

Reno Chamber Orchestra presents  
The 20<sup>th</sup> Nevada Chamber Music Festival

20<sup>th</sup> Festival Celebration  
Saturday December 30, 2023 7:30pm

Ravel: *Tzigane*

*Composed: 1922-24*

*Duration: 10 minutes*

The concert rhapsody *Tzigane* was inspired by the fiery playing of Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi, great-niece of the legendary violinist Joseph Joachim. The name of the piece is derived from the French-European term for "gypsy," although Ravel doesn't incorporate any authentic roma melodies in his composition. *Tzigane* was premiered by d'Aranyi and pianist Henri Gil-Marchex in April 1924. A few months later, Ravel orchestrated the piano part (the latter, by the way, had included an optional *luthéal*, an attachment that allowed the piano to produce unusual tone colors, including one reminiscent of the Hungarian cimbalom). *Tzigane* opens with an extended violin solo, which incorporates a tune that becomes the work's main theme. Eventually the piano enters with its own brief solo. Some fiery phrases from the violin, and a short transition of tremolos and trills, leads into the main body of the work. That main theme makes several further appearances. Eventually a wild *moto perpetuo* breaks out, featuring left hand *pizzicato* notes from the violin. The tempo speeds and slows and speeds again for the whirlwind finale.

Mendelssohn: String Quintet in B-flat major, Op. 87

*Composed: 1845*

*Duration: 30 minutes*

The string quartet had become an established and popular ensemble by the middle of the eighteenth century, largely through the efforts of Franz Josef Haydn. It was not long after the invention of the string quartet, though, that composers sought to add to the richness of the ensemble sound by adding a fifth instrument. Just a couple have added a third violin to the usual string quartet. A few more added a double bass, such as Luigi Boccherini and, in his Op. 77, Antonín Dvořák (you can hear this work in the Festival's December 31 concert). More common is the addition of a second cello, the most famous example of which is Franz Schubert's String Quintet in C major. The most common addition is a second viola – a host of composers have gone this route, including Mozart, Brahms, and of course, Felix Mendelssohn.

Composed during the summer of 1845 at Bad Soden, one of Mendelssohn's favorite vacation spots near Frankfurt am Main, the String Quintet in B-flat major – Mendelssohn's second string quintet, the first, Op. 18 in A major, having been composed way back in 1826 – is a passionate work. It calls to mind both the composer's famous Violin Concerto in E minor (completed at Bad Soden the year before) and the amazing Octet that Mendelssohn

had written twenty years earlier as a precocious sixteen year old.

Towards the end of his life, Mendelssohn's focus moved away somewhat from the melodic richness for which his works had been known, focusing instead on rhythm, tonal effects, and the development of smaller melodic segments in works like the present Quintet. An extroverted, even aggressive opening movement gives great prominence to the first violin, making parts of the movement sound almost like a virtuoso concerto. Two ideas – one a rising arpeggio, the other more quiet phrase with a falling motion introduced by the first viola – are contrasted in music of great drama and rich textures.

With its regular, dance-like motion, the brief, graceful second movement serves as something of an interlude (Mendelssohn calls the movement an *Intermezzo*) between the opening movement and the third, a dark-toned slow movement with intimations of melancholy, even tragedy, that effectively combines lyricism and a forceful, almost orchestral conception. Despite some more laid back moments, the sparkling final movement returns to the energy of the first and makes for an exciting conclusion.

### **Schubert: Piano Trio in B-flat major, D. 898, Op. 99**

*Composed: 1827-28*

*Duration: 40 minutes*

The Trio in B-flat major was part of the almost unbelievable rush of creativity that Franz Schubert experienced in his last year or two of life – among the works he created were the present trio as well as a second in E-flat major, his last three piano sonatas, the great String Quintet, and the beginnings of a tenth symphony. Interestingly, though, Schubert was never one to seek out the praise of the general music loving public. Only occasionally were there public performances of his works, as he was apparently content to enjoy the appreciation of his friends and close acquaintances. The B-flat major Trio, composed in late 1827 and early 1828 alongside Schubert's huge song cycle *Die Winterreise*, was only played once during his life, in a private concert on January 28, 1828 at the home of his boyhood friend Joseph Spaun on the occasion of Spaun's engagement. The work didn't appear in print until 1836, but it has since come to be recognized as one of the composer's greatest chamber works.

The lively first movement opens with a theme in the strings that moves on to the piano. A slower, generously melodic second idea is heard first in the cello. As these ideas are developed, by turns forcefully and gracefully, Schubert wanders through a number of surprising keys and harmonies. For those familiar with Schubert's songs, there is a reference made in this movement to his 1825 song "Des Sängers Habe" (The Minstrel's Treasure). The second movement begins and ends in simplicity with a lovely, hymn-like melody framing an impassioned, and more decorative, central section. Robert Schumann called this movement "an upsurge and release of finely human feeling." This may have been Schubert's second concept for the Trio's slow movement; the first now survives as a separate composition, the *Notturmo*, D. 897.

A sort of Austrian *ländler*, or folk song in 3/4 time, opens the third movement Scherzo. Its

ternary A-B-A form also features a lively waltz in its central section, with the violin and cello trading the melody over staccato piano chords. The violin opens the final movement with an extroverted theme, not unlike that of Schubert's song "Skolie," D. 306 of 1815. It becomes a repeating refrain of this rondo-sonata form movement, which also includes several new melodies that are spun out in this lively, highly contrapuntal finale.

Program notes by Chris Morrison