University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Cicely Parnas, Cello
From Young Concert Artists

Saturday, March 28, 2015, 7:30 p.m.
Squitieri Studio Theatre
Fantasiestücke (Three Fantasy Pieces), Op. 73
Robert Schumann

Zart und mit Ausdruck
Lebhaft, leicht
Rasch und mit Feuer

Sonata No. 1 for Violincello and Piano
Claude Debussy

Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto
Sérénade: Modérément animé
Final: Animé, légère et nerveux

From the Zodiac (2014)
Peter John

I. Virgo
II. Aquarius
III. Taurus

Sonata in D Minor, Op. 40
Dmitri Shostakovich

Allegro non troppo
Allegro
Largo
Allegro

Program Notes

Fantasiestücke (Three Fantasy Pieces), Op. 73
Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

German composer Robert Schumann had more than his fair share of grief, but also a decent amount of success and good fortune. Some of his good fortune came in the form of a woman, Clara Wieck, a piano student of his who would eventually become his wife and champion. His grief was caused by his mental state, called “nervous prostration” at the time, what we probably would call bipolar disorder today, a debilitating mental condition marked by wild mood swings. At one point, it got so bad that he hurled himself into the Rhein River in an attempt to commit suicide. Though he was rescued, he never totally recovered and spent the last two years of his life in an asylum.

When he was on the upswing, Schumann was a prodigious worker and singular intellect. He established his credentials as a critic and writer by founding the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik (New Journal for Music) at age 24. He also found his voice as a composer at an early age and in his relatively short life left an impressive catalog of works for orchestra, solo piano works, concertos, choral works, chamber music, and a vast catalog of songs, among many other works.

The Fantasiestücke, Op. 73, was written in an “up” period for him, the year 1849, which he himself proclaimed as one of his most productive. Op. 73 was originally written and performed February 12, 1849 with clarinet and piano, and it is still quite popular in that original format, though it is also popular with violinists and cellists. Indeed, it is a lyrical “song without words” that is universally appealing.
The first movement, marked Zart und mit Ausdruck (Sweet and with expression) opens wistfully in piano, yielding immediately to the yearning voice of the violin. It is almost like an intimate conversation that we have just dropped in on. The second movement – Lebhaft, leicht (Lively, light) – seems to grow organically from the first. The conversational tone continues, though here the music seems to glow a bit. The closing movement, Rasch und mit Feuer (Quickly, and with fire) is passionate, and marked by virtuosic flare in both instruments.

— Program note provided by Dave Kopplin

**Sonata No. 1 for Violincello and Piano**

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

All his life Debussy was preoccupied with the commedia dell’arte figure of the sad-faced, ivory-satin-clad Pierrot, who also inspired the best work of Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), his favorite painter. In fact, Debussy’s “ethereally pathetic” Cello Sonata, in the description of biographer Edward Lockspeiser, was to have been titled Pierrot fâché avec la lune (Pierrot Vexed with the Moon), a sample of the same aesthetic of disillusionment found in much of the composer’s work at this time (he began the Sonata in the early months of World War I), as well as in the contemporaneous art of Picasso and Stravinsky.

The Cello Sonata was planned as the first of six sonatas for various instruments. Owing to ill health and chronic fatigue only three were finished; this one, a second for flute, harp and viola, and a third for violin and piano. (The fourth, according to a note Debussy left, would have been for oboe, horn and harpsichord.)

In a rather gloomy essay Wilfred Mellers suggests:

“It is not surprising that the more isolated modern artist should see in Pierrot the Divine Fool, a symbol of his own difficulties and nostalgia. In his early work Debussy accepts the mythological Pierrot world, the world of the Mask, as something intrinsically good and valuable and imaginative; at the end of his life, worn out by disease and the attrition of war, he begins to see that the Mask and Phantoms are not enough. He looks back on his life and finds in it the likeness of a puppet-show—himself, moon-eyed, desiring but perpetually dissatisfied, in the mask of Pierrot.”

It is true that Debussy was already suffering from attacks of the cancer that would take his life in just three years, and that he was woefully dispirited by the War, already hovering so close to his beloved Paris. (On his deathbed he could hear the shelling of the city.) But his music has a visceral kind of energy, notwithstanding his emotional mood.

The first movement of the Sonata, a declamatory Prologue, is a noble soliloquy, reminiscent of some earlier Debussy songs like Le Colloque sentimental and Le Tombeau des naïades in its calm and “ghostly rumblings.” (Lockspeiser again.)

The second movement, a bitter Sérénade, almost ignores the normal legato of the solo instrument and calls on the player to imitate a guitar, a mandolin, a flute and even a tambourine. Its vivacity is in marked contrast to its implied acerbity.

The third movement, more folksong-like, invokes the commedia dell’arte of high spirits, though it is occasionally interrupted by a sombre passage, marked con morbidezza, in which the clown is at last unmasked and Debussy wryly acknowledges the desolation of his solitude.

— Clair W. Van Ausdall for Susan Wadsworth and Young Concert Artists, Inc.
From the Zodiac (2014)
Peter John (b. 1983)

Indiana-born composer and pianist Peter John trained at the Cleveland Institute of Music and is presently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis/St. Paul. His work encompasses many formats and mediums, from electronic music under the name Spearfish and concerts of free improvisation as a pianist, to podcasts interviewing contemporary classical artists and the solo cello work on this program. In addition to his work as a composer, John is an award-winning classical pianist who has performed internationally. The composer supplied the following note for his From the Zodiac:

“It's so strange that we would look to the stars and find ourselves in their image; the human form is so different from the cold and distant starlight. But for centuries we looked to the stars and saw them as a mirror, which didn’t reflect our image but reflected our imagination. In this brilliant field of light we saw the stories of humans painted in the skies. These were not distant hydrogen explosions; they were lovers, fighters, animals. These mute witnesses to the beginning of the universe gave us a tabula rasa to paint whatever we wished upon them.

“This was the spirit of the Zodiac; what once were cold silent stars now was a rich tapestry of stories. In this work I painted with a different sort of starlight, the language of sound, and I ask the listeners to let their imaginations be guided by these sounds to hear their own story reflected in them.

“This work begins with Virgo, The Virgin, whose character is both shy and passionate, excited yet afraid at the same time. As her travels take her to places both strange and exciting, we hear her theme once more before we go to the realm of space.

“Aquarius, The Water Bearer sees the world through the lens of the 20th century; even with the knowledge of how stars work he still can wonder at their greatness, see history bent through their deep cold rays. He is to me the expanse of space, the distant constellation of whose light seems to long for the earth. Taurus, The Bull, tears through this space with reckless abandon, finally arriving at Virgo’s theme as it destroys everything in its path.”

— Program note provided by Dave Kopplin

Sonata in D Minor, for Cello and Piano, Op. 40
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Shostakovich burst onto the Russian music scene in 1926 to critical acclaim, straight out of the conservatory at Petrograd (aka Leningrad, now St. Petersburg). He was on his way, it seemed. In 1934, his opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk was premiered to excellent notices, yet the state-run newspaper Pravda denounced it only two years later. Probably as a result, Shostakovich’s just-completed Symphony No. 4 was withdrawn, not premiered until years later. In 1937, he responded with his Symphony No. 5, which helped to repair his image. Symphony No. 7, honoring the siege of Leningrad, put him back in the state’s good graces, but in 1948 he suffered another denunciation. Later, in 1960, he joined the Communist Party and had no further “official” setbacks. He continued to add to his prodigious catalog until his death.

As scholars debate the Shostakovich legacy, they often argue about whether he was an apparatchik late in life, a pawn of the Soviet party. The evidence suggests that he was a pragmatist and – thankfully for us – a survivor. After the fall of the Soviet Union, has talent has been acknowledged by critics and audiences alike, and his music is now performed regularly by major orchestras and performers throughout the world.
Several of his works for cello have joined the standard repertory. They include two concertos for cello and orchestra (both written for and premiered by Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich), and the work on tonight’s program, the Sonata in D Minor, Op. 40, from 1934. Op. 40 is in four movements. The first movement begins lyrically, a bit gloomy at first. As the work unfolds, the lyricism alternates with fervent cello declarations and odd, almost martial dance passages (listen for the repeating “short-short-long” rhythms). Towards the end of the movement, the piano takes up a new rhythm, almost like a death march as the cello wails above (and sometimes below). The short-short-long motive returns as the movement closes eerily.

By contrast, the second movement Allegro is like a perpetual motion dance, evocative of any number of popular steps. One can easily imagine a frenzied Cossack dancer performing to this music.

Almost operatic in its effect, the third movement becomes the cellist’s time to shine in the spotlight like a soprano in her big number.

The Finale is Shostakovich the joker at his best. It begins as if an off-kilter drunk were lumbering down the street singing to himself; soon enough the players literally burst into furious flurries of notes, first the piano, then the cello. The surprise ending puts the finishing touch on this whimsical movement.

— Program note provided by Dave Kopplin

Cicely Parnas, Cello

American cellist Cicely Parnas is recognized for bringing “velvety sound, articulate passagework and keen imagination” to her performances (The New York Times). Ms. Parnas’ 2014-2015 season includes recitals and educational outreach at the National Museum for Women in the Arts, the Levine School of Music, Patrons for Young Artists, the Morgan Library and Museum, University of Florida Performing Arts, Music for Youth, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. She performs the Haydn Concerto in C with the Owensboro and Monroe symphonies, the Elgar Concerto with the Tulare County and Southwest Michigan symphonies, the Shostakovich Concerto No. 1 with the Schenectady Symphony Orchestra, and the Saint-Saëns Concerto No. 1 with the Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle.

Ms. Parnas has appeared at the Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center, the Buffalo Chamber Music Society, Vanguard Concerts, the Jewish Community Alliance, and the Washington Center for the Performing Arts, and has performed with the Long Bay Symphony, the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, the Rochester Chamber Orchestra, and the Montreal Chamber Orchestra, where she gave the world premiere of Jim McGrath’s Concertino for Cello.

In 2012, Ms. Parnas made her Carnegie Hall concerto debut, performing the Saint-Saëns Concerto with the New York String Orchestra under the baton of Jaime Laredo. The New York Times raved: “Cicely Parnas, a fast-rising young cellist, was the impressive soloist in a rhapsodic performance.” She has performed the Elgar Concerto with the Vermont Symphony, once again with Jaime Laredo and toured France performing the Saint-Saëns Concerto with L’Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire. Other international appearances include her participation in the 2013 Young Concert Artists Festivals in Tokyo and Beijing.
Ms. Parnas, no stranger to the limelight, was named an inaugural Young Artist in Residence on NPR’s Performance Today in 2011, where she was featured in five broadcasts and an American Public Media video spotlight. Winner of the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, she was presented last season in debuts at Merkin Concert Hall and the Kennedy Center to rave reviews. She holds the Anne and George Popkin Cello Chair of YCA and was the recipient of YCA’s Mortimer Levitt Career Development Award for Women Artists in 2012. She also captured First Prize in the 2011 Cello Concerto Competition at Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music.

Ms. Parnas also performs in Duo Parnas with her sister, violinist Madalyn Parnas. Duo Parnas has performed as soloists with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic under Randall Fleisher, the El Paso Symphony Orchestra under Lawrence Loh, and the Albany Symphony Orchestra under David Alan Miller, as well as in many recitals with pianist Peter Serkin. Duo Parnas has recorded three albums on the Sheffield Lab label, including their most recent CD, titled Duo Parnas NOW, which includes 21st century works by Lera Auerbach, William Bolcom, Paul Moravec, and Charles Wuorinen. In 2012, they recorded Brian Fennelly’s Fantasia Concertante on Albany Records, a piece written for Duo Parnas and the digital-instrument Fauxharmonic Orchestra.

Granddaughter of the distinguished cellist Leslie Parnas, Cicely Parnas started playing the cello at the age of 4 and made her concerto debut at 11 with the Woodstock Chamber Orchestra. She has studied with cellists Peter Wiley and Ronald Feldman, and earned an Artist Diploma from Indiana University’s Jacobs School of Music, where she worked with Sharon Robinson. Ms. Parnas performs on a 1712 Giovanni Grancino cello.

**Noreen Cassidy-Polera, Piano**

The pianist Noreen Cassidy-Polera ranks among the most highly-regarded chamber artists performing today, and maintains a career that has taken her to every major American music center and abroad to Europe, Russia and performing arts centers of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Seoul. Recent performances include appearances at the Caramoor, Bard, Grand Teton and Cape Cod Chamber Music Festivals, as well as engagements at the Chamber Music Societies of Philadelphia and La Jolla. She has recorded for Sony, EMI, Audiophon and Centaur Records.

Noreen Cassidy-Polera has collaborated with leading soloists including cellists Narek Hakhnazaryan, Matt Haimovitz, Carter Brey, Antonio Menesis and Yo-Yo Ma. Winner of the Accompanying Prize at the Eighth International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, she regularly collaborates with laureates of the Queen Elisabeth, Tchaikovsky and Naumburg international competitions.

Ms. Cassidy-Polera’s mastery of the complete cello-piano repertory is widely-known, as is her dedication to performing the works of living composers. In recent seasons she has performed Elliott Carter’s venerable Sonata for Cello and Piano on tour in Paris, New York and Philadelphia, along with new works by Lowell Liebermann, Benjamin C.S. Boyle and Kenji Bunch to critical acclaim. Her CD Sound Vessels (with cellist Scott Kluksdahl) features the recording premiere of Richard Wernick’s Duo, as well as works of Robert Helps, Augusta Read Thomas and Elliott Carter.

Noreen Cassidy-Polera holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Martin Canin.