The VMI Department of English and Fine Arts
and
The Timmins-Gentry Music Society

present

TERESA LING, violin

with

ANDREW HARLEY, piano, and TOBIAS WERNER, cello

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PROGRAM

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber . . . . . Mystery Sonata No. 1 in D minor

1. Praeludium
2. Aria and variations
3. Adagio
4. Finale

Maurice Ravel . . . . . Sonata for Violin and Cello

1. Allegro
2. Trés vif
3. Lent
4. Vif, avec entrain

INTERMISSION

Tōru Takemitsu . . . . . Distance de fée

Edvard Grieg . . . . . .Violin Sonata in C minor

1. Allegro molto ed appassionato—Presto
2. Allegretto espressivo alla Romanza–Allegro molto–Tempo 1
3. Allegro animato–Cantabile–Prestissimo

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Jackson Memorial Hall, VMI, February 11, 2009

BIBER, MYSTERY SONATA NO. 1 IN D MINOR. This sonata is one of a set of fifteen brief works for violin and keyboard continuo that Biber wrote in 1676, probably at the request of his patron, the Prince-Archbishop Maximilian Gandolf of Salzburg. The "Mystery" of the title refers to the mysteries of the rosary—ritual prayers meant to inspire meditations upon fifteen events in the life of the Virgin Mary, beginning with the Annunciation and ending with the Coronation, each of which is spoken with the aid of prayer beads. Biber's sonatas were possibly meant to accompany such meditations.

The D minor, the first sonata of the entire series, evokes the atmosphere of the Annunciation —that terrifying but transcendent moment when Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that "that thing" she is to bear is in fact the son of God. In the rapid, intricate violin figurations of the Praeludium we are probably meant to hear the beating of Gabriel's wings, and, in the passages that follow three downward shifts in the bass part, the angel's salutation to Mary, her moment of terror, and Gabriel's reassuring "Fear not . . ."

The second movement, even shorter than the first, consists of a broad, graceful theme and a series of increasingly agitated variations. The slow movement, whose gravity is emphasized by the violinist's double and triple stopping, is perhaps meant to evoke Mary's acquiescence: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord!" In the Finale we again hear in the violin part suggestions of fluttering wings, the gradual softening of whose sound is probably meant to describe the angel's ascent from Mary's chamber.

RAVEL, SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND CELLO. Sonatas for violin or cello and piano are plentiful, but sonatas for violin and cello are rare. The one that we're about to hear is surely the best known of the extant few. Ravel began writing it in 1920 and finished it two years later. Shortly before its première performance in April of 1922, the notoriously self-critical composer completely rewrote the second movement. Evidently determined at the outset to make the work a memorial to Claude Debussy, whom he revered and by whom he was for a time strongly influenced, he allowed its first movement to be published in 1920 as a supplement to a Debussy memorial issue of *La Revue musicale*. The title page of the published score is inscribed "To the memory of Debussy."

In fact, the sonata is as much a farewell as an homage, for in the independence of its parts—what Rollo Myers calls "its pitiless two-part counterpoint"—its structural linearity, its melodic angularities and, above all perhaps, its harmonic astringency it pivots sharply away from Debussy's impressionism and toward something more obviously modern. This shift of style was probably owing to the influence of Bela Bartók, with whom Ravel became personally acquainted when the Hungarian composer played a recital in Paris in early 1922. Echoes of Bartók's first sonata for violin and piano—some fleeting, others emphatic—are heard throughout the work.

The first movement opens with a tense, seesawing sixteen-note figure—less a melody than a motif—played in the upper registers of the two instruments. Although this figure will recur throughout the movement, it is heard most clearly at the beginning of the final section, the recapitulation of what Mark de Voto calls a "very tightly knit sonata form," and in the finale. Several measures into the movement, the cello, temporarily recovering its natural voice, descends to the middle of its range, offering momentary relief from the tensions of its treble dialogue with the violin. Soon the tempo quickens as the instruments engage in a brief, passionate exchange. After a few measures, however, the original tempo is reestablished. As De Voto says, " The movement is remarkable for its extreme melodic cohesiveness; the flow of quarter and eighth notes proceeds uninterrupted to the end without a pause. . . ." It ends quietly on a drawn-out dissonant chord.

The influence of Bartók is strongly felt in the vigorous, glowering second movement, which

has the power and thrust of a scherzo. As in the second movement of Ravel's string quartet, plucked and bowed passages alternate throughout. At times, the churning, folklike rhythms border upon the savage, their dark energy enhanced by the composer's flirtations with bitonality. (We occasionally hear combinations of C major and A major, and once, toward the end of the movement, B minor and F minor appear together.) Particularly striking is the passage that follows the violinist's initial statement of the folklike main theme, during which we hear against a steady pulse of low, soft notes a sequence of percussive bass notes snapped out by the cellist, followed at once by a vehement restatement of the theme.

The structure of the alternately tranquil and anguished slow movement is fairly simple—as De Voto observes, "a slow crescendo from the low register [of the cello] to a first climax . . . followed by a bigger second climax in the high register and a slow descent back to soft dynamics in the low register." It is only in the approach to each climax that the close harmonic accord between the violin and cello yields to dissonance, reflectiveness to anguish, as the music swells in volume. The movement ends as quietly as it began.

Although Ravel didn't label the last movement *rondo*, it contains the essence of one: a vivid opening theme which, alternating with contrasting themes or variants, doggedly recurs. Traditionally, this theme is a memorable tune, but what lingers in the memory here is a striking rhythmic pattern that barely rises to the level of melody: fourteen rapid beats, the first and eighth of which are played *forte*. The contrasting elements contain some of the composer's most startlingly original harmonic effects, of which, says Myers, "Ravel has nowhere else come nearer to complete atonality."

INTERMISSION

TŌRU TAKEMITSU, DISTANCE DE FÉE. Takemitsu, twentieth-century Japan's most important composer, was astonishingly prolific. In addition to scores for more than ninety films, he wrote music for orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo instruments, choruses, and electro-acoustic media. Most of his purely instrumental works are programmatic, meaning that they either describe or evoke non-musical phenomena. Unsurprisingly, he often found inspiration in literature, especially poetry. One of his favorite poets was Japanese surrealist Shuzo Takiguchi, on whose poems he based several of his compositions, including the work we're about to hear. *Distance de fée* might be translated "enchanted interval." The poem itself, originally in Japanese, opens thus: "Beautiful teeth sang behind the trees/Finely shaped ears were between the clouds/Iridescent nails blended with water/Kicked off a pebble. . . ." And so forth, for another thirteen lines. Takemitsu doesn't offer us precise sonic equivalents of such surreal couplings of anatomy and landscape—how, indeed, could he?—but, rather, a sustained, reflective mood piece, during the lingering course of which the violin spins out terse variations on a poignant, five-note melody over a series of mildly dissonant piano chords.

Edvard Grieg, Violin Sonata in C minor. Although he produced a great deal of music for orchestra, chorus, solo voice, and piano, Grieg completed only five chamber works: a string quartet, a cello sonata, and three sonatas for violin and piano. As Nils Grinde observes, "He did not find it easy to enter into the classical spirit that the [chamber] medium requires." Perhaps. But it's also possible that once Grieg had achieved a measure of fame with such important stage works as *Olaf*

Trygvason and *Peer Gynt*, his professional life—a busy round of composing, conducting, performing, teaching, and travel—left few opportunities for composing works for which there was little demand. Moreover, he sometimes suffered from composer's block. For over a year, between the late winter of 1878 and the spring of 1880, for example, he wrote nothing.

The first two violin sonatas, dating from the mid-1860s, are works of Grieg's youth—occasionally awkward but generally accomplished pieces whose lyricism and rhythmic vitality won the praise of no less a musical lion than Franz Liszt. The third, the C minor, composed over twenty years later, is, however, a fully mature work. Its first movement, in which musical passion is repeatedly torn to tatters, is as powerfully expressive a piece of music as Grieg ever wrote. The two plunging motifs with which it opens shortly lead to the initial statement by the violin of its main theme, a seven-note figure that, with variations, will return repeatedly in various guises and contexts. Such is the variety of musical effects—abrupt tempo-shifts, string tremolandi, sweeping crescendos, thumping piano chords, and stratospheric passage-work—that we are seldom aware that Grieg is negotiating the exposition-development-recapitulation pattern of traditional sonata form.

The second movement opens with a leisurely statement by the solo piano of what David Fligg calls "a touchingly simple, song-like melody" that recalls the gentler of the *Lyric Pieces*. (Not surprisingly, these were written at about the same time as the sonata.) After forty-four measures, the violin quietly enters and, supported by a series of soft, arpeggiated chords, repeats the melody almost note for note. Soon the tempo quickens, the emotional heat rises, and the violin and piano engage in what is either a lively folk dance or a spirited struggle for possession of the melody. Following an impassioned climax, calm is restored by a return to the original mood and tempo. Although the melody in the closing section is identical with that of the opening, its accompaniment is more vigorous and varied.

The rondo with which the sonata closes is composed of two starkly opposed musical forms: a bumptious, exhilarating peasant dance in cut time, equally shared by the two instruments, and a languorous, songlike melody of several measures, played first in the rich lower register of the violin, then repeated more loudly and fervently in the middle and high registers.

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Next concert: The Garth Newel Piano Quartet
Jackson Memorial Hall, VMI
Wednesday, March 11, 2009, at 7:45

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This recital was made possible by a grant from the Herbert N. Dillard '34 Fund.

Teresa Ling

Teresa Ling, our recitalist, has appeared several times at VMI as violinist with the Garth Newel Piano Quartet. She has had an impressive career in music as both performer and teacher. She has been a member of the Dakota String Quartet, the Mariposa Piano Trio and the Aurelian Trio, and has both performed and taught at the Adriatic Chamber Music Festival in Italy, the San Diego Chamber Music Workshop, and the Las Vegas Music Festival. In addition, she has served on the faculties of the Washington Conservatory, the University of the Pacific, the University of Nevada–Las Vegas, the University of South Dakota, and Augustana (SD), Northwestern (IA), and Dordt Colleges. Her awards and prizes include an Artist Fellowship from the South Dakota Arts Council, the Winnifred Small Solo Prize (London), and a Rotary Fellowship, which led to her receipt of an Advanced Diplonma from London's Royal Academy of Music. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry from Yale University and a Master's Degree in Performance from Eastman School of Music.

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Andrew Harley

A native of England, pianist Andrew Harley began his musical education at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester and completed it at Oxford University, the Royal Northern College of Music, and the University of Southern California. Since emigrating to America, he has held positions at several universities, including the University of Southern California and the Music Academy of the West. He made his New York debut at Carnegie Hall in 2005, his Washington debut at the Library of Congress in March of 2007. In addition to serving as pianist for the Garth Newel Piano Quartet he is one of two collaborative pianists at the Kamp–Lintfort International Chamber Music Festival in Düsseldorf, Germany.

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Tobias Werner

Cellist Tobias Werner was educated at the Musikhochschule in Freiburg, Germany, and at Boston University. Since completing his formal education he has had a full and rewarding career as a solo recitalist, chamber player and orchestral performer. A member of the Garth Newel Piano Quartet since 1999, he has played throughout Europe and the US, appearing at music festivals at, among other places, Mainz, Oberstdorfer, and Vail. Fairly recently he has performed at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Washington's Phillips Collection, and Strathmore Hall in Pennsylvania. As a soloist with a number of orchestras, he has performed the concerti of Haydn, Boccherini, Dvořák, and Elgar.