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An Evening of English Music

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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An Evening of English Music

Karen Johnson, violin
Joanne Kong, piano

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MARCH 1, 2004, 7:30 PM
CAMP CONCERT HALL
BOOKER HALL OF MUSIC

... PROGRAM ...

Sonata No. 2 in A Major

Joseph Gibbs

- I. Adagio 5:37 - 4:16
II. Allegro assai 4:26 - 7:02
III. Grave e piano 7:12 - 8:26
IV. Minuet 8:38 - 10:59

(1699-1788)

Sonata for Violin and Piano
in A Minor (1954)

Ralph Vaughan Williams

(1872-1958)

- I. Fantasia: Allegro giusto 12:43 - 21:17
II. Scherzo: Allegro furioso ma non troppo 21:34 - 27:02
III. Tema con variazioni 27:15 - 39:57
Tema: Andante
Variation 1
Variation 2
Variation 3
Variation 4
Variation 5
Variation 6: Allegro
Tempo del preludio, ma tranquillo

... INTERMISSION ...

Norse Legend

Frank Bridge

Souvenir 41:25 - 45:54

(1879-1941)

Heart's Ease 46:09

Amaryllis 5'

Sonata for Violin and Piano in E Minor, op. 82

Edward Elgar

- I. Allegro 55:32
II. Romance: Andante 63:02
III. Allegro, non troppo 69:41

(1857-1934)

Karen Johnson was appointed concertmaster of the Richmond Symphony in September of 2001. She has performed with the National Symphony, the Washington Ballet Orchestra, and the Baltimore Symphony including a European tour. She has performed as concertmaster for the Juilliard Orchestra and the Jerusalem International Symphony Orchestra. Additionally, she has played with the Prometheus Chamber Orchestra in New York, was first violinist of the Vaux String Quartet which appeared regularly at Alice Tully Hall, and is in frequent demand as a chamber performer in festivals throughout the country.



Ms. Johnson has appeared as soloist with orchestras in New York, California, Washington, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. She made her New York City solo debut in November of 1997 with the Juilliard Symphony in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center as winner of the Juilliard Sibelius Violin Concerto Competition. In the Spring of 2002, Ms. Johnson earned a Master's degree at the University of Maryland where she studied with Cleveland Orchestra Concertmaster and former Cleveland Quartet member William Preucil. She received a Bachelor of Music degree from the Juilliard School in New York City where she studied with Joel Smirnoff, first violinist of the Juilliard String Quartet. During Juilliard's May 2000 Commencement ceremony, Ms. Johnson was awarded the Peter Mennin Prize for outstanding achievement and leadership in music in the undergraduate program. She currently resides in Stafford, Virginia.

Chamber keyboardist *Joanne Kong* has received praise for her “great finesse and flexibility” (*The Washington Post*), “utmost keyboard sensitivity and variety of tone” (*Richmond Times-Dispatch*), “remarkable technical ability” (*The Oregonian*), and “superb artistry” (*San Antonio Express-News*). Her critically-acclaimed harpsichord-piano recording of the Goldberg and Diabelli Variations is available on the *BRIOSO* label.



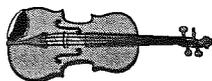
Ms. Kong has performed on numerous concert series including the Los Angeles and Oregon Bach Festivals, Memphis Chamber Music Society, Stotsenberg Concert Series, San Antonio Festival, Los Angeles Monday Evening Concerts, and Virginia Waterfront International Festival of the Arts. A native of Southern California, she is the recipient of national and international honors including performance fellowships from the American Academy of the Arts in Europe and the Bach Aria Festival, designation as a Laureate in the 1983 National Beethoven Foundation Fellowship Auditions, three Ruth Lorraine Close Fellowships, and the Irl Allison Grand Prize in the 1985 International Piano Recording Competition. In addition to concertizing, her performances have been broadcast over numerous radio stations including National Public Radio, WQXR in New York and WFMT in Chicago. Dr. Kong is currently the director of the accompanying and chamber music programs at the University of Richmond. A graduate of the University of Southern California and University of Oregon, she has studied with Joanna Hodges, Malcolm Hamilton and Victor Steinhardt, and performed in the master classes of Leon Fleisher and Lorin Hollander.

· · · PROGRAM NOTES · · ·

The *Sonata in A Major* of Joseph Gibbs (1699-1788) is one of eight such works published in London in 1746 under the title *Eight Solos*. Although the compositions of Gibbs are not well known, these sonatas are his most significant works; their musical substance represents an important achievement in English music, to the extent that they have been ranked with the sonatas of Handel. Other works for strings include a set of quartets which, although not at the level of the sonatas, are among the earliest published quartets to be written by an Englishman.

The A Major Sonata is in four movements. The opening Adagio shows a masterful command of rhythmic variety in the expressive violin line, as well as poignant harmonic progressions that are reminiscent of Corelli. A spirited character dominates the second movement, with the main theme presented in periodic points of imitation between the violin and the bass line of the keyboard. Gibbs turns to f# minor for the short, slow third movement, where the use of a dotted melodic fragment alludes to the French overture style. This serves as an introduction to the final movement, a light-hearted minuet.

Gibbs held posts as organist in Harwich, Dedham and Ipswich, where his contributions to musical life included numerous concerts for charity. Upon his death he was given a civic funeral, with an obituary in *Gentleman's Magazine* stating that "The mildness, simplicity and integrity of his manners rendered him universally beloved and respected. In his profession he was eminently distinguished, both as composer and performer."



The Violin Sonata in a minor of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), dating from 1954, was the only duo sonata the composer wrote. A serious and substantial work, it carries the maturity and nostalgia one might expect from a composer in his late years and was premiered by Frederick Grinke, violinist, and Michael Mulliner, pia-

nist, in a BBC broadcast on October 12th, 1954, the composer's 82nd birthday. Mulliner actually expressed concern over the difficulty of the piano part and suggested that it be arranged for orchestra, but 'Uncle Ralph' maintained that it was conceived as a sonata. The pianist opens the first movement with a dynamic, wave-like theme in 9/8 meter which is taken up in augmentation four bars later by the violinist. The solemn second theme shows the composer's sensitivity to sonority and texture, as a slow, chant-like melody in D Aeolian is harmonized by widely-spaced chords featuring quartal harmonies and parallel fourths and fifths. The remainder of the movement develops the two ideas, often contrapuntally or through virtuoso passagework, and the closing section is a mournful allusion to the main theme. The Scherzo movement is extraordinarily brilliant, rhythmic and unrelenting. Biting syncopations, abrupt dynamic changes and rapid *marcato* passagework permeate what biographer James Day described as a "real spitfire of a movement." The third and final movement is a set of continuous variations and shows Vaughan Williams's command of all aspects of structure, expression and sonority. The 5-bar pentatonic-style theme, stated initially in the piano, comes from an unpublished Piano Quintet of 1903. Its unique, hollow texture consists of octaves in both hands, spaced apart by a gap of as much as three octaves. In Variation 1, the theme in the violin is accompanied by a rich texture of parallel sixth-chords in the piano. This typically "English" sound, seen throughout the sonata, suggests the *fauxbourdon* or *faburden* vocal practices of the 15th century. The lyrical, *cantabile* Variation 2 is a canonic treatment of the theme. Beginning *pianissimo*, it grows in intensity and texture, leading into the robust and majestic Variation 3. The most subdued and serious point of the entire movement is reached in Variation 4. The theme appears in the violin part in both original and inverted forms, with an accompaniment of slow chords and arpeggios that creates a mysterious, veiled atmosphere. Variation 5 is similar in nature to Variation 2 but more extended; its gently-unfolding contrapuntal texture seems to be a working-out of the expressive elements of the theme. An abrupt change of mood and tempo arrives with Variation 6. A rustic, dance-like melody increases in animation to the climax of the movement, where a bold reappearance of the sonata's opening phrase signals the

start of a lengthy coda. The phrase gradually gives way to flowing sixteenths, followed by a violin cadenza and quiet close in the piano. The cadenza's resemblance to *The Lark Ascending* is no coincidence—Frederick Grinke, to whom the sonata is dedicated, was well-known for his interpretation of this work. Grinke was one of the large number of musicians and friends who gathered at Vaughan Williams's interment ceremony on September 19th, 1958. The composer's ashes were laid in Westminster Abbey, appropriately near the burial places of Purcell and Stanford. Friend and biographer Michael Kennedy wrote that "as the congregation went out into the noonday sunshine, the bells of the Abbey rang out a half-muffled peal over the London in which Ralph Vaughan Williams had lived and worked, and which he had turned into music."

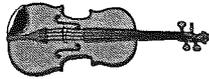


Frank Bridge (1879-1941) made notable contributions to the string and orchestral repertoire, reflecting his early studies of the violin with his father, further work in string performance and composition at the Royal College of Music, and extensive experience in chamber performance as a violist, including concerts with the Joachim Quartet and English String Quartet. He drew respect as a conductor as well, and, with the support of arts patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, conducted orchestras in the United States on several occasions, including performances in New York, Boston and Detroit.

Bridge's music reflects a wide range of influences, including Brahms, Debussy, Berg and Holst. Even though his postwar style reflects a marked change in harmonic language towards greater dissonance and increased flexibility of rhythm and form, the sense of "Englishness" is still evident in a high degree of lyricism and sensuous treatment of texture. While his music was unjustly neglected following his death, it is reaching more audiences today due in large part to the establishment of the Frank Bridge Trust.

The four short character pieces on this evening's program date from 1905-1921, and exemplify Bridge's gift for lyricism and accomplish-

ment as a string player. These works are among a number of salon-style pieces he wrote that appeal to professionals and amateurs alike.



A number of general characteristics have come to be associated with the music of Edward Elgar (1857-1934)—stately strength, rich orchestral sonority and color, and broad national appeal. His musical language, that of late 19th-century Romanticism, drew influences from Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms and Wagner; from the last he derived the use of *leitmotifs* an expanded harmonic palette, and sequential repetition (the persistence of which has been known to draw criticism). Other features of his music include the frequent alternation of tonic minor and major keys, wide melodic leaps, often to an accented passing tone, and underlying rhythmic urgency. While he did not quote folk songs directly, aspects of English life and patriotism are depicted in works such as *The Spirit of England*, his last choral work, and the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*.

During the war years Elgar suffered from depression and ill health, but was still able to produce a number of patriotic songs and choral works. In 1917 his devoted wife Alice, concerned over his condition, found a cottage near Fittleworth, Sussex where he could compose in seclusion and take long walks in the country. It was here that he wrote his mature chamber works, the *Violin Sonata Op. 82*, *String Quartet Op. 83*, and *Piano Quintet Op. 84*. Dating from 1918, all three works are in minor keys, and their distinct conservatism (compared to his earlier achievements, and especially to the new musical idioms of contemporaries such as Schoenberg and Bartók) suggests the effects of wartime, or perhaps nostalgia for his days as a young violinist. In the sonata he fully exploits the emotional range of the instrument, and music critic L. Dunton of *The Arts Gazette* wrote the following about the premier performance: "Like Brahms in the later part of his career, Sir Edward aims at ever-increasing directness, terseness and simplicity of expression. There are in the Sonata no complications of rhythm or harmony, no thematic singularities, it is not exceedingly difficult to play, it seems like a protest against the far-

fetches devices of the ultra-moderns—it seems to say: See what can be done yet with the old forms, the old methods of composing, the old scales...” The highly-energetic first movement uses motivic development to great dramatic effect and, like the third movement, is basically binary in structure, due to an unusually brief development section. The second movement, *Romance*, is notable for the Spanish flavor of its opening melody and the strongly lyrical second theme which shows the contemplative, tender mood so typical of Elgar’s late works. Alice Elgar described this music as “...wood magic. So elusive and delicate.” The closing movement opens with flowing lyricism, giving way to a variety of thematic ideas ranging from the expressive to the triumphant. The second theme of the *Romance* reappears towards the end of the movement, and Alice felt that her husband used it here as a nostalgic tribute to an old family friend, Marie Joshua, to whom the sonata was dedicated.

(Program Notes by Dr. Joanne Kong)