THE VMI DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND FINE ARTS
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PRESENT

TOBIAS WERNER, CELLO

AND

VICTOR SANTIAGO ASUNCION, PIANO

PROGRAM

FANTASIESTÜCKE (FANTASY PIECES), OP. 73 . . . . . ROBERT SCHUMANN

ZART UND MIT AUSDRUCK
LEBHAFT, LEICHT
RASCH UND MIT FEUER

SEVEN VARIATIONS ON MOZART'S *BEI MÄNNERN* . . . . . LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

SONATA NO. 2 IN G MINOR, OP. 5, NO. 2 . . . . . LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

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SCHUMANN, FANTASIESTÜCKE (FANTASY PIECES). Schumann wrote only a handful of works for the cello: the familiar concerto, the somewhat less familiar *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* (Five Pieces in Folk Mode) for cello and piano, and the practically unknown *Fantasiestücke*— composed for clarinet but later arranged for cello—that we are about to hear. Completed in 1849, one of Schumann's last productive years before his descent into madness, these pieces have been described as "pleasing miniatures." Since it takes only about ten minutes to play all three of them, "miniatures" is apt. "Pleasing," however, is somewhat misleading, for it suggests that while the pieces might offer light diversion, they don't really engage our emotions. Two of Schumann's headings—"delicately, with expression" and "urgently, with fire"—suggest otherwise. In fact, attentive listeners will find themselves drawn repeatedly into the sound-world of mid-19th-century romanticism by the music's rhythmic urgency and plaintive, heart-on-sleeve lyricism. Especially compelling is the third piece with its ecstatic upscale rushes and unison statements of the stirring six-note figure that dominates the closing measures.

BEETHOVEN, SEVEN VARIATIONS ON MOZART'S *Bei Männern*. Theme and variations is a musical game. Like all games it offers challenges. The composer is challenged to find provocative ways of varying his theme, the performer to meet the sometimes harsh technical demands of the variations, the listener to continue *hearing* the theme, however successful the composer's efforts to hide it. Beethoven especially liked the form, for it not only tested his ingenuity but also allowed him to indulge his fondness for unprepared shifts of mood. Occasionally he used it as scaffolding for the slow movements of sectional works, but often he composed "stand-alone" variations—some for piano, others for various combinations of keyboard and strings. Bach's *Goldberg* variations aside, Beethoven's *Diabelli* variations for piano are probably the greatest ever written.

Sometimes Beethoven wrote variations on his own themes. Frequently, though, he borrowed themes from other composers—partly, one assumes, because they were popular and therefore appealing to his audiences and partly because they were simple and easily remembered. (If we can't remember the tune, we can't track it through the denser thickets of the variations.) For the variations we are about to hear the composer chose as his theme *Bei Männern welche Liebe fühlen* ("A man who can feel love"), an aria from Mozart's *Magic Flute*, whose folklike simplicity probably accounted for its wide popularity in the Vienna of his day.

The first variation, in detached notes, assumes the form of a lively dialogue of equals, the second a more lyrical exchange featuring a rapid, five-note piano motif. The third, legato in phrasing and Mozartean in character, is succeeded by a slow, serious, most *un*-Mozartean variation in a minor key from which the melody seems at one point to vanish altogether. The joyous mood of the brief, buoyant fifth variation gives way to the darker mood of the sixth, marked *andante*, in which the cello's presentation of the theme, likewise Mozartean in texture and gait, is especially stirring. The final variation, strongly foreshadowing Beethoven's mature style, is in three parts, the first and third of which, in sprightly 6/8 time, frame a slow section whose brooding intensity borders upon the romantic.

BEETHOVEN, SONATA IN G MINOR. The classical sonata usually has three movements. The G minor—one of a pair of early sonatas for cello and piano that Beethoven published

as Op. 5—has only two. However, its introduction, marked "slow, sustained and expressive," is so long, so emotionally involving that it seems to be almost a movement in itself. (Such weighty introductions often appeared in the first movements of the mature symphonies of Haydn, whom the young Beethoven greatly admired and sometimes imitated.) The introduction ends in two hushed chords, the second of which—typically for Beethoven— provides the first note of the main theme to follow. Only when we feel the quickening of the 6/8 pulse are we aware that we have been firmly but gently launched into the exposition. What follows is, in the words of Christopher Headington, "a restless, impassioned movement, with an unrelenting forward drive." Helping to sustain this momentum, as well as to give continuity to passages in which the mood veers restlessly between the plaintive and the heroic, is a steady triplet figure in the piano. Following the development, in which a motif derived from the main theme migrates through several keys, we hear a virtual reprise of the exposition—as, according to the rules of sonata-allegro form, we must.

The frowning mood of the first movement is shattered by the first three notes of the bumptious twelve-note theme that will dominate the rondo finale. Dark G minor has now given way to sunny G major. After some lively banter between the cello and piano a gentler, more lilting melody makes known its presence, but the original theme—always announced by three bold notes—returns again and again. An exhilarating sequence of two-note, upscale skips leads us to the final quiet restatements of the main theme.

INTERMISSION

CHOPIN, SONATA IN G MINOR. Chopin struggled with the composition of this sonata, his last published work, for almost a year. As his many rejected sketches reveal, "struggled" isn't too strong a word. "I write a little and cross out a lot," he wrote to his sister. "Sometimes I am pleased with it, sometimes not. I throw it into a corner and then pick it up again." Critics have seen in these anguished efforts a determination to find new ways of blending the string and piano textures, of more tightly binding together the separate movements—even of reconfiguring sonata form itself. As we'll shortly hear, the composer admirably met the first aim. "It is arguable," says Jim Samson, "that Chopin finds a more satisfactory blend of stringed instrument and piano than either Brahms or César Franck." He seems to have achieved the second aim as well, for as Jósef Chomiński has shown, the composer found a way of linking the sonata movements in cyclic fashion by means of a simple, three-note motif, subtly announced in the first movement but clearly audible in the openings of the scherzo, the slow movement, and the finale. That Chopin reshaped sonata form is doubtful, but his addition of a fourth movement to the traditional three and his un-traditional repositioning of the second and third movements are probably symptoms of his efforts to do so.

Throughout the first movement, quiet, reflective passages alternate with urgent, often impassioned ones, and although the cello and piano function as equal partners, the variety of textural effects is extraordinary: piano solo, lightly accompanied cello, cello-accompanied piano, counterpoint, and so on. Worth listening for, ten minutes or so into the movement, is the moment when shimmering piano *glissandi* suddenly morph into fierce staccato 64th-note unison runs up and down the scale.

Chopin's scherzo, closely modeled upon Beethoven's redesign of the 18th-century minuet, is divided into three parts: a rather hectic dancelike section in 6/8 time, a quietly lyrical contrasting section in which the cello, playing *sempre legato*, spins out a deeply affecting melody over several measures, and a terse repeat of the opening section. In the brief slow movement, a dreamlike interlude between the agitated scherzo and the furious finale, the cello and piano alternate in playing a melody whose arch and sweetness recall some of the more evocative melodies of the Nocturnes. The relentlessly headlong finale is in fact a tarantella—a frenzied dance thought to have been originally inspired by the fits induced by the bite of the tarantula—although Chopin doesn't label it as such. It has been suggested that this movement is a kind of homage to Chopin's close friend Felix Mendelssohn, the fast movements of whose symphonies and string quartets are sometimes tarantellas.

CHOPIN, POLONAISE BRILLANTE IN C MAJOR. This brief work is sometimes catalogued as "Introduction and Polonaise." With good reason. Chopin composed the polonaise in the summer of 1829 while visiting the country estate of Count Radziwill, an amateur cellist, but it was only much later—probably about the time that he offered the work for publication— that he added the introduction.

"Polonaise"designates a moderately fast instrumental piece in 3/4 time having something like the following metrical pattern: da **da-a** dada da da **da** da. "Brillante" refers to the *stile brillante*, a showy, bravura style of instrumental performance popular in the salons of 19th-century Europe—which might help to explain why the mature composer dismissed this youthful work as "nothing more than a drawing room piece, suitable for the ladies."

Following a proclamatory up-scale sweep by the piano, the cello offers a hesitant, two-measure motif that, buoyed by a legato piano line, soon unwinds into a supple, languorous, long-breathed melody. As the introduction begins to draw to a close we hear a brief, passionate exchange between the two instruments, which subsides into near silence. The polonaise announces its arrival with two loud piano chords, an upscale rush on the cello, a downscale run on the piano, and another pair of chords. Then the cello swings exuberantly into the main melody while the piano taps out the eight-beat polonaise rhythm in staccato notes. The instruments switch roles, the piano singing the melody, the cello playing the rhythm pizzicato. As the piece unfolds, quiet, busy passages marked by free motivic play between cello and piano alternate with exhilarating restatements of the main theme.

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Tobias Werner was born in Berlin, studied music in Freiburg, and earned a master's degree from Boston University. Although he has performed with orchestras in both America and Europe, he has been especially active as a chamber player. A founding member of the Florestan Piano Trio, he also plays cello for the Sikorski String Quartet, the Colorado Music Festival Quartet, and, as local music lovers are well aware, the Garth Newel Chamber Players.

In addition to his numerous solo recitals, Victor Santiago Asuncion, a native of the Philippines, has performed in America and overseas with orchestras conducted by, among others, Harold Farberman, Enrique Batiz, and Leon Fleischer.

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