

Program notes for the Boston Cellos
March 22, 2014

Brubeck, *Elegy* and *The Desert and the Parched Land*

The program opens with two pieces by Dave Brubeck, both arranged by Derek Snyder for cello ensemble. Snyder, a cello soloist, has adapted many pieces by Brubeck, Piazzolla, and others for the Yale Cellos.

The *Elegy* for five cellos was dedicated to Brubeck's friend Randi Hultin, a Norwegian artist, journalist and critic. Originally titled "Blues for Randi," the piece was premiered by the Dave Brubeck Quartet in Norway. Now, after Brubeck's passing, this stirring piece can be seen as a tribute to the composer himself. In this instrumentation, the plaintive aesthetic reminds of the Popper Requiem but with unexpected, fresh harmonies, particularly his use of 9th chords.

The Desert and the Parched Land originated as a soprano solo in Brubeck's 1979 mass *To Hope!* Based on a Biblical text from Isaiah, "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom," the work served as the Scripture reading in Brubeck's mass setting. In subsequent performances, instrumentalists have adopted the melody and added improvisatory material. Derek Snyder incorporates some of these additions in his cello orchestration. The surprising, uplifting harmonic progressions in this work lend it a sense of forwardness and ultimately hope.

Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Composed in 1874, Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" remains his iconic work. A collection of brief folk-like songs, the piece originally intended for piano lends itself well to various instrumentations, most famously the orchestration by Ravel. Like the Brubeck *Elegy*, this piece grew out of a reverent for a deceased close friend. Mussorgsky based *Pictures* on a series of paintings by Victor Hartman, in a posthumous exhibit. The whimsical artworks are predominantly inspired by fairy tales and folklore, and each movement brings to life Mussorgsky's impression of a particular painting. While much of the piece uses French titles, Mussorgsky also employs German, Italian, and his native Russian. The myriad inspirations for this piece lend it a multifarious quality, sometimes critiqued as fragmented; but the piece is intended as a series of short movements linked by the recurring *Promenades*, rather than a large-scale sonataform work.

Tuileries, or Dispute d'enfants après jeux

Tuileries takes its name from a public garden in Paris. This upbeat, B Major allegretto conjures images of children shouting, running and playing in the garden with fountains leaping around. The high range and rapid notes fit very well pianistically, and the simple, open sonorities represent the innocence and exuberance of childhood.

Ballet des poussins dans leurs coques, or Balet nevylyupivshikhsya ptentsov

Throughout the piece, Mussorgsky uses bird and animal imagery to evoke country life. This number, marked 'scherzino vivo, leggiere' in a cheerful F Major, is based on a painting in which children appear to be hatching out of eggshells. As the music plays, you can almost see the clumsy chicks stumbling around for the first time. The percussive rhythms imitate the chicks' pecking to get out of the shell.

Il Vecchio Castello (The Old Castle)

Though the sketch for this piece is unknown, the title suggests that the inspiration was an antiquated Roman villa. The dark key of G# minor complements the movement's marking: 'Andantino molto cantabile e con dolore.' The traditional Siciliano rhythm, in 6/8 time, reinforces the Italian cultural aura. Arranged like a strophic song, the piece can be seen to consist of an introduction, six strophes, and a coda. The heavy piece speaks of the former grandeur, dilapidation and ruin the castle has seen through the ages.

Villa-Lobos, *Bachianas Brasileiras* No.5

From 1930 to 1945, Heitor Villa-Lobos wrote nine suites for various instrumentations. His choice to call this series of pieces *Bachianas Brasileiras* reflects his veneration for J.S. Bach and intent to pay tribute to him within the context of his own Brazilian national style. In his words, this work is "inspired by the musical atmosphere of Bach." Most individual movements in these suites contain two titles, one adopted from Bach's formal classifications and the other Brazilian. Like *Bachianas Brasileiras* no. 1, number 5 is scored for an orchestra of celli; but this time with a soprano soloist. The two movements, *Aria* and *Danza*, were written 7 years apart yet form a unified whole. The *Aria* begins with the celli playing pizzicato, setting a guitar-like foundation for the haunting soprano melody. Later in the movement, Villa-Lobos inserts a song in Portuguese (text below). The second movement, *Danza*, includes another Portuguese poem about a little bird, with imitative bird calls in the soprano. It ends with the opening wordless melody from the *Aria*, bringing the piece to a compelling finish.

Text- *Aria*:

Tarde uma nuvem rósea lenta e transparente.
Sobre o espaço, sonhadora e bela!
Surge no infinito a lua docemente,
Enfeitando a tarde, qual meiga donzela
Que se apresta e a linda sonhadoramente,
Em anseios d'alma para ficar bela
Grita ao céu e a terra toda a Natureza!
Cala a passarada aos seus tristes queixumes
E reflete o mar toda a Sua riqueza...
Suave a luz da lua desperta agora
A cruel saudade que ri e chora!
Tarde uma nuvem rósea lenta e transparente

Sobre o espaço, sonhadora e bela!

English translation:

Evening, a rosy, translucent cloud, slowly crosses the drowsy, beautiful firmament!

The moon gently rises into infinity, adorning the evening, like a sweet maiden dreamily getting ready, making herself beautiful, desiring her soul to be beautiful.

She calls to the heavens, the earth, to all of Nature.

She silences the birds' melancholy laments, and the sea reflects all her treasures...

Softly the moon awakens, a cruel yearning which laughs and weeps!

Evening, a rosy, translucent cloud, slowly crosses the drowsy, beautiful firmament!