motif, is much more violent here than in the earlier work. In the course of the movement, the elegiac melodies are repeatedly interrupted by this powerful motif, even at the very end, just when it seems that the music has finally reached a point of repose.

In the last movement, Bartók lets his hair down and treats us to some of the most cheerful moments in his entire output. The rhythmic and melodic elements of Hungarian folk dance are combined with Baroque procedures such as alternation between concertino and ripieno (the smaller and larger instrumental groups of the concerto grosso), and a fair amount of contrapuntal writing. A touch of delicious humor is provided by the pizzicato (plucked) passage shortly before the end.

BIOGRAPHIES

In addition to serving as music director of the Bard College Conservatory Orchestra, **Leon Botstein** is music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra (ASO), founder and music director of The Orchestra Now (TÖN), artistic codirector of Bard SummerScape and the Bard Music Festival, and conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003 to 2011. He has been guest conductor with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Mariinsky Theatre, Russian National Orchestra in Moscow, Hessisches Staatstheater Wiesbaden, Taipei Symphony, Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra, and Sinfónica Juvenil de Caracas in Venezuela, among others.

Recordings include a Grammy-nominated recording of Popov's First Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra, an acclaimed recording of Hindemith's *The Long Christmas Dinner* with ASO, and recordings with the London Philharmonic, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, and TÖN, among others. He is editor of *The Musical Quarterly* and the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Compleat Brahms* (Norton), *Jefferson's Children* (Doubleday), *Judentum und Modernität* (Böhlau), and *Von Beethoven zu Berg* (Zsolnay). Honors include Harvard University's Centennial Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters award, and Cross of Honor, First Class, from the government of Austria, for his contributions to music. Other distinctions include the Bruckner Society's Julio Kilenyi Medal of Honor for his interpretations of that composer's music, Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society, and Carnegie Foundation's Academic Leadership Award. In 2011, he was inducted into the American Philosophical Society.

Born in Caracas in 1990, conductor and violinist **Andrés Rivas** began his musical education at the Centro Académico Montalbán, a part of El Sistema Nacional de Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela. In 2010, he made his international conducting debut in Seoul, South Korea. In 2011, maestro Gustavo Dudamel invited him to conduct at the inauguration of the National Center for Social Action for Music and the 36th anniversary of El Sistema in Venezuela. He culminated the year conducting at the majestic Casa da Música theater in Porto, Portugal. As a violinist he has worked with soloists worldwide such as Martha Argerich, Gautier and Renaud Capuçon, and Ilya Gringolts, among many others; and performed under the baton

of conductors including Claudio Abbado, Simon Rattle, Dudamel, Esa-Pekka Salonen, JoAnn Falletta, James Bagwell, Leon Botstein, and John Williams. Rivas has made numerous international tours with the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar de Venezuela. Rivas earned his MMus degree in orchestral conducting at the Bard Conservatory under the tutelage of Harold Farberman. He is assistant conductor for The Orchestra Now (TÖN) and the Bard College Conservatory Orchestra.

BARD COLLEGE CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC

Tan Dun, *Dean*

Frank Corliss, *Director*

Marka Gustavsson, *Associate Director*

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For more information and the concert calendar, see bard.edu/conservatory.

Rehearsals and performances adhere to the strict guidelines set by the CDC, with daily health checks, the wearing of masks throughout, and musicians placed at a safe social distance. Musicians sharing a stand also share a home.

Programs and performers are subject to change.