

Reno Chamber Orchestra presents
The 20th Nevada Chamber Music Festival

Beyond Tomorrow
December 31, 2023
2:00 pm

Houghton: String Quartet No. 3

Composed: 2017-18

Duration: 19 minutes

Monica Houghton grew up in Reno, and earned A.B. and A.M. degrees from Harvard University, and an M.M. in Composition from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she served on the faculty for several years before moving back to Nevada. She was honored with an Individual Excellence Award from the Ohio Arts Council in 2007. Her compositions reveal a wide range of influences inspiring her works, including nature, poetry, the visual arts, language, science and world events. She kindly provided the following note on her String Quartet No. 3.

"I began composing my third string quartet in the fall of 2016, completing it the following spring. I drew upon a fragment of Bon chant for some raw material; however, the underlying narrative of the work arose entirely from my own thoughts and feelings at the time. In the opening movement, the individual instruments of the quartet are set against each other, arguing. The second movement then offers up a welcome refuge. Arising out of near silence, the third movement depicts a 'dust devil' — mercifully brief, and dissolving back into thin air.

"The final movement reflects some aspects of South Indian music, as for example in the particular way that repetition is used to build up the form. This music tells a classic Katakali story of the temptation of a hero by a demon disguised as a beautiful woman. Gradually the hero comes to suspect that the beautiful creature before him is not what it appears to be... so he chops off its nose, revealing its true identity.

"Insider tip: A phrase borrowed from Leoš Janáček's *In the Mist* appears twice near the end of the second movement in the first violin."

Arensky: Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 32

Composed: 1894

Duration: 30 minutes

A student of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Anton Arensky won the gold medal at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and shortly afterwards became one of the youngest professors ever at the Moscow Conservatory, where he became a mentor for some of the most important figures in the next generation of Russian music. Arensky's Trio No. 1 is dedicated

to the memory of Karl Davidov, director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory while Arensky was there. Both Davidov and Arensky's father were cellists, possibly accounting for the prominent role given to the cello in the Trio. Another big influence was a set of Russian memorial trios: the Trio of 1881-2 by Arensky's friend Piotr Tchaikovsky, written as a memorial for the pianist Nikolai Rubinstein, and Sergei Rachmaninoff's two *Trios élégiaques* of 1892-3, the second written in memory of Tchaikovsky.

An elegiac tone is set with the rhapsodic main theme – possibly a musical portrait of Davidov – of the opening movement. That theme sometimes takes a more passionate turn, with its roiling piano accompaniment. Contrast is briefly provided by a simple song from the cello and another lighthearted theme before the somber Adagio coda. The Scherzo is playful, even coquettish, with a particularly active piano part featuring flying arpeggios. Muted cello opens the restrained, elegiac (but not funereal) slow movement. The violin, also muted, soon joins in the tender song, over *pizzicato* cello and descending piano chords. The finale opens passionately, with an agitated main theme. A nostalgic second theme calms the turbulence for a time. Bits of melodies from the previous movements make brief reappearances, before a final, dramatic statement of the movement's opening theme.

Dvořák: String Quintet in G major, Op. 77

Composed: 1875/1883

Duration: 34 minutes

The original five movement version of the Quintet in G major dates from 1875. With the Austrian State Prize having just come his way, Dvořák and his music were starting to become much more popular. Even into the 1880s, Dvořák was literally being hounded by publishers looking for new works to print and put on the market. With that in mind, in 1883 he returned to the Quintet in G major, removing the Intermezzo that had been the work's second movement (it was rearranged for full string orchestra and published separately as the *Notturmo*). Then, in 1888, Dvořák eventually published the now four movement Quintet. Wanting to pass the work off as a more recent composition, Dvořák's publisher Simrock gave the Quintet the opus number 77; given that it was written over a decade before, it probably should have been given the number 18.

This String Quintet is suffused with the spirit of Dvořák's homeland. Most of the melodies have a distinct folk music cast to them, and many of the rhythms derive from Czech dance forms. Also, Dvořák's use of a bass in the ensemble (aside from Schubert's "Trout" Quintet and a bare handful of other works, the bass was seldom included in chamber music in the nineteenth century or before) both frees up the cello for more melodic material and gives the entire Quintet an attractive rustic flavor. The first movement is in sonata form, with two main themes both of which employ a triplet figure followed by a longer note (short-short-short-long). The constant repetitions of this figure call to mind, of all things, the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, with its similar rhythm. Both of the central movements are in ABA form, the Scherzo having perhaps the most clearly Czech feeling of the four movements, the slow third movement's central B section featuring the first violin and cello playing in their upper registers. The lively final movement features, toward the end, a reprise

of ideas from the first movement.

Program notes by Chris Morrison