

Sunday, November 14, 2010 • 3 pm

At the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Second & State Streets, Troy, NY.

Pre-concert talk at 2 pm, Rensselaer County Historical Soc., 57 2nd St., Troy.

LARA ST. JOHN, *violin*
Martin Kennedy, *piano*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)

Sonata in G minor, L. 140
Allegro vivo
Intermède: fantasque et léger
Finale: très animé

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Sonata No. 5 in F Major, Op. 24 "Spring"
Allegro
Adagio molto espressivo
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

GEORGE GERSHWIN
(1898-1937; arr. Jascha Heifetz, 1901-1987)

Three Preludes

INTERMISSION

MARTIN KENNEDY
(b. 1978)

Trivial Pursuits

HENRYK WIENIAWSKI
(1835-1880)

Legende in G minor, Op. 17

STEPHEN FOSTER
(1826-1864; arr. Matthew Van Brink, b. 1978)

Songs of Stephen Foster

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875-1937)

Tzigane: Rhapsodie de concert

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PROGRAM NOTES

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (born 1862, *St. Germain-en-Laye*; died 1918, *Paris*)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1916)

1. Allegro vivo
2. Intermède, fantasque et léger
3. Finale: Très animé

Debussy's Violin Sonata presents a superb balance of sweetness, fire, humor, and nostalgia. It is a work imbued with deep melancholy that also embodies other characteristic traits that make Debussy's work distinguishable from others: a sense of fantasy, freedom, and affective depth. Written at the very end of the composer's life, the Sonata is one of the finest examples of Debussy's compositional and artistic dexterity. At the time of this composition, Debussy was already ill with terminal cancer. He had continued to write despite his failing health, partly for financial reasons. It was in 1915 that he began a project of writing six sonatas for various instrumentations; the Violin Sonata was the third in the set, and the last work he completed before his death.

Lionized by Ravel and detested by Saint-Saens, Debussy was a patriotic Frenchman, who worked hard to protect and preserve French culture. His opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, produced in 1902, was a landmark of French music that strongly influenced both his contemporaries and younger composers. Considered the first and foremost Impressionist composer, Debussy had a style marked by Japonism and innovative harmonies and tone color that was also characterized by understatement and emotional warmth.

The challenge for the violin-piano duo in the Violin Sonata is the collaboration of senses and spirit. Unlike sonatas from earlier periods, or other sonatas of Debussy's time, the two instruments do not accompany each other per se; rather, one instrument leads with a pulling energy against the counter melody or motif of the other. Ultimately, this creates a different kind of sonority and texture; the two instruments challenge one another but their arguments ultimately bring them closer together.

The poignant opening chords of the first movement of Debussy's Violin Sonata, *Allegro vivo*, played by the piano, immediately transport the listener into a subdued atmosphere, enveloped in nostalgia and sadness. The movement is filled with rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity with an ongoing momentum, regardless of speed. In contrast, the middle movement, *Fantasque et léger*, as indicated by its marking, is mostly light and fantastic, capricious with a hint of coquettishness and with a second theme as surprisingly melodious as it is sensuous.

Debussy finished the final movement, *Très animé*, in October 1916, four months before he completed the preceding two movements. It begins with running notes in the piano, punctuated with a melodic emphasis from the second theme of the previous movement. The violin then enters in a slightly modified handling of the nostalgic theme from the beginning of the sonata. The main bulk of the movement, however, is a showcase of agility with a splash. In particular, Debussy uses the maximum pitch range available on the violin, going from the open G (lowest possible note of the instrument) to a C-sharp at three octaves and a half-

step above the middle C. For the piano, he demands a tremolo-like speed with atmospheric lightness of touch.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (*born 1770, Bonn; died 1827, Vienna*)

Sonata for Piano and Violin in F Major, Op. 24, "Spring" (1800-1801)

1. Allegro
2. Adagio molto espressivo
3. Scherzo: Allegro molto
4. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Beethoven had a great love of nature and was particularly happy and inspired when in the forest or under the stars. The presence of God for him was reinforced by the beauty of nature. This tender side - bucolic, romantic, and gentle - contrasts with the well-known characteristics of extreme dynamic tension and emotional aura in much of Beethoven's music, but it is indeed found throughout his oeuvre and is an important element in understanding the composer's complex personality.

In an attempt to define Beethoven's genius, Leonard Bernstein maintained that the composer had an 'inexplicable ability to know what the next note had to be.' Certainly, in listening to any of Beethoven's works, one is aware that the composer is very conscious of what he is doing. Moreover, there is an incredible combination of sureness of musical direction and complete submission to the higher powers. Beethoven's music is, without doubt, miraculous and godly. Therefore, it is not possible to imitate his music; it is always distinctive, uncontested, and in its own class.

The 'Spring' sonata, Op. 24, is the fifth of Beethoven's ten sonatas for piano and violin. Composed between 1800 and 1801, it was dedicated, along with the Sonata in A minor Op. 23 to one of Beethoven's most generous Viennese patrons, Count Moritz von Fries. Both sonatas were originally intended to be paired as Op. 23, Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, but through the fault of the engraver, the 'Spring' sonata became Opus 24.

One of the most popular of Beethoven's sonatas for piano and violin, the work is easily remembered, even after first hearing. The music is full of joy, and its refreshing, hopeful quality makes the subtitle, 'Spring,' most appropriate. Throughout, the melodies are immediate, simple, and elegant. There are also humorous moments, reminding listeners that Beethoven was a master of fun and games as well.

'Spring' is one of only three of Beethoven's piano and violin sonatas to be cast in four movements, the others being No. 7, Op. 30 No. 2, and No. 10, Op. 96. It opens with one of the most unforgettable melodies of all time played in F Major by the violin. The second theme which follows is more rhythmic and energetic, and the movement develops around the two contrasting themes. The slow movement in B-flat Major speaks simply and flowingly, with violin and piano alternating in presenting the theme in slightly different variations. The third movement, a scherzo and trio, is like a game of tag in which the violin and the piano bounce off each other. The coquettish impression is strengthened by the rhythmic playfulness. The finale is in rondo form, with a lyrical theme followed by three episodes. Lighthearted and spontaneous, its dotted rhythms exemplify Beethoven's inventiveness and sense of humor.

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937; arr. Jascha Heifetz, 1901-1987)

Three Preludes for Violin and Piano

George Gershwin composed the Preludes for Piano in 1926, two years after Rhapsody in Blue, and two years prior to An American in Paris. Transcribed for Violin and Piano by the supremely canonized virtuoso of all violinists, Jascha Heifetz, these three picturesque cultural snapshots are even more vivid than the original solo piano version. While Heifetz's transcription adds a virtuosic flair (no doubt to showcase his deistic technique), the inclusion of the violin brings a singing element to the texture that provides drama and contrast. Gershwin was born of Jewish immigrant parents in New York, and his style of composition is an American blend of ragtime, blues, jazz (as it would eventually be known), and European classical tradition. DuBose Heyward, author of the novel from which Porgy and Bess was spawned, recounts a story in Norman Lebrecht's Book of Musical Anecdotes:

The Gullah Negro prides himself on what he calls 'shouting.' This is a complicated pattern beaten out by feet and hands as an accompaniment to the spirituals and is indubitably an African survival. I shall never forget the night when, at a Negro meeting on a remote sea-island, George started 'shouting' with them. And eventually to their huge delight stole the show from their 'champion' shouter. I think he is the only white man in America who could have done it.

Perhaps Marshall Mathers would currently challenge Mr. Heyward's assertion, though it is valuable to note that the concept of crossing racial boundaries in pursuit of artistic cultural reflection is, by now, an established phenomenon. Gershwin was an innovator, helping to fuse the ideals of accessible expression and high art. Perhaps this is the American aesthetic, or at least an aspect of it.

MARTIN KENNEDY

Trivial Pursuits

"In addition to being a wonderful collaborator, Lara is also one of my dearest friends. We have spent many late nights conversing over the board game Trivial Pursuits (a favorite of ours) and red wine (another favorite of ours). For the uninitiated, Trivial Pursuit involves answering questions with the goal of collecting six 'pie pieces,' each one representing a different area of knowledge. In this same vein, Trivial Pursuits is composed of six unique slices, each different yet tied to a singular motive: a major scale that never resolves. This motive - the musical equivalent of a dog chasing its tail - is truly the most trivial of all pursuits."

-- Martin Kennedy

HENRYK WIENIAWSKI (*born 1835, Lublin, France; died 1880, Moscow*)

Légende in G minor, Op. 17

Légende Op. 17 is a showpiece by the Polish violin virtuoso Henryk Wieniawski, written for solo violin and orchestral accompaniment, though it is often performed using a piano reduction as a substitute for the orchestra. It is estimated to have been written in about 1860, though the exact date is unknown.

Wieniawski's Légende was instrumental in helping to secure his engagement to Isabella Hampton. Initially, Isabella's parents did not approve of their daughter's

engagement to Wieniawski, but after they heard the piece, they were so impressed that they offered the young couple their blessing, and they were married in 1860.

Structure and Analysis

The piece can be divided into three main sections, loosely following an ABA format. *Légende* Op. 17 is in G minor, but the middle section is in the major mode. It is in 3/4 time. The mood is set from the start with a low melody in the horns, accompanied by delicate pizzicato (plucking) in the string sections. After the brief orchestral introduction, the solo violin part enters, with a soft, simple melodic line. As the piece progresses, Wieniawski intensifies the music by having the orchestral strings switch from pizzicato to arco (bowed) and by adding embellishments and turns to the solo violin part. Wieniawski further intensifies the solo violin part through usage of double stops. Within the first section, the main theme repeats itself, with the same orchestral music of the beginning of the piece serving as an interlude-like return to the repeat of the violin theme. In the repeat of the theme, the orchestral texture is varied slightly, with much more usage of pizzicato in the strings. At the end of the first section, the violin part imitates the opening melody of the horn section.

A significant cadence is reached on the tonic G, and the second section begins, this time in the major mode. The overall mood of the piece changes here, as the meter changes to duple and the tempo increases. The orchestra plays a march-like motif underneath the solo violin part, which has a swift, moving part full of double stops and chords. The playful mood is further enhanced by the violinist's usage of slides. Throughout this section, Wieniawski includes brief passages in the minor mode to foreshadow the eventual return to it in the last section. The orchestral and solo violin parts both create a long crescendo as the musical line ascends and intensifies. At the climax, the violin plays a rapid descending chromatic scale, and upon reaching the bottom, the music transitions back into the opening minor theme, again in 3/4 time.

At the start of the third section, the opening horn melody returns. After another brief orchestral interlude, the violin theme of the beginning returns. The violin part recapitulates the melody, and then executes scalar and arpeggio passages all the while making a decrescendo, ending softly on a high G (three octaves above middle C).

STEPHEN FOSTER (1826-1864; arr. Matthew Van Brink, b. 1978)

Songs of Stephen Foster

Stephen Foster is recognized as the “father of American music” for his 19th century songs many of which remain popular today. He wrote his first composition at age fourteen and, in spite of his lack of formal musical training, later produced widely performed works. Composer, pianist and accordionist Matthew Van Brink's (mattvanbrink.com) medley for violin and piano is based on several of Foster's best known tunes including: *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, *Some Folks*, *Soiree Polka*, *Hard Times Come Again No More*, and *Beautiful Dreamer*. The premiere took place on October 15, 2010, at Rockefeller University, New York, performed by violinist Lara St. John and pianist Martin Kennedy.

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-, Basses Pyrénées; died 1937, Paris)

Tzigane (1924)

Maurice Ravel is one of the most important French Impressionist composers, along with Debussy. In addition to composing he was an accomplished pianist and conductor. As a composer, he was often fascinated with the interpretation of a theme, both musically and content-wise, as demonstrated in his well-known works such as *Rapsodie Espagnole*, on a Spanish theme, and *Tzigane*, on a Hungarian theme.

Born into a household filled with cultural activities, Ravel's parents, who were French and Basque, were very supportive of their child's musical gifts and interests. Though he was born in Basses Pyrénées, he spent his childhood almost entirely in Paris—capital of the intelligentsia and new artistic trends, where the previously considered “exotic” was increasingly becoming the “fashionable.”

Tzigane, which Ravel wrote in his forties, was first conceived for violin and piano, but later arranged for violin and orchestra. Today, it is still more often played in the original version of violin and piano. The word *tzigane* is French for “gypsy.”

Dedicated to the Hungarian violinist Jelly D'Aranyi, a great-niece of the legendary violinist Josef Joachim, *Tzigane* is a work derived from Ravel's interest in the gypsies and in Hungarian culture. It can be broadly divided in 2 sections: the Cadenza and the post-Cadenza. The Cadenza could be considered a gypsy's declamatory monologue about his life - his misery, passions, memories, surroundings, and dreams. As the Cadenza ends we are transported into the countryside where the gypsies live. We experience the gaiety of their lives in a section that peaks in a festive, frenzied dance in the form of a loose set of variations, Ravel basically uses two themes: one previously used in the Cadenza, and another introduced only towards the middle of the main section (post-Cadenza).

The violinist has plenty of "tricks" with which to demonstrate virtuosity and technical agility in this piece. The greatest challenge is in the interpretation of the Cadenza, however. Poor playing can easily make it interminable. The piece demands a particular blend of spontaneity, uniqueness, and coordination, all of which is more difficult than one might initially assume. Playing the Cadenza with "beautiful" tone does not solve the problem, either; it is as if the performer must completely redefine violin playing!

LARA St. JOHN (photo: Twain Newhart)

www.larastjohn.com

Canadian-born violinist Lara St. John has been described as "something of a phenomenon" by *The Strad* and a “high-powered soloist” by the *New York Times*.



She has performed as soloist with the orchestras of Cleveland, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Seattle, Brooklyn, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, the Boston Pops and many more in North America. In Europe, she has played with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, NDR Symphony (Hanover), Zurich Chamber Orchestra, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Bournemouth Symphony, and the Amsterdam Symphony, among others. In Asia,

solo appearances have included the Hong Kong Symphony, Tokyo Symphony, China Philharmonic in Beijing, Guangzhou Symphony and the Shanghai Broadcasting Orchestra. Lara has also performed with the Queensland Orchestra in Australia and the Akbank Symphony in Turkey.

The Los Angeles Times has written, "St. John brings to the stage personal charisma, an unflagging musical imagination and genuine passion." Recitals in major concert halls have included New York, Boston, San Francisco, Ravinia, Washington DC, Prague, Berlin, Toronto, Montreal, and in the Forbidden City.

Lara St. John's recording with the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and conductor Eduardo Marturet **VIVALDI– The Four Seasons and Piazzolla – The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires** reached No. 2 on the iTunes charts on its first day and Maestro José Antonio Abreu, the founder of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela and El Sistema wrote of the recording: "This stunning recording features the extraordinary violinist Lara St. John. She and the musicians of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra give an inspired performance under the baton of Eduardo Marturet." *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* said, "Lara St. John is as captivating in the seductive scenes of the Piazzolla as she is crisp, caressing and colorful in Vivaldi's atmospheric paeans to nature" and *Audiophile Audition* stated "Do we need another Four Seasons? With playing and sound like this, yes we do!"

Lara's sixth recording, **Hindson – Corigliano – Liszt/Kennedy/St. John** was released in 2008 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of London, featuring two world premiere works; the *Matthew Hindson Violin Concerto* and the *Martin Kennedy/ St. John* arrangement of *Totentanz* by *Franz Liszt*, as well as *The Red Violin Suite* by John Corigliano. In writing of his impressions of the recording, John Corigliano commented: "I'm thrilled to be included in a new recording by the brilliant and always surprising Lara St. John. She is a real maverick, as a performer and in her choice of repertoire. An opulent and virtuosic new violin concerto and my Red Violin suite are coupled with a newly arranged version of a 19th century pianistic tour de force in her latest stunning release."

Lara's fifth recording, **Bach: The Six Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo**, described as "awe-inducing" by *The Toronto Star*, and "wild, idiosyncratic, and gripping" by the *Los Angeles Times*, was released in the autumn of 2007 where it climbed to No. 2 on the iTunes classical charts and was that year's best selling double album on iTunes.

Her third recording, **Bach: the Concerto Album** appeared in the "strongly recommended" section of *Gramophone*, which stated, "It is difficult to argue with such a technically dazzling and unflinching musical interpretation." In June of 2005 the recording was released on iTunes where it immediately reached No. 1 in the classical category. Lara has also recorded for Sony Classical.

Her debut CD, **Bach: Works for Violin Solo**, has sold over 50,000 copies and received resounding acclaim. *The Chicago Tribune* described Ms. St. John as having "superb technique and an irresistible vitality," while *US News and World Report* called the recording "an exquisite performance." Her second album, **Gypsy**, was described as "a sizzling display" by *Gramophone*, and *The Strad* called her "an

electrifying player, as deeply satisfying in Bach as she is bewitchingly seductive in Waxman's *Carmen Fantasy*."

She has been featured in *People*, *US News* and *World Report*, on CNN's *Showbiz Today*, NPR's *All Things Considered*, Fox News, CBC and a Bravo! Special: *Live At the Rehearsal Hall*.

The 2010-2011 concert season includes more than 45 performances in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Ireland, the United States and Canada as well as a concert in New York's Central Park.

Lara began playing the violin when she was two years old. She made her first appearance as soloist with orchestra at age four, and her European debut with the Gulbenkian Orchestra in Lisbon when she was 10. She toured Spain, France, Portugal and Hungary at ages 12 and 13, entered the Curtis Institute at 13, and spent her first summer at Marlboro three years later. Her teachers have included Felix Galimir, David Takeno, and Joey Corpus.

She performs on the 1779 "Salabue" Guaragnini thanks to an anonymous donor and Heintz & Co. of Toronto.

MARTIN KENNEDY



Born in England, composer/pianist Martin Kennedy is currently an Assistant Professor of Composition and Theory at Washington University in Saint Louis. In 2005 he received his doctorate in composition from The Juilliard School where he studied with Samuel Adler and Milton Babbitt. He holds a Bachelor's degree in both piano performance and composition and a Master's degree in composition from the Indiana University

School of Music.

Martin has received numerous awards, most notably the BMI Student Composer Award, five ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards, the 1999 ASCAP Raymond Hubbel award, and the Indiana University Dean's Prize in composition in both 1998 and 2002. His *Four Songs* for flute and piano has been performed over one hundred times worldwide.

His compositions have been featured by the American Composers Orchestra, the Bloomington Camerata, the Haddonfield Symphony, the Polish National Chamber Orchestra of Slupsk, the Shenandoah Symphony and the Tuscaloosa Symphony among others.

Martin's most recent works include a piano concerto, a suite for string quartet, and *All Hands on Deck*, a work for ten pianos that was given its world premiere in 2007 under the baton of Leonard Slatkin. He is currently working on several projects, including an opera based on Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Invitation to a Beheading*.

An active pianist, he regularly performs with members of the Saint Louis Symphony. Martin has also toured with Lara St. John and with flutist Thomas Robertello, with whom he recorded *Souvenir: Works by Fauré and Kennedy* in 1999.

Martin's music is published by the Theodore Presser Company.