



Music on the Hill

— Mozart & Higdon —

January 10th, 2021, 4:15 p.m.

Peter McGuire, violin

Richard Belcher, cello

Bethel Balge, piano

Piano Trio in C Major, K548.....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro

Andante cantabile

Allegro

Piano Trio ~ 1. Pale Yellow.....Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

This program is offered, in part, in memory of long-time MSO supporter and community and arts advocate, Lyle Jacobson, who passed December 15, 2020.

Program Notes

by Dr. Stephanie Thorpe

Piano Trio in C Major, K. 548

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Composed in Vienna in July 1788, one year after his operatic masterpiece, *Don Giovanni*, the Piano Trio in C Major, K. 548 was part of one of Mozart's most musically productive summers. During the summer of 1788, Mozart composed his three final symphonies, three piano trios, two piano sonatas, the C Minor Adagio & Fugue for strings, and the Divertimento K. 563 for string trio. While musically exceptional, Mozart often struggled financially, however only in terms of being able to continue living in the style to which he and his wife had grown accustomed. K. 548 was composed primarily for amateur musicians and promptly published in order for Mozart to make money quickly.

The opening Allegro movement opens with exuberance while featuring pedagogical elements, similar to those of J.S. Bach's many keyboard compositions. The arpeggiated theme quickly sets the tone for the movement, trading itself between the piano and violin swiftly and often, while the cello is harmonically supportive. The cello is featured more prominently with yearning lyrical melodies in the second Andante Cantabile movement. The melodic themes exchange between instruments throughout this delicately tuneful movement. The trio closes with a final movement marked Allegro that is reminiscent of the first movement in terms of the ebullient melodic material traded between the piano and violin. The piano swiftly takes the lead towards the conclusion of the movement, its virtuosity leading the trio to a final combined cadence.

Piano Trio ~ 1. Pale Yellow

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

Creatively prolific, Pulitzer Prize-winner Jennifer Higdon is one of America's most celebrated and performed classical composers. Her style is accessible and glides between neo-classical standards and innovative compositional techniques that she has often tailored to the variety of brilliant soloists and ensembles for whom she is often commissioned. Hilary Hahn, *Trio Solisti*, and the Santa Fe Opera number among the leading musical forces who have premiered her works. Higdon stated, "My job is to communicate. I feel that you should be able to come to my music without having any kind of knowledge about classical music. I want to be able to speak to you on a kind of visceral level. "Accessibility" doesn't seem like a negative word to me."

Written in 2003, Higdon titled the composition simply as Piano Trio. The first movement, "Pale Yellow," is followed by a second movement, entitled, "Fiery Red." The composer herself has stated that each movement may be performed independently. In reference to the Piano Trio Higdon mused, "Can music reflect colors and can colors be reflected in music? I have always been fascinated with the connection between painting and music. In my composing, I often picture colors as if I were spreading them on a canvas, except I do so with melodies, harmonies and through the instruments themselves. The colors that I have chosen in both movement titles of the Piano Trio and in the music itself reflect very different moods and energy levels, which I find fascinating, as it begs the question, can colors actually convey a mood?"

"Pale Yellow" opens with ethereal, quasi-improvisatory piano chords, reminiscent of Debussy, joined by a lyrically intimate melody from the cello that floats above the chordal firmament. The violin seamlessly merges with the cello to create a triadic theme that rhythmically pulses. Regarding rhythm, Higdon stated, "I believe in a clear pulse and a clear rhythm. I like to be able to hear the harmonic movement. And I have a tendency to make musical events happen or turn over fast." Each instrument swiftly begins to move in independent, deeply passionate melodic lines while remaining harmonically supportive and connected to each other, returning briefly to the triadic pulse before diverging once again to new thematic materials. While the movement is relatively brief, the amount of dense and utterly exquisite melodic and harmonic textures Higdon pours out through her rich compositional style is breathtaking.

Musician Bios



Peter McGuire, violin



Richard Belcher, cello



Bethel Balge, piano

Peter McGuire

Peter McGuire was previously a member of the Minnesota Orchestra from 2003 to 2012. Peter joined the orchestra again in 2016 after serving as a Second Concertmaster with the Tonhalle Orchester-Zürich for three years.

McGuire began his career as first violinist in the Pioneer String Quartet and Des Moines Symphony, and has served as Guest Principal Second Violin with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Peter McGuire has performed as Guest Concertmaster with the Orchestre de la Suisse-Romande, Zürich Opera, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Gürzenich Orchester-Cologne, and Richmond Symphony Orchestra. In addition, he has performed and recorded with the Berlin Philharmonic, SWR Radio-Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, All-Star Orchestra, Chicago Symphony and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

A frequent chamber musician and soloist, McGuire has been featured with the Minnesota Orchestra for the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto and has performed with ensembles throughout the US, Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. A frequent adjudicator, he has given masterclasses throughout the U.S. and Switzerland.

Richard Belcher

New Zealand cellist Richard Belcher joined the SPCO in 2019 after a twenty-year career as founding cellist of the Grammy-nominated Enso String Quartet. With the quartet he earned highly critical accolades from recording and concertizing in many of the world's major concert halls such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Kennedy Center in the United States, as well as abroad in Europe, South America, Australia and New Zealand.

Richard is the Artistic Director of Music on the Hill in Mankato, Minnesota, and since 2008 has been Principal Cellist of River Oaks Chamber Orchestra in Houston, Texas. He has taught and performed at many festivals including St. Bart's, Festival d'Aix en Provence, Prussia Cove, Madeline Island, Campos do Jordao International Winter Festival, SummerFest La Jolla, and the San Miguel de Allende International Chamber Music Festival.

In demand as a teacher and chamber music coach, Richard has previously served as Adjunct Faculty at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and has given numerous masterclasses around the world. Richard moved to the United States in 1998 to study with Aldo Parisot at Yale University, and it was while there that he founded the Enso String Quartet. Richard's other principal teachers include Norman Fischer, Marc Johnson, and Alexander Ivashkin. He plays an N.F. Vuillaume cello made in 1856, and is married to Cecilia Belcher, Assistant Principal 2nd Violin of the Minnesota Orchestra.

Bethel Balge

Winner of the Louis B. Sudler Prize in the Arts and of the McKnight sponsored Artist Grant, pianist Bethel Balge has performed in Germany, including at Frankfurt's Alte Oper, in Russia as soloist with the Voronezh Philharmonic, as well as in various American venues. Balge's "highly concentrated, technically secure and captivating interpretation" of Ravel's Gaspard de la Nuit attracted notice from a reviewer at the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung after a performance at the Alte Oper. As a doctoral student of Lydia Artymiw, Balge performed in a Minnesota Public Radio live broadcast in the Bach Birthday concert organized by MPR host Michael Barone. She is founding Artistic Director of the Summit Avenue Music Chamber Music Series and Co-Artistic Director with Peter McGuire of the ProMusica Chamber Music Festival. After six years in Germany, Balge received a *Diplom* degree from the University of Frankfurt's Staatliche Hochschule fuer Musik und darstellende Kunst. Previously she received her Master of Music M.M. from the University of Wisconsin under Howard Karp. She is a cum laude graduate (Bachelor of Music) of Michigan State University, where she studied under Van Cliburn gold prize winner Ralph Votapek. Balge teaches piano and music history courses at Bethany Lutheran College (Mankato, MN) and is executive director of the Mankato Symphony Orchestra.

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