

TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Sextet in the City

Thursday, October 20, 2022 at 6 p.m.
Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

VICTOR EWALD

Brass Quintet No. 1, op. 5
I. Moderato — Più mosso
II. Adagio non troppo lento — Allegro
vivace — Tempo I. Adagio
III. Allegro moderato

Julian Kaplan, *trumpet*
Steven Franklin, *trumpet*
David Sullivan, *horn*
Porter Wyatt Henderson, *trombone*
Joseph LeFevre, *tuba*

GEORGE GERSHWIN

Lullaby for String Quartet

Tamamo Someya Gibbs, *violin*
Rena Ishii, *violin*
Duke Lee, *viola*
Mark Gibbs, *cello*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sextet in E-flat Major for String Quartet
and Two Horns, op. 81b
I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio
III. Rondo — Allegro

Alberto Suarez, *horn*
Elizabeth Gray, *horn*
Tamamo Someya Gibbs, *violin*
Rena Ishii, *violin*
Duke Lee, *viola*
Mark Gibbs, *cello*

PROGRAM NOTES

Program notes by Eric T. Williams



VICTOR EWALD (1860-1935)

Brass Quintet No. 1, op. 5 (1890)

14 minutes

Probably not a household name (unless you have a brass player in your household), Victor Ewald was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1860. At the age of 12, he began studying music at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In Russia at that time, professional musicians were not held in high regard and so many people pursued other professions and moonlighted as musicians —

consider César Cui (military engineer), Modest Mussorgsky (civil servant), Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (Imperial Russian Navy officer) and Alexander Borodin (chemist). Ewald became a civil engineer, eventually earning his doctorate and joining the faculty at the St. Petersburg Institute for Civil Engineers.

Along the way, Ewald started playing cello in regular chamber music evenings organized by timber baron and music publisher Mitrofan Belyayev. These Friday evening soirees encompassed standard literature by Beethoven, Haydn and Mozart but also included Russian music because Belyayev was firmly devoted to promoting development of a Russian nationalist style. This experience likely colored Ewald's compositional style as he searched out Russian folk music. Belyayev published Ewald's early works in the mid-1890s, including two selections for cello and piano, a string quartet and a string quintet, but the Brass Quintet No. 1 wasn't published until 1912, more than two decades after its composition. Indeed, it was the only one of Ewald's four brass quintets published during his lifetime. The remaining three quintets languished in manuscript form, essentially unknown until performed by the American Brass Quintet in Carnegie Hall during the 1974/75 season.

The 19th century saw huge experimentation and advances in brass instruments and while others had composed music for varying configurations of brass quintets, Ewald is generally credited with being one of the first to arrive at the instrumentation most commonly used today (two trumpets, horn, trombone and tuba). Filled with equal measures of lyricism and athleticism, Brass Quintet No. 1 is the most popular of Ewald's works. He carefully balances the solo spotlight with showcasing ensemble playing. Working with great technical assurance, he also explores the marvelous array of featured duo and trio tonal combinations. His study of folk music is manifest in the smooth melodic phrasing that reflects vocal influence. While much of the opening movement dwells in minor (but not morosely so), there are occasional excursions to major, providing welcome contrast. Sweet melodic strains introduce the second movement based in five beats per measure, perhaps providing inspiration for Tchaikovsky to write the second movement of his Sixth Symphony in the same meter three years later. The slow tempo soon gives way to a peppy section, still in five — think up-tempo Dave Brubeck "Take Five." The slower tempo returns to close the movement. The last movement has a heroic character, with a bold arc on the journey to a triumphant conclusion.

Like this? Try Ewald's other brass quintets, Michael Kamen's Quintet, and Malcolm Arnold's Brass Quintet No. 1, op. 73. There are many arrangements for brass quintet, so have fun exploring!

PROGRAM NOTES

GEORGE GERSHWIN (1898-1937)

Lullaby for String Quartet (1919)

8 minutes

The Gershwin hit of 1919 wasn't *Lullaby*, it was "Swanee," performed by Al Jolson. That was also the year of Gershwin's first complete Broadway musical: *La La Lucille*. *Rhapsody in Blue* was still five years away. The youthful composer wrote *Lullaby* in 1919 as part of his classical music studies with Hungarian émigré Edward Kilenyi. This endeavor in "serious" music was a change from the Tin Pan Alley tunes he had been plugging and it was well-received at various private events, so much so that he included the melody in his 1922 operatic musical *Blue Monday*.

The show was a flop and *Lullaby* slumbered until the 1960s when brother Ira Gershwin shared the manuscript with harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler who transcribed it for harmonica and string quartet. The Juilliard Quartet performed the original version at the Library of Congress in 1967 and *Lullaby* was finally published in 1968.

Sometimes heard in a string orchestra version, *Lullaby's* gently rocking syncopations (emphasizing normally unaccented beats) provide the heartbeat of this lovely piece. The melody is simple but wonderfully captivating. The texture varies, sometimes featuring flute-like harmonics and plucked notes tiptoeing along. Gentle solos by violin and cello lead to a more up-tempo section that gradually relaxes back to a dreamy state. The music conjures whispers of "good night" as one drifts into sweet slumber.

Other soothing music: Frédéric Chopin's Berceuse in D-flat Major, op. 57; Gabriel Fauré's Berceuse, op. 16; Erik Satie's *Gymnopédie* No. 1; Edvard Grieg's "Sarabande" from the *Holberg Suite*; and of course, Brahms' *Lullaby*.



NEXT WEEKEND!

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PROGRAM NOTES

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827) Sextet in E-flat Major for String Quartet and Two Horns, op. 81b (1795)

17 minutes



Unlike a string quartet or a brass quintet, sextets don't have standard instrumentation so composers have been free to follow their ears — and imagination. Written for string quartet and two horns, this sextet is a relatively early work by Beethoven, composed around 1795. To set the stage, Beethoven had been in Vienna for a couple of years studying with Joseph Haydn, Antonio Salieri, Ignaz Schuppanzigh and Johann Albrechtsberger while developing his reputation as a piano virtuoso. His opus 1, a set of three piano trios, was published that year and the ambitious young composer was acquiring renown as well as aristocratic patronage. During the same timeframe, horn player Nikolaus Simrock, Beethoven's colleague from earlier days in Bonn, was establishing the renowned music publishing house N. Simrock. It's plausible that Beethoven had Simrock in mind when writing the virtuosic horn parts of this sextet. The Sextet was eventually published by Simrock in 1810, accounting for the later opus number.

This is music written by a youthful Beethoven, deeply influenced by Wolfgang Mozart and Joseph Haydn. The work begins graciously, spinning attractive phrases from slender melodic strands. The texture is somewhat reminiscent of a double horn concerto accompanied by strings. Between lithe arpeggios and singing melodies, Beethoven demands much from the horns, all to beautiful ends. A brief yet luscious slow movement offers a study in simple elegance. The last movement's hunting-horn calls are a wry nod to the instrument's history. Beethoven features the strings more prominently here as the piece canters to a very satisfying conclusion.

Like this? Check out Wolfgang Mozart's Horn Concertos (K. 412, K. 417, K. 447 and K. 495), Joseph Haydn's Horn Concertos (No. 1 and No. 2), and Carl Maria von Weber's Concertino for Horn and Orchestra.

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