

NEVER AGAIN

Powerful Musical Voices Bringing Light into Darkness

Rebecca Jackson, artistic director and violin

Moni Simeonov, violin

Tiffany Richardson, viola

Frédéric Rosselet, cello

Christine McLeavey Payne, piano

Natalie Parker, clarinet

Program

The Lark Ascending for Violin and Piano (1914) Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 110 (1960) Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Largo

Allegro molto

Allegretto

Largo

Largo

-Intermission-

Prelude for the left hand, Op. 9, No. 1 for solo piano (1894) Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

Haim for String Quartet, Clarinet, Piano, and Narrator (2012) Polina Nazaykinskaya (1987-)

Introduction

Narration

Main Part

The Lark Ascending by Vaughan Williams

From the beginning of his career, in the first years of the twentieth century, Ralph Vaughan Williams was seen as a composer rooted in the past. His first significant large-scale work, the *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* composed in 1910, is indebted to the music of his sixteenth-century predecessor and to the great English tradition. Even the experience of studying with Ravel in 1908, which clearly enhanced his understanding of color and sonority, only served to sharpen his own individual style and to ground him more firmly in the sensibilities of his musical heritage. (Years later, Ravel would call him “the only one of my pupils who does not write my music.”) Vaughan Williams was one of the first composers of the new century who managed to forge a strong personal style almost exclusively from the materials of the past.

The Lark Ascending is indebted both to English folk song and to the composer’s reading of the work of the English novelist and poet George Meredith. Vaughan Williams originally wrote *The Lark Ascending* as a short romance for violin and piano in 1914. The autograph is prefaced by lines from Meredith’s poem, “*The Lark Ascending*.” When Vaughan Williams enlisted in the army, after the outbreak of World War I, he set the score aside. The experience of serving in the war seems only to have heightened his nostalgia for a simpler time and for a world that no longer existed. It isn’t surprising then, that shortly after he came home in 1919, he picked up *The Lark Ascending*, lovingly fine-tuned it, and eventually orchestrated it as a touching souvenir of a time gone by. Even the song of the lark itself, which Vaughan Williams suggests in the flourishes of the solo violin, is now a rare thing, the bird’s population in decline and much of its natural habitat irrevocably spoiled.

Vaughan Williams prefaced his score with these lines from Meredith’s poem:

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup
And he the wine which overflows
to lift us with him as he goes.
Till lost on his aërial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings

String Quartet No. 8 by Shostakovich

Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 in c minor comprises a mere twenty minutes of non-stop music, written in three days in 1960 as a distraction from a project to write a film score about the Dresden fire bombings of WWII. In a letter, Shostakovich sarcastically dismissed it as an "ideological piece of no use to anyone". Officially, he dedicated it to the "Victims of Fascism and WWII", but privately, he described it as a eulogy for himself, an epitaph close relations called a suicide note. The work has since become one of the most important string quartets of the 20th century, well known, frequently performed, extensively discussed. Vivid, dramatic, mesmerizing and devastating, this compact but dense quartet contains a lifetime of music: the life and music of Dmitri Shostakovich.

As other composers have done, Shostakovich wrote his name into his music. He used the initials DSCH from the German transliteration of his name (Dmitri SHostakovich). This musical theme saturates the entire quartet, appearing in numerous, immediately recognizable transformations throughout the texture from violin to cello, from melody to accompaniment. It provides the first four notes of the quartet, and a primary element of the first movement. It flashes constantly as a frightening ostinato throughout the violent second movement, mockingly dances in the main melody of the macabre scherzo, languishes in the trio, and ultimately becomes the main subject of a heartbreaking fugue in the finale. Seemingly absent from the apocalyptic fourth movement (it surfaces once at the end as a transition), the motive is disguised within the main theme, a twisted inversion of itself that ends abruptly with three devastating notes variously described as the knock of the KGB, the bombs of warfare or the arrival tragic fate. The quartet is obsessively cyclic and the preoccupation is Shostakovich himself.

Cyclic in a larger sense, the quartet looks back through Shostakovich's lifetime and quotes several of his other compositions: the 1st and 5th symphonies, the Second Piano Trio, the Cello Concerto, and his opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsinsk District (among other references). Whether you recognize the quotes or not, you can easily notice them, obvious swatches of notable melody like memories floating within a stream of consciousness. As if to reflect the fragmented, yet ultimately unbroken continuity of a life, the movements run together without pause, even overlapping, tightly integrated with a series of thematic cross-connections dominated by a single genetic code. The end returns to the beginning, resuming the somber elegy so violently interrupted by disturbing visions of a life flashing before one's eyes. As he composed the quartet, Shostakovich claimed to have shed an unquantifiable number of tears.

Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 is not pretty, nor beautiful in a traditional sense. It is riveting, immensely powerful, profoundly moving, and, in parts, achingly lyrical. In a domain that is idiosyncratically and brilliantly Shostakovich's own, the music explores the complex aesthetics of the darkest aspects of human experience: sorrow, terror, violence, death, shock, grief and a sardonic gallows humor. Regardless of its program, the music is a distillation of visceral emotion with astonishing impact. With or without knowledge of its intricate topical and musical references, the quartet delivers an unforgettable, epic experience. It would seem that Shostakovich wrote a soundtrack after all.

*Shostakovich notes by Kai Christiansen (www.earsense.org)

Prelude for Left Hand by Alexander Scriabin

One can't help wondering why it is that so much music has been written for the left hand alone and virtually none of any significance for the right hand. The answer is that almost all of the great music written for the left hand alone is the result of a determinedly heroic concert pianist who lost his right arm during World War I. Paul Wittgenstein, the Austrian pianist, refused to allow his career as a concert pianist to be ended almost before it had begun by the loss of his arm. Wittgenstein was in a position to ask many of the most important composers of the day to compose music for him to play. Among these were Richard Strauss, Sergei Prokofiev, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Franz Schmidt, Paul Hindemith, Benjamin Britten, Josef Labor, Sergei Bortkiewicz, Maurice Ravel, and Alexander Scriabin.

Scriabin was one of the most innovative and most controversial of early modern composers. The Great Soviet Encyclopedia said of Scriabin that, "No composer has had more scorn heaped on him or greater love bestowed." Born into a family of aristocrats, Scriabin was a contemporary of Rachmaninov. He went to the Moscow Conservatory to study piano and composition with Sergei Taneyev. While there, he strained his hand severely while learning Liszt's Don Juan Fantasy and Balakirev's Islamey. This resulted in two compositions for left hand alone, Prelude and Nocturne Op. 9. Scriabin also trained his one uninjured hand hard and, from this moment on, most of his piano repertoire remained incredibly difficult for the left hand.

Despite fairly traditional Russian training, Scriabin's music speaks its own language entirely and has no 'Russian-ness' or nationalistic traces in it. Some of the early compositions are said to be heavily influenced by Chopin but this seems an unfair comparison. While he did make use of forms that Chopin himself employed, his compositions are all through-and-through 'Scriabin'; and if you listen carefully, they already carry the kind of dark undertones that envelop his later works.

Haim by Polina Nazaykinskaya

For string quartet, clarinet, 2 pianos and narrator.

Haim premiered in 2012 at Music in May in Santa Cruz. The piece consists of three “movements” – music – spoken word – music. The text read by a narrator is written by David Arben. The title of this work comes from David Arben’s name at birth, Chaim, Hebrew for “life.” His family name, Arbeitman, means “worker.” Out of a labor of love, the violin which miraculously saved his life, came music that is the universal language of hope.

Polina Nazaykinskaya was born in Togliatti, Russia on January 20, 1987 and has been studying music since the age of 4. After graduating with honors from the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Russia with concentrations in violin and composition, Polina earned her Masters of Music Degree and Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music. Her professors at Yale included Christopher Theofanidis and Ezra Laderman. Currently Polina is pursuing her Doctorate Degree in Composition at the Graduate Center City University of New York and studying with Professor Tania León. Over the last four years her music has been performed by the Russian National Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, the Yale Philharmonia Orchestra, the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Russia, the Omsk Philharmonic Orchestra, the St. Olaf Philharmonia, the Boston Metro Opera, among others. Polina’s music has garnered numerous national and international awards and received raving reviews in the press, including the New York Times. In 2010, "Sony-Music Russia" label released a CD that featured Polina’s symphonic poem "Winter Bells".

Biographies

Sound Impact is a collective of musicians dedicated to serving communities and igniting change through live performance. In 2012, co-founders Danielle Cho, Rebecca Jackson, and Tiffany Richardson brought "Haim" by Polina Nazaykinskaya to Washington DC areas. This chamber work elicited an overwhelming response from both performers and audience and led to the genesis of Sound Impact. Each project brings aboard different collaborators creating a unique team. Sound Impact has connected with communities in hospitals, schools, homeless centers and children's homes. Sound Impact recently returned from their 2nd international tour of Costa Rica, presenting masterclasses and concerts. This year also included an educational residency at The Arts Center in North Carolina and at the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall.

Hailed as “riveting” by The San Francisco Examiner, violinist **Rebecca Jackson** is a native of California. She is founder and artistic director of chamber music festival, Music in May. Rebecca is a founding member of Ensemble San Francisco, Sound Impact and has performed with Sarasota Opera, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, San Francisco Opera and Ballet, and Santa Fe Opera. The latest undertaking, in collaboration with her father, is writing the authorized biography of her mentor David Arben, imprisoned in 7 Nazi death camps & former associate concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Ms. Jackson holds degrees from The Juilliard School and UC Santa Cruz.

A native of South Carolina, **Natalie Parker** is currently the principal clarinet of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra. Ms. Parker joined the Ballet Orchestra in January of 2012 and received her masters in music from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music the following May. Ms. Parker has recently attended such music festivals as Brevard Music Center, the Madeline Island Chamber Music Camp and the Texas Music Festival. While in school, she actively participated in the Houston Da Camera Young Artist's Program and JUMP!, the community music outreach program at Rice University. In 2010, Ms. Parker won second prize in the International Clarinet Association's Young Artist Competition and performed in recital at the Association's annual ClarinetFest. Since arriving in San Francisco, Ms. Parker has played frequently with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, and enjoys performing chamber music throughout the Bay area. She currently is on faculty at San Francisco State University.

A prizewinner at the Lyon International Chamber Music Competition, **Christine McLeavey Payne** was featured on Radio France and France TV. Ms. Payne is the pianist and co-founder of Ensemble San Francisco. Ms. Payne has collaborated with several leading chamber musicians, including musicians from the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Tokyo String Quartet, San Francisco Symphony, and Philadelphia Orchestra. She has performed in such venues as Alice Tully Hall, the Kingston Chamber Music Festival, the Banff International Keyboard Festival, and the Tanglewood Music Festival. Locally, she has performed at the Montalvo Arts Center, Music in May, Classical Music Sundaes, and as soloist with the Stanford Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Payne holds a masters from Juilliard and graduated as valedictorian of Princeton University, with a degree in Physics.

Violist **Tiffany Richardson** enjoys a multi-faceted career as performer and arts educator. Ms. Richardson performs regularly with the Richmond Symphony, Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, National Philharmonic Orchestra and the Washington National Opera. Ms. Richardson has performed with the St. Louis Symphony, and attended prestigious festivals including the Aspen Music Festival, IMS Prussia Cove, Spoleto Festival USA, and Festival Mozaic. Deeply committed to community outreach and arts education, Ms. Richardson is co-founder of Sound Impact, a chamber music collective dedicated to serving communities through live performance. Ms. Richardson attended the Arts and Passion Driven Learning Institute at Harvard University and performs in the National Symphony Orchestra's Education Ensemble, the King Street Quartet. Ms. Richardson holds degrees from University of Maryland and the New England Conservatory of Music.

Frederic Rosselet

Swiss-American cellist Frédéric Rosselet has performed widely across Europe and North America. A passionate orchestral and chamber musician, he has been a member of the Verbier Festival Orchestra, a participant at the Yellow Barn Music Festival as well as a faculty member at the Yellow Barn Young Artists Program. Having a keen interest in early and new music, he enjoys discovering new repertoire for the cello and exploring old works on baroque cello and viola da gamba.

After finishing studies at both the Basel Music Academy and the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Frédéric obtained his DMA from the University of Southern California, where he was awarded first prizes in both the solo Bach and the concerto competitions. He has mainly benefited from the teachings of cellists Ralph Kirshbaum, Paul Katz, Rafael Rosenfeld and David Geringas.

Moni Simeonov moved from his native Bulgaria at the age of 15 to study music in the United States. Since then, he has lived on both coasts, and concertized in most States, as well as in Asia, South America, Europe and the Middle East. Upcoming projects include a recording with the Zagreb Radio Orchestra, as well as tour to Mexico and Argentina. Moni is Currently the Strings Department Chair at California State University, Long Beach. His hobbies include the study of foreign languages and martial arts.