

The Color of Sound

Program

February 3, 2020 at 7:30 pm
Finney Concert Hall, Texas A&M University-Commerce

Adagio molto in E-flat major TH 158
for harp and string quartet

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

Dances for harp and string quartet

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

I. Danse sacrée
II. Danse profane

String Quartet No. 2 in a minor op. 35

Anton Arensky
(1861-1906)

Moderato
Variations on a theme by P. Tchaikovsky
Finale

❧ *Intermission* ❧

Fratres for string quartet

Arvo Pärt
(1935-)

String Quartet F major op. 96
(American Quartet)

Antonín Dvořák
(1841-1904)

Allegro ma non troppo
Lento
Molto vivace
Finale – Vivace, ma no troppo

Barbara Biggers, harp
Mark Miller and **Yuko Mansell**, violins
Ute Miller, viola; **Elizabeth White**, cello
Jack Unzicker, double bass

Barbara Biggers has been described by reviewers as one who “plays with beauty and nuance” and “creates a luminous sound.” She has lived in Dallas, Texas for only a few years and since moving here she has played with the Dallas Symphony, Dallas Opera, Ft. Worth Symphony, Dallas Chamber Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Dallas Wind Symphony, as well as many freelance groups in the area. Previously she was an active freelancer in the New York area. Ms. Biggers performed regularly with the New Jersey Symphony, and was principal harp with the Westfield Symphony. She also worked with the New Jersey Opera Theater, Princeton Symphony, New York City Opera as well as many other symphonic groups in the New York area. In addition, she has performed for the Tony Awards at Radio City Music Hall. As soloist, she has appeared with the Lake Placid Symphonietta, Marble Collegiate Concert Series, Monmouth Symphony, Newtown Chamber Symphony, and American Harp Society and has performed at Merkin Concert Hall in recital. Her multi-faceted career has included performing with headliners as diverse as Plácido Domingo, Andrea Bocelli, Jean-Pierre Rampal, The Irish Tenors, Diana Ross, Johnny Mathis and many more. She has performed on *The Today Show* and also has done a national television commercial. Ms. Biggers also maintains a large private teaching studio, and has done numerous master classes for the American Harp Society.

Ms. Biggers was principal harp with the hit Broadway musicals *Follies*, *Ragtime* and *Nine*. Her other Broadway credits include *Phantom of the Opera*, *South Pacific*, *The Producers*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Pirate Queen*, *Wicked*, *The Light in the Piazza*, *42nd Street*, *Hello, Dolly!* and *Carousel*.

Her recordings include a solo CD, *Nocturne*, Britten’s *A Ceremony of Carols* with the American Boy Choir and *Fantasy Sonata* by Sir Arnold Bax with violist Brett Deubner, as well as the cast albums of *Nine* and *Follies*. In addition, she has recorded for film scores and a variety of pop albums.

Ms. Biggers currently lives in Dallas with her husband Stephen, an acupuncturist and the owner/operator of Park Cities Acupuncture.

Besides serving as concertmaster of the East Texas Symphony Orchestra, violinist **Mark Miller** performs with the Fort Worth Symphony and other North Texas ensembles. He is a founder and president of Mount Vernon Music Association, and co-presents the chamber series “The Color of Sound” at Texas A&M University – Commerce, where for eleven years he taught and performed as an Artist-in-Residence with his wife, violist Ute Miller, and the ensemble Duo Renard. Their recordings can be found on the MSR and Fleur de Son labels. Following studies at SUNY Purchase, Indiana University - Bloomington and Boston University, Mark studied with Jürgen Kussmaul in Germany, where he was assistant concertmaster in the Robert Schumann Kammerorchester of Düsseldorf and a member of the Orchester der Beethovenhalle Bonn.

A native of Nara, Japan, **Yuko Mansell** began playing the violin at the age of three, and has been giving performances across North America and Japan. She holds both her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees in violin performance from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, where she studied under renowned violinists Henryk Kowalski, Ik-hwan Bae, Koichiro Harada, and Federico Agostini, as well as with Stanley Ritchie on Baroque violin. She is currently a candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in violin performance at the University of North Texas under guidance of Julia Bushkova. As an avid teacher, she maintains a large studio in Plano, TX, and performs with several ensembles across the Dallas – Fort Worth vicinity.

Ute Miller is the principal violist of the East Texas Symphony, performs frequently with the Dallas and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestras and has appeared as a soloist with the East Texas Symphony Orchestra. A founder and the Executive Director of Mount Vernon Music Association, Ute performs with her husband Mark in the violin-violita ensemble Duo Renard, which was brought to Texas with a National Endowment for the Arts Rural Residencies chamber music grant. She also produces the Color of Sound series at Texas A&M Commerce, where she was Artist-in-Residence. Ute’s musical studies include the prestigious Konzertexamen diploma from the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf, and a year at Boston University as a student of Raphael Hillyer. In addition to playing with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, she served for seven years as assistant principal violist of the Gürzenich Orchester/Cologne Philharmonic, and for eight years as principal violist of the Dallas Opera Orchestra. She maintains a private studio in Dallas.

Cellist **Elizabeth White** is a founding member of the Cézanne Quartet and an alumna of Southern Methodist University, where she studied with Andrés Diaz and Christopher Adkins. Highlights of her career include performances at the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival, the Aronson Cello Festival, the Clandeboye Festival, the Music in the Mountains Festival, the National Orchestral Institute, the Texas Christian University CelloFest, and with the Meadows Virtuosi Players and Meadows Symphony Orchestra.

Elizabeth made her solo debut with the Oklahoma Youth Orchestra playing Elgar's Cello Concerto, and performed Haydn's Cello Concerto in C major with the Meadows Chamber Orchestra. In December of 2016 she recorded works by Mendelssohn, Bartók, and Kevin Puts with the Cézanne Quartet, to be released in Fall 2018. Elizabeth was a President's Scholar at Southern Methodist University and an Emerson Scholar at the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

Dr. **Jack Unzicker**, Assistant Professor of Double Bass at the University of Texas at Arlington, is an active educator, orchestral and chamber musician, and soloist. In addition to heading the double bass studio, Dr. Unzicker has also taught Music History, Music Literature, Music in Film, Beginning and Advanced String Music Education, Ear Training, and Music Appreciation at the University of Texas at Arlington. Previously, he has served on the faculties of Texas Tech University, Tarleton State University, Texas Woman's University, North Texas Double Bass Camps, and Hong Kong Youth Music Camp. He has performed, adjudicated, and presented at the International Society of Bassists, American String Teachers Association, and Texas Music Educators Association Conventions and is featured in articles on playing and teaching the double bass in *The Strad* and *Strings Magazine*.

Dr. Unzicker is currently the principal double bassist of the Dallas Chamber Symphony and Plano Symphony Orchestra. He has performed as principal of the AIMS Festival Orchestra (Graz, Austria), Dallas Chamber Orchestra, Dallas Wind Symphony, Lubbock Symphony Orchestra, and the Metropolitan Classical Ballet. He also performs regularly with the Dallas Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, and Dallas Opera. Dr. Unzicker is an ardent and sought-after chamber musician, performing with Amici di Corde San Marco, Caminos Del Inka, Chamber Music Festival Saugatuck, Gyros String Quintet, Orquesta Divertimento (Costa Rica), and Santa Fe Pro Musica. Dr. Unzicker's recent concerto performances include three seminal works of Giovanni Bottesini, *Concerto No. 2 in B Minor*, *Passione Amorose*, and the *Gran Duo Concertante*.

Dr. Unzicker received his DMA and MM from the University of North Texas and BMus from Western Washington University.

Notes on the Program

Tchaikovsky was in his early twenties and a student at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory when he composed his short (roughly six minutes) *Adagio molto in E-flat major* for the rather unconventional instrumentation of harp and string quartet as an exercise for a composition class taught by Anton Rubinstein. The single movement conveys a hushed, hymn-like quality, with the strings providing a long introduction before the entrance of the harp, whose part consists almost entirely of descending broken chords. (Duration: about 4 minutes)

In 1897 the French instrument manufacturer Pleyel and Wolff proudly introduced their new chromatic harp, with an increased number of strings and therefore no need for bothersome foot pedals. Promoting their new product, the company appealed to conservatories to offer chromatic harp instruction. They also approached star composer **Claude Debussy**, whose fame was cemented by the recent success of his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, to write a work showcasing the instrument. The result, *Danses Sacrée et Profane*, immediately outlived the instrument it was written for when harpists realized the chromatic harp was actually more of a challenge to play – and tune.

In French, the word *profane* does not connote scandal or obscenity, simply referring to something non-religious. In that sense, it is easy to understand the significance of the title of this gorgeous music, most

often heard performed by a larger number of players in a string orchestra. The first of the dances, *Sacrée*, evokes a spiritual character with its imitation of medieval Gregorian chant. The listener is transported out of the cares of the world and into a place of reverence and holiness. Following without pause, the *Danse Profane* is a musical romp in the sunshine. Debussy, observing a popular French trend of his day, infused this lilting waltz with Spanish flavor. (Duration: about 10 minutes)

Anton Arensky's teacher at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, made the uncharitable prediction about his student "He will quickly be forgotten." Perhaps this disparaging view was a reaction to Arensky falling under the sway of Tchaikovsky's influence. Perhaps it was his disapproval of Arensky's self-destructive gambling and drinking habits. In any case, though Arensky died of tuberculosis at the age of 44, more than a century later our world is richer for the music he created. The *String Quartet No. 2 in A minor* was dedicated to the memory of his friend and mentor Tchaikovsky, and composed in the months after Tchaikovsky's death. His unusual choice of instrumentation, violin, viola and two cellos, gives the music a sonic depth corresponding to the composer's sadness. Listen for the sound of the Russian Orthodox funeral chant at various times in the opening movement. The middle movement is a brilliantly diverse set of seven variations on *The Legend*, one of Tchaikovsky's *Songs for Children Op. 54*. You will recognize the close of this movement in the return of the chant motive from the beginning of the piece. The Finale opens with music from a Russian funeral Mass, and concludes with a folk tune associated with the coronation of the Tsar, a tune used by Mussorgsky in his opera Boris Godunov, and by Beethoven in his String Quartet Op. 59 No. 2.

The version of this piece you are hearing today takes Arensky's dark instrumentation a step further by replacing the second cello with double bass. The transcription is by Anthony Scelba, the first person to receive a Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in double bass performance from the Juilliard School. (Duration: about 30 minutes)

Before just recently losing the distinction to John Williams, Estonian **Arvo Pärt** was for several years the most performed living composer in the world. He began musical studies when he was seven, and attended the Tallinn Conservatory. The Soviet authorities condemned his music in 1968 after he produced his first openly sacred piece, *Credo*. The following eight years Pärt barely composed, but studied medieval and Renaissance music. Finding his musical voice again, he returned to composing using a minimalist technique he calls *tintinnabuli* (from the Latin word for bell). Based on a two-part texture with a melodic voice moving around a central pitch, tintinnabuli is described by Pärt himself as "...a form of polyphony in music that allows free melody, and its harmonic accompaniment which can be broken down into purely tonal chords. The second part is like a guardian angel that goes with you...a modest companion, invisible, but always there."

Pärt composed *Fratres* in 1977, and it was one of his first pieces to use tintinnabulation. It was originally performed by the Estonian early music ensemble Hortus Musicus, with no specified instrumentation. There are now many versions of the piece for various scorings, always with the same musical substance. Note: if you imagine that the timbre of the instruments sounds especially deep, you are correct. Pärt requires one string on both 1st violin and viola to be tuned considerably lower than normal. (Duration: about 9 minutes)

In 1892, Czech composer **Antonín Dvořák** moved to the United States, and accepted the directorship of the new National Conservatory of Music in New York City. His former student, the violinist Josef Jan Kovařík, had accompanied Dvořák and his wife in their move from Prague, and persuaded the composer to return with him to his family home in the tiny town of Spillville, Iowa. A rural Bohemian enclave full of Czech immigrants, it was an unlikely place for a famous composer of symphonies and operas, but Dvořák was happy there. He filled his days with productive work on compositions, conversations with the locals, and walks. Not one whole week after arriving in Spillville, he began working on the *Quartet in F major Op. 96*, and had it completely sketched out in just three days, writing in the manuscript "Thanks be to the Lord God. I am satisfied. It went quickly."

Dvořák had written extensively about the state of music in America. As one who had achieved remarkable success incorporating his own native folk idioms into classical music, he was convinced that

African-American and Native American music should be central elements of an American national musical tradition. After hearing in passing young Harry Burleigh, a black scholarship student at the National Conservatory, singing as he cleaned the halls, Dvořák requested he come sing for him. Burleigh, who gained his own fame as a composer, arranger and baritone singer, later said “I sang for him very often, and before he wrote his own themes, he filled himself with the spirit of the old spirituals.”

The popularity of the *American Quartet*, like that of *The New World Symphony*, has been universal and enduring. Its opening theme is based on the 5-note (pentatonic) scale, common to indigenous music the world over. The *Lento* second movement is characterized by wistful beauty, perhaps a reflection of Dvořák’s homesickness, but probably also colored by the sadness expressed in the songs he heard from Burleigh. In the bright third movement, listen for the sound of the bird (a scarlet tanager) perched in the tree outside Dvořák’s window, producing such a distraction that the composer remarked “This damned bird!” Before the Finale races to its conclusion, listen for bits of the chorale from a hymn, perhaps one of those Dvořák played on the organ in the little Spillville church.

Though he only stayed there one summer, Dvořák loved the time he spent in Spillville, and after returning to New York said he wished he could have stayed there. Back in Prague years later, he told a friend Spillville was “...an ideal spot. That’s when I felt happy.” (Duration: about 30 minutes)

Notes by Mark Miller