

Salt Bay Chamberfest – August 8, 2017

DAVID LUDWIG *Moto perpetuo* for solo violin
MISSY MAZZOLI *Kinski Paganini* for solo violin
GIOACHINO ROSSINI "Riedi al soglio" from *Zelmira*
RICHARD STRAUSS *Zueignung; Allerseelen; Befreit; Morgen*
GABRIEL FAURÉ Piano Quartet No. 2 in G minor, Op. 45

The idea of perpetual motion has tantalized physicists and inventors for centuries, leading to ingenious and oddball contraptions such as the “overbalanced wheel” and “Maxwell’s Demon.” An impossibility in the physical universe, such corporeal limitations are overcome in music through the inexhaustible energy of the performing artist. The symbolic equivalence of motion and musical action has resulted in numerous showpieces for both a composer’s inventiveness and a player’s agility and stamina. Examples have been liberally sprinkled throughout music history since Bach set out to prove his mettle as an organist and contrapuntist in continuously modulating canons up through Rimsky-Korsakov’s ubiquitous *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Rossini’s virtuosic aria “Riedi al soglio” illustrates this idea for the voice alongside new iterations (for violin) by David Ludwig and Missy Mazzoli. A paradoxical corollary is embodied in the music of Richard Strauss, who, while portraying stillness and contemplation, uses the surface of serenity to envision the greatest journeys of all, those of the heart. These two extremes are unified, agitation married to profoundly soulful expression, in Faure’s Second Piano Quartet.

Shared Madness is a project through which Jennifer Koh cleverly invited composers to explore the performer’s relationship to a specific instrument, fulfilling a desire to create new repertoire for that instrument. She writes:

While Paganini wrote a landmark set of 24 caprices that explored the relationship of virtuosity on the violin at the beginning of the 19th century, this group of composers explores the meaning of virtuosity in the 21st century.

The series of works was premiered as a part of the New York Philharmonic’s Biennial in June 2016 and now totals 34 individual pieces.

In addition to the Caprices, Paganini composed his *Perpetuum mobile* to dazzle and flabbergast audiences with his endlessly inventive craft. Two modern-day composers have followed Paganini’s lead. David Ludwig’s contribution to *Shared Madness* is *Moto perpetuo*. A rising-falling pattern, similar to what one would find in a Bach prelude, is repeatedly interrupted by noisy outbursts like a needle being dragged across a vinyl record and dropped in a new place. The sound of the violin is continuously transformed—at one moment a pinched squeal, the next a resonant swell. We hear a single point of sound splinter into a many-sided form—is it a view through a kaleidoscope or simply a shared double-vision?

Missy Mazzoli writes of her work:

My short composition *Kinski Paganini* references Paganini's *24th Caprice*, but is also a nod to the unbridled energy of the late German actor/director/madman, Klaus Kinski, who, in 1989, wrote, directed, and starred in the surreal, sublime, touching

and ultimately ridiculous film *Paganini*. Kinski's portrayal required him to smash his instrument against walls, tear through rooms in an inexplicable rage, and "play" his violin with a devilish intensity. Any hope or memory of musical accuracy is obliterated in this film, and replaced with a passion and humanity that is possibly even closer to how we experience music in our hearts.

In Mazzoli's music, hints of Paganini's violin repertoire appear amid wave-like bouncing over the four strings—"devilish intensity" and mythical transformations finally ascend into an unknown sphere.

In Rossini's opera *Zelmira*, a convoluted plot with many double-dealings comes to a happy resolution with the restoration of the king to his rightful throne. In the finale, the Princess Zelmira marks the turning point of fate and declares an end to the ongoing injustice with a stately, elaborate aria about the splendor of the heavens and the righteousness of the proper order. Regal grandeur is represented by a florid, cascading vocal line, like the flowing, embroidered robes of royalty and the ceremonial pomp of majestic ritual. A rush of joy advances into a luminous future.

Another side of movement is the idea of transitions—moving not superficially from one place to another, but transformed from one state of being into something new. Strauss, in his songs, explores these inward states through music of heartbreaking beauty as a setting for words written primarily by contemporary poets. Instead of a busy surface of motion, we hear harmonic progressions that open up deep psychological vistas. To choose one example, the poet Richard Dehmel shared his own thoughts about his poem "Befreit" (*Set Free*):

I, for my part, had the picture of a man speaking to his dying wife. But, as works of art only aim at arousing human sensations and feelings in rhythmic harmony, I do not mind in the least that the allegory is also conceived of the other way around... Such mutual elevations of the soul—at least noble souls—apply not only to death, but to any parting; for every leave taking is related to death, and what we give up forever, we *give back to the world*.

Fauré's Piano Quartet in G minor is marked by dualities left unresolved. In the first movement, the sustained impassioned intensity of the opening melody is uncharacteristically agitated for this customarily introspective composer. The restlessness eventually gives way to music often marked *tranquillo*, *dolce* and *pianissimo sempre*. The darkness of the minor tonality is relieved by sun-dappled moments in the major key, where the pleading quality of the opening appoggiaturas is transformed into sighs of pleasure and relief. Chromaticism spirals through the harmonies, subliminally lending a churning, emotionally complex background to the music, through which purely diatonic moments emerge as a reprieve. The virtuosic rumblings of the keyboard are balanced by the long lyric lines in the strings. The second movement scherzo suddenly shatters the lyrical mood with a frenzy of piano notes. It has a folk-tale quality with an ostinato in the piano's left hand and syncopated scalar passages that evoke a harried feeling, despite brief countermelodies in the strings. In the slow movement, deep rumblings in the left hand of the piano, an evocation of distant, tolling of church bells, lend the movement a static quality that, in a way unique to Fauré, dovetails with slowly evolving, soaring and wafting,

peaceful, but emotionally significant lines of melody. This music allowed Fauré to travel through time, and, in a trance-like state, to hear again the distant sound of bells he heard in his youth:

...the far-off memory of a peal of bells in the evening, coming from a village called Cadirac as the wind blew in from the west. Upon this ringing a vague daydream grew which would be inexpressible in literary terms...The desire for nonexistent things, perhaps; and it is here indeed that music holds sway.

In the last movement, the manic ostinato character of the scherzo pulsates under forceful but fragmented melodies. Before one knows it, a vigorous waltz bursts out and fades. In the end, the waltz breathlessly emerges to close the movement.

By Mark Mandarano