

Programme Notes by Majella Boland

April 2019



Raphaela Gromes, cello

Julian Riem, piano

Programme:

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

Serenata for cello and piano in G minor,
Op. 34, BV196

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909)

Sonata for cello and piano in F-sharp
minor, Op. 52

- I. Allegro giusto
- II. Scherzo. Allegro molto
- III. Intermezzo. Andantino flebile
- IV. Finale. Allegro

Kevin Volans (b. 1949)

“cello:piano 2” in C major
New Music Network Commission

INTERVAL

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

“Une Larme”

Theme and Variations for cello and piano

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

3 songs from “Soirées musicales”

- 5. L’invito
- 8. La gita in gondola
- 7. La danza

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Hommage à Rossini

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

Variations on a theme of Rossini in D major, H.
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Addendum: A paragraph of text was omitted from the programme book in error.
The version which follows is the introduction as it was intended by the author.

This programme largely features music from the long nineteenth century, i.e. music composed roughly from 1789 to 1914. As the nineteenth century progressed, there was a preoccupation with emulating the voice as the performance direction *cantabile* (singing style) often attests. This may be in part due to ever-improving piano manufacturing standards as the piano became a more and more versatile instrument. It could also be attributed to a change in listening behaviours – there was a shift from patronage to the general public and therefore a shift in tastes, alongside which music-making in the home increased.

Equally, this trend reflects musical activity during the nineteenth century, an outcome of which became known as the twin styles. In brief, the twin styles is the coexistence and yet duality of opera/vocal works and orchestral/instrumental works, both genres representing two very different concepts: popular and serious art forms.

It is hardly surprising then that vocal topics feature in instrumental music from this time, or that themes from operas were transcribed for instruments. Moreover, playing piano reductions of symphonies or operas in the home, as well as playing famous themes on the cello for example, was akin to playing a record or CD of your favourite music. In many ways, tonight's programme exemplifies the tendency to transcribe vocal works for instruments, as well as aiming to make the instrument sing; notwithstanding that the cello itself is often considered one of the instruments closest to the human voice.

This programme is equally orientated around Italian composers, and where this is not the case – Offenbach (French/German) and Martinů (Czech) – Rossini was chosen for their inspiration; in fact, Rossini's melodies were so popular during the nineteenth century that numerous composers and artists wrote variations on them or chose them as the basis for other works. This is all the more significant as the twin styles is thought to have emerged from the music of both Rossini and Beethoven.

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

Serenata for cello and piano in G minor, Op. 34, BV196

Born in Italy, Busoni mostly worked in Austria and Germany. A respected pianist and teacher, he was approximately thirty when he began to focus on composing. His reputation as a pianist shadowed his compositional output however, and he was also known for devoting concerts to interpreting specific composers such as Liszt. His generosity in the music world was evident by his promoting and financing orchestra concerts of new music, including Bartók, Elgar, and Sibelius. Busoni was equally adept as a writer with a command for a literary style; an estimated 15,000 letters are preserved to this day. He also published guidelines for the future of music demonstrating a strong awareness for the musical landscape in which he was operating. *Serenata for Cello and Piano* is one of Busoni's early works, based on his *Suite for Clarinet and Piano*. Although it is one movement, there are essentially three sections. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the word *serenata* was closely aligned to

vocal works but it later became purely instrumental. Busoni appears to be thinking of serenata in terms of its later development i.e. a serenade, which has connotations of romance. Listen out for the interaction between cello and piano; the piano is not subordinate to the cello but rather complements it and assists in driving the music forward.

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909)

Sonata for cello and piano in F-sharp minor, Op. 52

- I. **Allegro giusto**
- II. **Scherzo. Allegro molto**
- III. **Intermezzo. Andantino flebile**
- IV. **Finale. Allegro**

As a regular piano accompanist for the famous cellist Piatti, Martucci's familiarity with the instrument is easy to discern. In addition to being a renowned pianist, his knowledge of and ability to compose for the cello/piano combination are evident from the quality of Sonata for Cello and Piano. This work in four movements brings to mind Brahms, and similar to Brahms, it can hold its own in the canon of works. It therefore warrants greater inclusion on programmes. The piano commands attention at the opening of the first movement (allegro) before the cello enters with a lyrical melody, which is developed and woven between the two instruments. The second movement is a scherzo, which is the Italian for 'practical joke'. In music it has come to mean playful and this character is caught from the start. An intermezzo makes up the third movement, which seems to serve two functions: to bridge the second and fourth movements, while being an expressive and lyrical piece of instrumental music, as was usually the case in the nineteenth century. The fourth movement (finale) wraps up the entire sonata with panache, starting and ending with energy, and also gives a final nod to the opening of the sonata.

Kevin Volans (b. 1949)

"cello:piano 2" in C major

New Music Network Commission

"I began this piece with a fragment of material from my 4th piano concerto, which I then developed in several ways, whilst adding in a cello part, which in turn affected the piano part."

Principal performances of Volans' work in the last years include the Berliner Musikfest, Vienna State Opera, the Salzburger Festspiele, the Lincoln Center NY, Dokumenta Kassel, the Pompidou Centre Paris, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Kunstmuseum Bonn, the Chicago Institute of Fine Arts, the

Edinburgh Festival, the Caixa Forum Madrid, the Barbican, South Bank, Wigmore Hall, London and several times in the BBC Proms.

In the last 35 years Kevin Volans has worked with quartets: Kronos, Smith Quartet, Duke Quartet, Arditti Quartet, pianists: Barry Douglas, Marc-André Hamelin, Peter Donohoe, Melvyn Tan, conductors: Michael Tilson Thomas, Marek Janowski, Alan Buribayev, Yan Pascal Tortelier, orchestras: the San Francisco Symphony, BBC Symphony, Bayerische Rundfunk Symphonieorchester, Royal Flemish Philharmonic, BBC Singers, percussionists: Robyn Schulkowsky, Jonny Axelsson, SISU and many others, as well as dance companies like Siobhan Davies, Shobana Jeyasingh, White Oak, Jonathan Burrows and artists: William Kentridge, Juergen Partenheimer, Jose-Manuel Ballester.

He was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and studied at the University of the Witwatersrand with Karlheinz Stockhausen and later with Mauricio Kagel in Cologne. He moved to Ireland in 1986 and has been an Irish citizen since 1994. He lives in Co. Cork. After a productive collaboration with the Kronos quartet in the 1980s his work, principally in the field of chamber and orchestral music, has been regularly performed worldwide. The Kronos discs, *White Man Sleeps* and *Pieces of Africa* broke all records for string quartet disc sales.

In 1997 the BBC Music Magazine listed him as one of the 50 most important living composers and he was described by the Village Voice (New York) as “one of the most original and unpredictable voices on the planet”. In 1999 the South Bank in London hosted a 50th birthday celebration of his work and for his 60th the Wigmore Hall in London organised a “Kevin Volans Day” of concerts.

He has been the featured composer in several European festivals of contemporary music and he was the featured composer in Prague last November 2017. This year the Wigmore Hall is sponsoring his 70th birthday concert with 3 world premieres.

There are some 47 CDs and videos featuring his music currently available. His work is performed regularly worldwide.

INTERVAL

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

“Une Larme”

Theme and Variations for cello and piano

Considered the greatest Italian composer of his time, Rossini's popularity was such that scholars have referred to it as the 'Rossini craze'. Known mostly as a composer of operas (he wrote thirty-nine), among which are William Tell and The Barber of Seville, Rossini also wrote a collection of 150 works, which he composed for his salons, attended by many prominent artists and figures in Paris. He called this collection *Péchés de Vieillesse* (sins of old age), which he refused to publish during his time. These works essentially remained unknown until the 1950s at which point the Rossini institution (Fondazione Rossini) began to edit them.

In this collection of works, Rossini is said to have used his wit musically, writing parodies of composers' works. Yet he also wrote music to charm, which is certainly the case for *Une Larme*, theme and variations for cello and piano. The piano opens *Une Larme* (French for 'a tear'), with an ominous and somewhat sedate melody before building momentum and paving the way for the cello to enter with a sorrowful theme that you'll find yourself singing long after the concert is over. The piano quickly changes pose by setting a very different pace and mood, while introducing the first variation in a triumphant manner. The tone is more upbeat and rhythmic, while retaining its lyrical feature. The character again becomes sombre before regaining its composure and finishing with a virtuosic display that, unlike the start, brings a tear of joy rather than sorrow.

Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

3 songs from “Soirées musicales”

- 5. L'invito
- 8. La gita in gondola
- 7. La danza

When Rossini retired from writing operas he did not stop composing for voice: he wrote three song cycles one of which was *Soirées Musicales*. This set comprises twelve songs likely composed for various figures in society before being put into a collection. The three songs, arranged for cello and piano tonight, are so close to their vocal counterparts that you can almost hear the lyrics as the cello captures the character of each song with ease.

'L'invito' is an invitation of love. It is also a bolero, which is a dance evocative of love and romance. As expected for a bolero, it is in triple metre with the rhythm being a distinctive feature and at the same time supports a song-like melody.

'La gita in gondola' (the gondola ride) is a barcarolle which is a traditional song sung by Venetian gondoliers. Here, however, the song touches on a story of love, told from the perspective of the male protagonist who encourages the boatman to row quicker now that he has his lover in his arms. Together they are enjoying the sky, the water, the breeze, as well as their love. The changes of mood in the music represent requests to 'row, row o boatman' (voga, voga, marinar). Hear the ebb and flow of the water at the start and end, as well as throughout the music, with the 12/8 meter capturing the strokes of the gondolier's oar.

In 'La Danza', aspects of love or lust are never too far away. The music conjures up images of young people and couples coming together to spin, turn, and leap as they dance at night time. This is explained by the fact that la danza is also a Neapolitan tarantella; a dance associated with courtship which increases in speed as it progresses.

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Hommage à Rossini

Those familiar with the complete Overture to William Tell, rather than its famous finale, will recognise much from the section Ranz des Vaches (cow procession). This may in part explain the inclusion of harmonics on the cello, perhaps as a bouquet to the woodwind instruments that play this section in the overture. For humour, Offenbach often cited famous themes in his operetta, and he also pays homage to Rossini's William Tell in La belle Hélène. Given that Offenbach was a composer mostly for operas and operetta, Rossini's influence is easy to discern, notwithstanding that Offenbach knew the composer.

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

Variations on a theme of Rossini in D major, H. 290

The connection between Martinů's variations and Rossini's prayer-aria – 'Dal tuo stellato soglio' from his opera Moses in Egypt – the theme upon which the variations are ostensibly based, is not immediately evident. An appraisal of Paganini's variations on the same theme however, makes clear that Martinů worked from Paganini's version. In fact, the cello opens with Paganini's theme that was preceded by a citation of Rossini's 'Dal tuo stellato soglio'; Paganini presents this as the introduction. Martinů's work is, like Paganini's, rhythmic, catchy, and energetic. That he entitled it variations on a theme of Rossini, despite it being more a variation of Paganini's variations, is indicative of Rossini's aforementioned popularity.