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Junior Recital: Elizabeth Thompson, cello

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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PERKINSON RECITAL HALL

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 1997, 8:00 PM

Junior Recital

Elizabeth Thompson, cello

assisted by
Larina Orlando, piano
Susan Pierce, piano
Program Notes

Bach,
Suite No. 2 in D minor

Written in 1721, Bach's D-minor suite is a very solemn piece, tapping the cello's capacity for full tone and emotional expressiveness. The mood of the suite is set by the lyrical Prélude, which draws its powerful harmonies from arpeggiated chords. In the Allemande and Courante, the free tempo and passionate rubato of the Prélude have been exchanged for a strong, dance-like pulse, but the rich chords still provide a harmonic anchor for the quick sixteenth-note runs. The suite's solemn dignity returns in the Sarabande. Here, the dance's pulse is softened and varied by accents which appear to alternate between the first and second beats of the movement's three-four measures. Menuet I and Menuet II are the setting for the suite's most pronounced contrast between major and minor modes, a contrast heightened by the fact that the dances are played as one single movement, in ABA form. The suite concludes with a Gigue, a lively country dance. The Gigue's fierce, rhythmic theme is starkly articulated at the beginning of the movement and embellished with explosions of scales and arpeggios throughout the piece.

Saint-Saëns,
The Swan

The Carnival of the Animals was written as a musical joke, but Saint-Saëns' lighthearted composition gained immediate popularity. Embarrassed, the composer refused to allow any more performances of the piece, adding that it could only be published after his death. As editor Fred Flaxman observed, "he didn’t want this auditory burlesque to conflict with his reputation as a serious composer."

First performed on March 9, 1886, at the premier of the entire Carnival, "The Swan" was the only movement Saint-Saëns would allow to be performed after he withdrew the piece from the concert stage. With its lyrical, widely-recognized theme, "The Swan" is arguably the most famous piece ever written for the cello. The smooth, rippling piano line provides a strong harmonic base for the cello's melody, which is at once dignified, understated, and highly expressive.

Beethoven,
Sonata no. 4 in C major

Beethoven is widely considered to be the last of the great classical composers, the man whose music formed the bridge to romanticism. In this sonata (written in 1815, very late in the composer's life), the melodramatic themes and expressive rubato that would become trademarks of romantic music are very evident. The work is organized into two movements, each consisting of a lyrical, soothing, slow theme and a fierce, technically demanding fast theme. Each slow theme features melodic interplay between the piano and cello. (In the second movement, the statement of the lyrical theme is followed by a restatement of the first movement's slow theme.)

In both movements, the change in theme from lyrical to fierce is made without transitional material. These dramatic changes in character suggest agitation and teeming activity that lie behind the sonata's calm and understated exterior.

(Notes by Elizabeth Thompson)

Fauré,
Élégie

Although Fauré is most famous for his Requiem and his chamber music, Élégie is one of his most powerfully expressive compositions. This piece was written during a very dark period in Fauré's life. He had fallen in love with Marianne Viardot and had proposed to her in 1877. After months of indecision, Marianne rejected him, plunging Gabriel into a deep depression. He vented his tormented feelings in a long series of somber creations, including Élégie (1880).

This piece begins as a funeral march - the piano line tolls like a church bell as the cello part carries the sound of a mourner's cry. Élégie then moves through several moods, including a restful, flowing section in a major mode, and a ferocious exchange of cadenza-like arpeggios between the cello and piano. The mournful theme always returns, however, forming a melodic and emotional base for the entire composition.
Program

Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008
from Six suites for solo cello
  Prélude
  Allemande
  Courante
  Sarabande
  Menuet I
  Menuet II
  Gigue

Elégie, op. 24

• Intermission •

The Swan (Le Cygne)
from Carnival of the Animals

Cello Sonata No. 4 in C major,
op. 102, no. 1
  Andante - Allegro vivace
  Adagio - Tempo d’andante - Allegro vivace

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1942)

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)