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Faculty Recital

Roger Lebow
Chapman University

Gayle Blankenburg
Chapman University

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Spring 2010 Event Highlights

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The PageFeb 1 – Mar 12

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Chapman University Conservatory of Music

presents a

Faculty Recital

Roger Lebow, cello

Gayle Blankenburg, piano

February 25, 2010 • 8:00 P.M.

Salmon Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Sonata No. 2 (1924) Larghetto grazioso Allegro pesante ma agitato Molto lento; molto più mosso; Più tranquillo (played without pause)	Willem Pijper (1894-1947)
Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Op. 1 (1889) Sehr bewegt Sehr langsam und breit So schnell als möglich Nicht zu schnell, mit Humor	Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949)

INTERMISSION

Malinconia, Op. 20 (1901)	Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)
La Lugubre Gondola (1883)	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Shadow of the Hawk (1997)	Gareth Farr (b. 1968)
O Canto do Cisne Negro (1948) (Song of the Black Swan)	Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

The Dutch composer Willem Pijper (rhymes with “Skyper”) was the most important twentieth-century figure in his native land, both for the excellence of his works and for his influential role as teacher to the next generation of Dutch composers. His Second Sonata was written in 1924. It consists of three compact movements played without pause. Lasting a shade over ten minutes, it's about as long as the Debussy Sonata, which in its sensuality and quicksilver mood-swings must almost surely have been its immediate model. But of course it's not at all like Debussy. In fact, if you didn't know the piece already, who would you guess the composer to be? There are certainly whiffs of the Impressionist's paintbox, chiefly in Pijper's fondness for the whole-tone scale and veiled instrumental shadings. But what do you make of its wilder, more Fauve gestures? Not Stravinsky, certainly. Shades of Les Six, perhaps, in the jauntier automotive music? (Pijper loved fincars, and there are spots one almost expects to hear a klaxon.)

Despite its sources of inspiration, this intoxicating, mysterious music is really very original. You may feel after a bit that you've heard that tune before. And you have: it was Pijper's practice to use what he termed a “germ-cell” as the melodic and harmonic basis for an entire piece. So the opening cello solo, supported by those jazzy accompanying piano chords that straddle major and minor tonality, forms the DNA for the entire piece.

The scoring for the instruments is sophisticated and idiomatic. Pijper had been trained as a pianist, and the piano writing is accordingly expert, and though the chords and figurations are complex, the texture is never heavy. It is as if one hears the music in layers, through veils of sound, something reinforced by the fact that cello and piano often go their own way in completely different time signatures. The cellist, too, is occasionally asked to play in microtones, between the cracks of the piano keys, as it were. (This is something string players always find a way to mention, not merely to call attention to its exotic quality, but lest we be thought to be playing out of tune. It will naturally go without saying that throughout this concert, if the cellist seems to be out of tune, he is actually playing microtonally.)

The music of Hans Pfitzner (1869-1949) is still in the public ear in his native Germany, chiefly his chamber music, songs, and his superb opera *Palestrina*, which we in the U.S. can only encounter on recordings (an excellent jumping-off point, in fact, is the set of three orchestra preludes to the opera). In this country, indeed, one will seek in vain for Pfitzner performances.

Pfitzner's Cello Sonata was written when the composer was 20, and its ardent emotional language is that of a young man, as is made explicit by his title page quotation from the poet Heinrich Heine: “The song shall shudder and quake.” If you are coming to this piece for the first time, you may at first be struck by its superficial resemblance to Brahms and even Schumann (especially in the last movement, which almost evokes the Davidsbund). This is hardly surprising, considering that in 1889 Brahms remained the most vital and important composer of the German-speaking world. But as Gayle and I have gained familiarity with Pfitzner's Sonata, we've been increasingly struck by its bold originality in emotional scope and daring, its technical command. The work gives the lie to something one more or less takes for granted: that a piece by a minor composer influenced by established idols would of necessity be merely derivative and inferior; and that a composer's first published piece, the Opus One, must be juvenile fluff. (You will demur, citing the examples of Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms and Berg, who prove the point.)

Jean Sibelius: finally, a composer one has heard of! And yet, what is this *Malinconia*, this startling,

tempest-tost twelve-minute canvas? It is indeed an original work for cello and piano dating from 1901, the fertile period of his first two symphonies. In titling his piece "Melancholy," Sibelius can scarcely have been maneuvering for market share. What, then, is the emotional source of this piece? Though some biographers have cited the death of Sibelius's favorite grandchild, he was already someone who had a running start at this sort of dark meditation, and there are certainly plenty of gloomy expanses in the composer's other works. *Malinconia*, though, stands apart in its nearly monochrome bleakness, and looks ahead to Sibelius's final masterwork of 1926, the chillingly atmospheric orchestral tone poem *Tapiola*.

Death in Venice: this might have been the subtitle of a little set of late compositions written by Franz Liszt at the twilight of his career. The dark inspiration for these pieces was the impending death in February 1883 of Liszt's old friend and son-in-law, Richard Wagner.

La Lugubre Gondola was composed in Venice two months before Wagner's death, while Wagner was gravely ill and seeking to recuperate in the southern winter. The "dismal gondola" was, of course, the craft used to convey the dead to San Michele, the isle of burial a short distance from Venice. These spectral boats passed along the Grand Canal just in front of the Palazzo Vendramin, where Liszt had joined Wagner and his wife Cosima (Liszt's daughter; doesn't this make the short list for Greatest Musical Menages?). That the image was compelling to Liszt is attested by the fact that he wrote two different versions of *La Lugubre Gondola*, as well as two other unrelated epitaphs, *Richard Wagner—Venezia*, and *At the Grave of Richard Wagner*.

The present version, the second, was conceived from the outset for cello and piano (there is a violin alternate, but we don't like to talk about that). The first version was a sepulchral barcarole for solo piano; in this newer setting, the composer who had always relied solely on the piano turned for the first time, and with striking effect, to the cello to give utterance to a series of recitatives, somber, then agitated, then resigned (listen for a shard of *Tristan* in the third entrance). Liszt never published these pieces, nor is there any indication he ever meant to, and to listen is to eavesdrop on contemplations of the most dark and personal sort.

Enough with the death and dying already? We have the antidote: Gareth Farr is a New Zealand composer/percussionist. I discovered his music after Daniel Wachs played me his wonderful and utterly unique orchestral piece *From the Depths Sound the Great Sea Gongs*, and I had to discover whether he'd written for cello. He had. A romp through his engaging web site <http://www.garethfarr.com/> yields this information:

Gareth Farr was born in Wellington in 1968. He studied composition, orchestration and electronic music at Auckland University and was a regular player with the Auckland Philharmonia and the Karlheinz Company. Further study followed at Victoria University, Wellington, where he became known for his exciting compositions, often using the Indonesian gamelan. He played frequently as part of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra before going to the Eastman School in Rochester, New York, where he graduated Master of Music.

At 25, Gareth became Chamber Music New Zealand's youngest composer-in-residence. Since then, his works have been performed by the NZSO, the Auckland Philharmonia, the Wellington Sinfonia, the New Zealand String Quartet and a variety of other professional musicians. Gareth Farr is recognized as one of New Zealand's most important composers. Gareth's alter ego, Lilith, has performed Drumdrag to sold-out houses, won a fashion award at the Trentham Races wearing her own high-fashion handiwork, appeared in television commercials, and was recently seen recording a pop video for the theme song from Drumdrag.

While there are other pieces for cello that draw from rock and other vernacular music, they either sound as if they're slumming, or they don't rock, or both. *Shadow of the Hawk* most certainly isn't slumming. Besides its clear homage to visceral popular veins, there are references to gamelan, octatonic scales more often at home in "serious" music—and above all, a strong, confident original voice.

The composer provides the following note on the piece: "The shadow of the hawk rises and falls as the landscape gently undulates beneath it. One moment it is indistinct and unfocused, the next it snaps into clear definition as the ground rises. A rocky outcrop thrusts up towards the sky—the shadow is suddenly crystal-clear. Slowly it slides away again as the hills recede, and the hawk ascends soundlessly back into the sky."

More bird music. That cellists owe so much to the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos is only partially because he was himself a cellist who wrote so much for his own use. There have certainly been many composers who have written more impressively or virtuosically for the cello, but it was Villa-Lobos who among all twentieth-century composers—and think here of his celebrated *Bachiana Brasileira* for soprano and eight cellos—was able to embody in his music the soul of our instrument.

Though Villa-Lobos composed two concerti and two sonatas for the cello, it is perhaps his short solo pieces that show him at his best. The title is a transparent reference to Camille Saint-Saëns' *The Swan*. There must be a Portuguese word for "chutzpah," and it would certainly describe the colorful Villa-Lobos, and his emulation of the most famous short piece ever written for the cello. We offer it as envoi, as a pure distillation of why we play music.

– R.L.

ROGER LEBOW, cello

Cellist Roger Lebow has been the Chapman faculty cellist since 2005. He teaches at Pomona College and the Claremont Graduate University. Formerly at Occidental College, he has also been on the guest faculty at CalArts, UC Irvine, and UC Bjoerling. His own teachers were either students of Gregor Piatigorsky (Laurence Lesser, Robert Sayre) or Pablo Casals (Gabor Rejto, William van den Burg). In his dotage he regards teaching and other musical intervention as one of the central and most fulfilling parts of his life.

As for the other part of his life, you'll most often run into him in recital, with his chamber group XTET (in 2009-2010 savoring its 25th season), in the pit with LA Opera, or browsing through Vroman's Book Store, where he is a threat to buy something in almost any section, as long as it doesn't have an embossed cover. Mr. Lebow was for years part of the vigorous LA studio scene, heard, however subliminally and ephemerally, on hundreds of soundtracks; and spelunking pop enthusiasts can find him on albums by such period acts as ELO, Kim Carnes and Alanis Morissette.

RL has appeared as soloist in such arcana as Heitor Villa-Lobos's *Fantasia* and the Cello Concerto by Arthur Honegger (as well as standard repertoire by The Usual Dead White Suspects). He gave the premiere, with the LA Mozart Orchestra, of a concerto by Byron Adams, which he commissioned. A new-music advocate of too many years' standing, he's also commissioned solos by Leo Smit, Donald Davis, John Steinmetz, Leon Milo, Jean-Pierre Tibi, and David Ocker, and participated in dozens of chamber music premieres. He has chamber recordings on the Delos, New World, Water Lily Acoustics, and Albany labels. As is curiously so often the case with avant-gardistes, Roger is also an ardent player, on baroque cello and viola da gamba, of early music.

Back in what it pleases the kids to call "The Day," Lebow was the founding cellist of the Armadillo String Quartet and the Clarion Trio, and he spent several waterlogged years in Seattle with the Philadelphia String Quartet. He has appeared as soloist and chamber player at the Oregon Bach Festival and Cabrillo Music Festival. Other memorable and printable encounters include string quartet performances on a rafting trip through the Grand Canyon, his college rock group opening for the Jefferson Airplane in 1967, and participating in an original-pharmacology performance of Terry Riley's *In C* led by the composer. Lebow has been an iconoclastic classical music announcer on NPR stations in Santa Monica and Seattle, and still entertains radio dreams. So many have told him he should be a writer that he wonders if this is just a polite way of telling him to stop playing; but he continues to toil over a hot Macintosh turning out program annotations and album liner notes (or whatever they're called these days). He lives in a small cottage in Sierra Madre (Greene & Greene, 1906) with librarian Wendy Schorr (who clandestinely brings home books with embossed covers for him) and a cat, Eudoxa, who hates to be around the cello. Their son Theo is a tenor in New York City.

GAYLE BLANKENBURG, pianist

Gayle Blankenburg has performed extensively to great critical acclaim as a solo pianist, chamber musician, and vocal accompanist. She was a roster artist with Southwest Chamber Music from 1996 to 2003, with whom she regularly performed and recorded. Among recordings for Southwest Chamber Music on Cambria Records are her performances of Elliot Carter's newest song cycle, *Of Challenge and of Love* with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson and the Carlos Chavez *Invencion* for solo piano. She has also performed with Phyllis Bryn-Julson at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in New York City, and in Vienna, Austria. She is currently a founding member of the LA-based ensemble "inauthentica" with whom she has recently recorded works of Richard Cameron-Wolfe with soprano Lucy Shelton, and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with soprano Jennifer Goltz. The latter has received the highest critical acclaim from *Grammaphone Magazine*, *Opera News*, and *The American Record Guide*.

The Los Angeles Times has said of her playing, "Blankenburg played with elegant power and poise... Her crisp touch and light pedaling produced crystalline, pensive, haunting sequences... This is a gratefully idiomatic piece for a pianist with both power and a palette, requirements Blankenburg met easily."

She has performed much of the standard chamber music repertoire with members of major orchestras across the country, including members of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and is currently on the piano faculties of the Claremont Colleges, teaching at Scripps College, the Claremont Graduate University, and Pomona College.

Ms. Blankenburg was a student of the distinguished pianists Menahem Pressler (of the Beaux Arts Trio) and Abbey Simon at Indiana University, where she received the Bachelor's and Master's degrees in piano performance, and was also awarded the coveted Performer's Certificate.

Upcoming Events

March

- 4 Scott Stone, Euphonium, Guest Artist 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall
Free Admission
- 5 Chapman Chamber Orchestra and 7:00 P.M.
University Singers St. John's Lutheran Church
154 S. Shaffer, Orange
Free Admission
- 10 Daniela Mineva, Piano, Guest Recital 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall
\$10 General Admission/\$5 Seniors and Students
- 12 Stan Kenton Alumni Band Concert 8:00 P.M.
with Chapman Big Band Chapman Auditorium
Reserved Admission \$10-40
- 13 Chapman University Wind Symphony Concert 8:00 P.M.
Chapman Auditorium
\$10 General Admission/\$5 Seniors and Students
- 19 Laszlo Lak, Piano, Faculty Recital 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall
\$10 General Admission/\$5 Seniors and Students
- 23 Sergei Babayan, Piano, Guest Artist in Recital 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall
\$15 General Admission/\$10 Seniors and Students

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