

Program Notes

Amelia Bailey Distinguished Major Recital
March 27th, 2021 at 3:30pm

Roma Folk Dances: *Villages Tunes of the Hungarian Roma*. Daniel Sender (1982-)

- I. Ha elvettél, tartsá (Öcsöd)**
- II. I canka uj Anna (Püspökladány)**
- III. Hallgató (Mezőkovácsháza) for Violin Solo**
- IV. Ének (Püspökladány)**
- V. Jaj, anyám, a vakaró (Csenyéte)**

Daniel Sender is currently the concertmaster of the Charlottesville Symphony and the Charlottesville Opera, as well as associate violin professor at UVA. Sender studied at Ithaca College, the University of Maryland—where he received his PhD, the Liszt Academy (Budapest) and the Institute for European Studies (Vienna). His scholarship in Hungarian music began when he was awarded a Fulbright Student Scholar grant for his research in Budapest (2010-11), where he attended the Liszt Academy as a student of Vilmos Szabadi and became interested in Hungarian Roma folk music. (Note: unless otherwise stated, assume “Hungary” in terms of folk music geographically refers to the late Austro-Hungarian Empire which existed prior to the Treaty of Trianon. At the end of WWI, the Treaty of Trianon split 75% of Austro-Hungary’s territory up into modern day Romania, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and the Balkans.)

The Roma people in Hungary—also known as Romani people, and previously, “gypsies,” though that term is now considered outdated slang, are the largest minority group in Hungary, making up between 3 and 7% of the population. There is a clear cultural divide between those who consider themselves native Hungarians, and Roma people. A large proportion of the Roma population lives in extreme poverty and faces constant racial discrimination, while the European Union and Hungarian officials are only just beginning to take accountability.

When Daniel Sender first became enamored by Roma folk music while in Hungary, he realized how ignored it had been by composers, most likely because of the stigma around Roma people. Sender saw the opportunity to introduce people to a previously unknown, albeit beautiful, style of folk music. His methodology when creating this set of Roma Folk Dances was similar to that of Bartok and Kodaly when they transcribed Hungarian folk music (not Roma music) into their compositions. Using the national archives in Hungary, he listened to hours and hours of field recordings from the mid-20th century before selecting a handful of folk tunes he liked. Unlike Bartok and Kodaly, who adapted folk tunes into original compositions, Sender’s goal was to transcribe the tunes as closely as possible to the original recordings and preserve their authenticity. He said that one of the biggest challenges was determining how many of the vocal inflections, differing rhythms, and pitch bends he should translate literally, and how many of them could be chalked up to mistakes or recording faults. The third dance, Hallgató for Solo Violin, is a perfect example of the creative decisions Sender had to make. The woman singing in the original recording uses many fluctuating rhythms and pitches, so instead of assuming she was intending to sing straight rhythms in tune, Sender transcribed the rhythms in the violin part as closely as he could to the original, to mimic the improvisatory feel it has. Pitch-wise, we had to

decide whether or not it made sense for me to try to emulate the vocal pitch bends by playing quarter tones, or whether that would detract from the melody and it would be better to play it “in tune;” we settled on the latter.

Sender was recently awarded another Fulbright scholarship, this time as a Fulbright U.S. Scholar, and plans to continue his study and transcription of Roma folk music this fall while teaching at the University of Pécs in Hungary.

Sonata for Two Violins

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

I. Andante cantabile

IV. Allegro con brio

Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Sergei Prokofiev left his home in Russia to pursue a career as a pianist and composer. Following several international tours and stations, he ended up in Paris for more than a decade. During that time, he wrote his Sonata for Two Violins while on vacation in Saint Tropez on the southern coast of France. The sonata was written on commission from Triton (French for “tritone”), a new musical society in Paris dedicated to introducing new chamber music to the world. Prokofiev wrote the piece for Triton’s inaugural concert in December of 1932, but, with his permission, it ended up being premiered three weeks prior in Moscow, by violinists Dmitry Tsyganov and Vladimir Shirinsky of the Beethoven Quartet.

On the inspiration for the sonata, Prokofiev wrote:

“Listening to bad music sometimes inspires good ideas... After once hearing an unsuccessful piece for two violins without piano accompaniment, it struck me that in spite of the apparent limitations of such a duet one could make it interesting enough to listen to for ten or fifteen minutes.”

The Sonata for Two Violins is modeled after the *sonata da chiesa* Baroque structure, following a slow-fast-slow-fast movement sequence. The first movement starts with a wandering solo in the first violin part which is soon joined by the second part. The lines follow and wind around each other, full of hair-raising dissonance and frequent “falling” intervals, creating a sense of longing or yearning for something unknown. The movement swells to an apex in the stratospheric register of the violins, before shrinking back and ending just as bleakly as it began.

The second and third movements are Prokofiev’s takes on the fugal allegro and slow expressive movements typically found in a *sonata da chiesa*, but neither will be performed today. The fourth movement, an *allegro* in rondo form, begins with another solo in the first violin part, this time bright and upbeat as it states the main theme. Throughout the movement, the two parts dance around each other, passing the theme back and forth, before whipping into a “call and response” frenzy in the last page and ending with a quick little descending scale.

Tzigane

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Maurice Ravel was a French impressionist composer (though he refused to identify as an impressionist) who thrived during the 1920s and 30s. His slow and steady nature while composing led to a portfolio which was smaller than those of his contemporaries, but he is well-loved for his masterpieces. One of his best-known works is *Tzigane*, a concert rhapsody he originally wrote for violin and piano, and later adapted for violin and orchestra. Ravel modeled *Tzigane* after Paganini's famous 24 Violin Caprices, which should be indicative of the barrage of virtuosic techniques required by the performer. Such techniques include rapid harmonics and pizzicati, octaves, quadruple stops, glissandos, nimble passages in perpetual motion, and, most iconically, the entirety of the first page being played on a single string.

Ravel's intentions behind *Tzigane* were originally unclear. He described it as "a virtuoso piece in the style of a Hungarian Rhapsody," but the title translates closer to the French word for 'gypsy' (gitan/tzigane/tzigane) than the Hungarian word, 'cigány.' In an interview, Ravel remarked "It is a tzigane in the sense in which one speaks of a polonaise, an allemande or a sicilienne," pointing out that he wrote it with Hungarian influence in mind, but did not try to evoke Hungary, however one chooses to interpret that. It could be said that Hungarian gypsy music is more of an idiom for *Tzigane*, than the actual subject of the composition. Critics suggest Ravel fell into the trap of the popular musical exoticism present in Europe at the time where 'gypsy' was more of a blanket term for exoticism, rather than referring to the true Roma (gypsy) people. A puzzled *Times* critic wrote of the premiere, "Either the work is a parody of all the Liszt-Hubay-Brahms-Joachim school of Hungarian violin music and falls into the class of *La Valse*, or it is an attempt to get away from the limited sphere of his previous compositions to infuse into his work a little of the warm blood it needs." Nevertheless, the influence Roma culture and music had on *Tzigane* is undeniable. The characteristics that give away Ravel's inspiration for the piece (aside from the blatant translation of the name) include the frequent subtle tempo changes and use of the 'Gypsy' scale mode. Sometimes called the Double Harmonic scale, the 'Gypsy' scale is defined by the augmented interval between the 2nd and 3rd, and 6th and 7th scale degrees (i.e., E Major Double Harmonic scale: E-F-G#-A-B-C-D#-E). However, unlike Pablo de Sarasate when he wrote *Tzigane's* gypsy-inspired predecessor, *Zigeunerweisen*, Ravel refrained from incorporating any authentic Hungarian gypsy melodies into his work, opting instead to allude to the inspiration without directly quoting it. This factor may have contributed to critics' judgement of Ravel for being inauthentic with his portrayal of true Hungarian folk music.

Tzigane was dedicated to Jelly d'Aranyi, a Hungarian violinist Ravel was fascinated with at the time (who also happened to be the great-niece of violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim). Having grown up in Hungary, d'Aranyi was very familiar of Roma/ni people and their music. About them, she said that they taught her "freedom, warmth, and naturalness in playing," qualities which can all be heard when listening to authentic Roma folk music. The inception of *Tzigane* occurred after a private house concert Ravel attended where d'Aranyi had performed. He asked her to play some 'gypsy' melodies from her native country, which continued until five o'clock in the morning, exhausting everyone except the performer and composer. Ravel became so captivated with the melodies that he wrote *Tzigane* and asked d'Aranyi to premiere it. Because of his aforementioned meticulous nature, Ravel didn't complete the work until two days prior to the performance, leaving d'Aranyi almost no time to prepare. Despite this, she gave a successful premiere, as any able performer of her day would have, provided only days of preparation. This

performance is considered the first true premiere of the piece, d'Aranyi performed it from the manuscript with pianist Henri Gil-Marchex on April 26, 1924.

Ravel's original instrumentation for *Tzigane* was for violin and piano, but he also wrote a version for violin and luthéal later that year. The luthéal was an attachment to the piano developed in 1919. It essentially extended the sound spectrum of the piano, adding three new registers: a harp or lute register, a harpsichord register, and a register which imitated the Hungarian cimbalom, created by using the first two registers simultaneously. Unfortunately, the popularity of the luthéal only lasted about five years, and it was forgotten soon after the first performance of *Tzigane* with it on October 15, 1924 by American violinist Samuel Dushkin. After Durand finally published the violin and piano version in September of 1924—after hounding Ravel to get it finished after the April premiere—Ravel quickly arranged an orchestral accompaniment to the violin solo, which was premiered in November of 1924. Both the orchestral and piano accompaniment versions remain close to the hearts of music-lovers and violinists today.

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

I. Allegro Moderato

II. Adagio di molto

III. Allegro, ma non tanto

Jean Sibelius aspired to be a violinist as a young man, but his late start on the instrument and stage-fright got in the way. His love for the instrument manifested itself in his violin concerto, written well after he had settled down and made a name for himself as a composer. As the only concerto Sibelius wrote in his life, this piece holds a special place in his legacy.

The original version of the concerto was completed in 1904, but proved to be so technically demanding on the soloist that Sibelius revised it in 1905. The original premiere was intended to be given in Berlin by soloist Willy Burmester, the dedicatee of the concerto, but due to financial pressures, Sibelius had to move the premiere to an earlier date closer to home in Helsinki, Finland. Burmester was unable to travel to Finland at the time, so Sibelius employed Victor Nováček, a Hungarian violinist who was teaching in Helsinki at the time. Because of the shortened timeline, Sibelius barely finished the concerto on schedule, giving Nováček very little time to learn the notes. Consequently, the premiere was disastrous, and the negative reviews persuaded Sibelius to revise the concerto into the version we know today. For the revised premiere, Sibelius again called on Willy Burmester to perform the solo with Richard Strauss conducting the Berlin Court Orchestra, but Burmester was unavailable on the planned date, so the orchestra's concertmaster, Karel Halíř, stepped in. Having been passed over twice, Burmester was furious, and vowed to never perform the concerto, so Sibelius re-dedicated it to Ferenc von Vecsey, a young Hungarian prodigy of the time. Despite the Berlin premiere being widely successful, it still took a few decades for the concerto to become a staple of the violin repertoire. It wasn't until Jascha Heifetz recorded it for the first time in 1935 that it became as well-known and loved as it is today. The original version of the concerto was unheard of until 1991, and since then, relatives of the composer have only given a select number of orchestras and soloists permission to perform it. Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos was the first allowed to perform and record the 1904 version.

This concerto is unique among violin repertoire in that the soloist and orchestra/accompaniment are considered of equal value. Though the soloist is obviously the primary voice, the melodies they have are almost always heard in the orchestral part and vice versa.

The first movement is written in sonata form and begins with an ethereal solo line above a shimmering string accompaniment as new themes are gradually introduced. While the first movement does have a traditional cadenza, it is unlike most in that it serves as the development of the movement, returning to the recapitulation at the end of it. The movement ends with an *Allegro motto vivace* that is laced with themes from earlier in the movement.

The second movement is lyrical and expressive, and, though it lacks surprises, it is often considered the most emotionally touching movement Sibelius ever wrote. From the performer's point of view, the second movement provides a break from the technical whirlwind of the first and third movements. The slow passages at the beginning and the end of the movement require the soloist to pay special attention to bowing distribution and sound quality, a stark change of pace from the end of the first movement. The accompaniment begins with a simple dotted rhythm by the clarinets and oboes, the longest, and most complex opening of the three movements, perhaps shifting some of the attention off the soloist. Once the solo violin enters, the low brass line carries a dissonant accompaniment that evokes a wandering, hopeless feeling under the already emotional solo violin line.

The third movement is perfectly summed up by British musicologist Donald Francis Tovey as a "polonaise for polar bears." Famous for its exhibition of the soloist's most impressive technical abilities, this movement takes the listener on an emotional journey ranging from a lively dance to a lamenting cry in the solo line, which is doubled by the orchestra, to a battlefield of technique between the orchestra and soloist. A powerful tutti passage takes over near the end before the violin finishes the movement out with flourishing scales ending on a high D in unison with the orchestra.