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An Evening of the Romantics

Carol Neblett  
*Chapman University*

Grace Fong  
*Chapman University*

Mary Palchak  
*Chapman University*

Jacob Braun  
*Chapman University*

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
Conservatory of Music
presents

An Evening of the Romantics

Carol Neblett, soprano
Grace Fong, piano
Mary Palchak, flute
Jacob Braun, cello

March 26, 2012 • 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall
Program

Il Tramonto – (the Sunset)
Carol Neblett, soprano
Grace Fong, piano

Vocalise
Mary Palchak, flute
Grace Fong, piano

Sonata for Cello and Piano, op. 19
Lento – Allegro moderato
Allegro scherzando
Andante
Allegro mosso
Jacob Braun, cello
Grace Fong, piano

Chansons madécasses op. 78
I. Nahandove
II. Aoua!
III. Il est doux . . .
Carol Neblett, soprano
Grace Fong, piano
Jacob Braun, cello
Mary Palchak, flute

Artists

Jacob Braun enjoys a multi-faceted career as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. He has earned praise as one of the most versatile and accomplished cellists of his generation, a cellist with "a distinctly warm . . . and gorgeous dark tone" (The St. Louis Dispatch).

Mr. Braun joined the Penderecki String Quartet in the fall of 2009 and is Professor/Artist in Residence at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Canada. With this ensemble, he has appeared worldwide, having recently completed auspiciously recognized tours of China, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Spain.

As a recitalist, Mr. Braun has appeared live on BBC Radio 3 in London, WFMT in Chicago and CBC Radio Canada. Mr. Braun has performed with many leading artists including Grace Fong, Shmuel Ashkenasi, Cho-Liang Lin, Ida Kavafian, David Finckel and members of the Brentano, Calder, Juilliard, Miami, Shanghai and Tokyo String Quartet.

Jacob was a winner of the 2003 Naumburg Chamber Music Award with the Biava Quartet. He has performed numerous times in Lincoln Center, Wigmore Hall and Jordan Hall and frequently appears as a guest artist for numerous festivals, including the 2011 Amsterdam Cello Congress, String Academy at Indiana University and the Innsbrook Institute.

Mr. Braun received his degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music (B.M. 02), the New England Conservatory (M.M. 04) and Yale University (A.D. 06), studying with Richard Aaron, Paul Katz, Aldo Parisot, and Clive Greensmith. While studying at Yale University, Mr. Braun served as a teaching assistant to the Tokyo String Quartet and was Paul Katz’s teaching assistant at NEC. Mr. Braun plays on an Antonius Mariani cello made circa 1619.

Praised as "positively magical," an artist of "rare eloquence and grace," American pianist Grace Fong enjoys a career as an international concerto soloist, recitalist, chamber musician and teacher. She has gained critical acclaim in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia, making appearances at major venues around the world, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Disney Hall, the Kennedy Center, Phillips Collection, Hollywood Bowl, Great Hall in Leeds, UK, Severance Hall in Cleveland, Ohio, the Liszt Academy in Budapest, Konzerthaus Dortmund, Germany, among others. Radio/television broadcasts have included British Broadcasting Company, WCLV-FM 104.9, KUSC 91.5 FM in Los Angeles, the "Emerging Young Artists" series in New York, and "Performance Today" on National Public Radio.

Dr. Fong is a prizewinner of numerous international competitions, including the prestigious Leeds International Piano Competition in the United Kingdom and the 2009 American Pianists Association Classical Fellowship Award, among others. She is also a recipient of the Presidential Scholar in the Arts Award, where she was presented a medallion by former President Clinton at the White House. An avid educator, Dr. Fong appears frequently as a guest artist and teacher at festivals including the 2012 Schiern International Festival
Mary Palchak is active as a flutist and teacher in Southern California. She has played with the Pasadena, Pacific and Long Beach Symphonies, as well as with Long Beach Opera, numerous touring ballet productions at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion and OCPAC, and throughout the United States for the Yamaha Music Education program. As artistic director of the California Concert Artists she organized and performed concerts with many of Southern California’s most noted musicians, premiering new works and reviving old repertoire. Her CD Flute Music by French Composers, produced in collaboration with Louis Moyes, received critical acclaim in Fanfare Magazine and is a best-selling classical CD world-wide. Ms. Palchak is proud of her association with the Chapman University College of Performing Arts, and takes great pleasure in helping her students develop their talent and artistry.

One of America’s greatest and most acclaimed sopranos, Carol Neblett’s career has spanned over forty years, performing opera’s most coveted roles in the world’s greatest opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala, Covent Garden, San Francisco Opera, Salzburg, Hamburg and Chicago Lyric Opera.

Ms. Neblett began her career in 1964, at the age of eighteen, as a soloist with the Roger Wagner Chorale, making her professional debut at Carnegie Hall in Handel’s Oratorio Esther. That same year, Ms. Neblett also appeared as the Angel in Respighi’s Laud to the Nativity at the Los Angeles Music Center. From 1965 to 1969, under the guidance of impresario Sol Hurok, Ms. Neblett toured the world performing recitals, oratorio and symphonic concerts.

Ms. Neblett made her operatic debut in 1969 with the New York City Opera as Musetta, in La Boheme. Amidst huge acclaim, she performed over twenty-five leading roles with the company over the next five years. Critical triumphs included the dual roles of Margherita and Helen of Troy in Boito’s Mefistofele. Her performance of Korngold’s Die Tote Stadt was so successful that it was subsequently recorded with the renowned Erich Leinsdorf conducting, and won a number of coveted awards, including a Grammy in 1975.

Ms. Neblett’s signature roles include Puccini’s Tosca as well as Minnie in The Girl of the Golden West. In 1976 she made her debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago as Tosca with Luciano Pavarotti, and has sung this role more that 400 times. Ms. Neblett was invited to sing Minnie with Placido Domingo for Queen Elizabeth’s 25th Jubilee Celebration at Covent Garden, which was filmed live as well as recorded. Ms. Neblett made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1979 as Senta in Jen-Pierre Ponelle’s production of Der Fliegende Holländer, conducted by James Levine. Throughout her career, Ms. Neblett sang regularly with the Met in productions such as Tosca, Don Giovanni, Manon Lescaut, Un Ballo in Maschera, Falstaff, and La Fanciulla del West. In the 1993-94 opera season, she celebrated her 25th operatic anniversary by reviving her role as Musetta.

Throughout the world’s major opera houses, Ms. Neblett has sung more than eighty-five leading roles and more than 100 oratorio and symphonic works. Her recordings include Musetta in La Boheme for Angel/EMI, James Levine conducting; Minnie in La Fanciulla del West with Placido Domingo and Sherrill Milnes, Zubin Mehta conducting (DG); Miretta in Korngold’s Die Tote Stadt, Erich Leinsdorf conducting (RCA); Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 with Claudio Abbado and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; and a special recording with Roger Wagner on Angel/EMI entitled Magnificat. In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a compact disc was issued of Ms. Neblett singing Soprano No. 1 in Mahler’s Symphony No. 8. James Levine conducting. She is featured in “James Levine’s 25th Anniversary” with the Metropolitan Opera, singing the role of Alice Ford in Falstaff with Giuseppe Taddei; an international television broadcast of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Maestro Carlo Maria Giulini; television broadcast from the Kennedy Center, A Tribute to George London, subsequently released on RCA.

Ms. Neblett is currently on the vocal staff as Artist-in-Residence at Chapman University. She conducts master classes for young artist programs worldwide, concentrating on role preparation for the professional singer, as well as maintaining a private studio in the Los Angeles area. Additionally, May 3rd through June 9th, Ms. Neblett will sing Old Heidi Schiller in Follies and the Ahmanson Theater.
Program Notes

Il Tramonto
OTTORINO RESPIGHI
Born July 9, 1879, Bologna
Died April 18, 1936, Rome

In 1816 the 24-year-old Percy Bysshe Shelley married 19-year-old Mary Wollstonecraft, who would write Frankenstein two years later. That spring, Shelley wrote a poem titled The Sunset, which touches many themes central to the romantic imagination: the mingling of love and death, the power of grief, the longing for rest, and the effect of time. Though parts of the poem had appeared before Shelley's drowning in 1822, the complete poem was not published until his widow gathered a number of works as his Posthumous Poems in 1824.

Exactly a century after The Sunset was written, it attracted the attention of Ottorino Respighi, who knew it – in an Italian translation by R. Ascoli – as Il Tramonto. At this time Respighi was still virtually unknown as a composer. In 1913, at the age of 34, he had become a professor of composition at Saint Cecilia's in Rome, and over the next few years he composed the work that would bring him fame, The Fountains of Rome. At the same time he was writing Fountains, Respighi made a setting of Il Tramonto for the unusual ensemble of soprano and string quartet, and both The Fountains of Rome and Il Tramonto were first heard in February 1918.

Those who know Respighi only as the composer of the splashy Roman trilogy will be in for a surprise with Il Tramonto, for here the Italian master of orchestration writes with subtlety and refinement for this much more restrained palette. Respighi subtleties this work "poemetto lirico," and he is quite sensitive to Shelley's text: the soprano sings virtually throughout, with only the briefest instrumental interludes, and in fact the entire work is shaped by the evolving moods of Shelley's poem. Just as the events of the poem change sharply, moving from the passion of the lovers to the aging woman's plea for release, so Respighi shifts tempo and harmony constantly. The mood remains generally restrained: only occasionally does the dynamic rise above mezzo forte, and the climax – on the word "Peace" – is marked triple piano before Il Tramonto fades into silence on a postlude that Respighi marks dolcissimo.

~Notes by Eric Bromberger

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) premiered his own piano and cello sonata, often referred to as his fifth piano concerto because of its uncommonly difficult piano part. He dedicated it to Anatoliy Brandukov, the Russian cellist who worked closely with Rachmaninoff and premiered works by Pyotr Tchaikovsky and Anton Rubenstein as well. The sonata stretches the technical demands of the pianist and requires only a virtuoso to play the part. Written in four movements, Rachmaninoff completed and performed the work in 1901, but it was overshadowed by another one of his compositions, his Piano Concerto No. 2, which premiered just 2 months before.

Rachmaninoff was one of the greatest concert pianists of his time. His extremely large hands, combined with an impeccable technique and warm melodic phrasing made his performances stand alone among the top echelon of the greatest pianists. Even today, many pianists are quite envious of the size of his hands, as many of his chords require almost impossible stretches. Besides the piano, Rachmaninoff had an affinity for the cello and had written for the piano and cello combination in his Romance in f minor and Two pieces for Cello and Piano, Opus 2. He preferred the cello to the violin because it more closely resembled the human voice, therefore reflecting the inner soul of the Russian voice. The piano and cello sonata is as rich in texture and lyricism as any that has ever been written for the genre. Both the piano and cello are used as expressively as possible; there seems to be no limits to the intensity of emotion.

The piano and cello sonata was written at a point during which Rachmaninoff was in the midst of a comeback. Several years earlier, he was sent into a deep depression as a result of harsh critics and attacks on his music and was so distraught he gave up composing. He was only brought back with the help of Dr. Nikolay Dahl, who used hypnosis on his talented patient. Rachmaninoff gained his confidence back and wrote the 2nd piano concerto and just 2 months later, the piano and cello sonata. Of his very small chamber music output, this was to be his final chamber music composition. Rachmaninoff was only 28 at the time.

It had become increasingly common in the romantic era, since the expansion of the sonata form by Beethoven, to shift the weight of the movements towards the last movement of a four-movement composition, whereas in the classical era, the first movement was the heavier, more important movement. In the piano and cello sonata, Rachmaninoff does this masterfully. The yearning, inward and mysterious 1st movement g minor melody leaves us wanting more. The rhapsodic, quick paced and dramatic 2nd movement keeps the tension in the air. The Andante is often played alone as it is considered one of the most gorgeous single movements written for any combination. This is the heart and soul of this work, a timeless tender and loving melody. Rachmaninoff comes full circle in the Finale with a victorious and exciting G Major conclusion.

~Notes by Jacob Braun
The Chansons Madécasses come from later in Ravel's life, and they offer some of his most advanced music. In 1925 Ravel received a commission from the American patron of arts Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge for a set of songs, and she made an unusual request: Ravel was free to choose the texts, but she asked that they be accompanied, if possible, by an ensemble of flute, cello, and piano. Ravel—who had just completed Tzigane and his orchestration of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition—accepted that condition, and then he in turn made a surprising choice of texts.

The title Chansons Madécasses means "Songs of Madagascar" or "Madagascan Songs." For these songs, Ravel set three poems that Évariste Parny claimed to have translated from the original in 1787 under the title Chansons madécasses, traduites en français, suivies de poésies fugitives. Scholars have doubted the authenticity of these "fugitive poems," suggesting that rather than translating native poetry, Parny (1753-1814) wrote them himself while living in India and based their style on poems from Madagascar. Whatever their origin, these songs and their shocking texts caused a sensation at their first performance on June 13, 1926 in Paris: the poems are surprising in their explicit sexuality and in their political sentiments, and some members of the audience walked out of that first performance. The almost visceral appeal of these songs was underlined by the lithographs that appeared in the first edition of the songs: dark, expressionistic, and violent, these crude woodcuts captured the spirit of the "native" songs perfectly.

Some observers have detected an unexpected influence on these songs: Arnold Schoenberg. The use of a solo singer and small instrumental ensemble recalls Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire of 1912, and Ravel freely admitted being aware of Schoenberg when he wrote these songs: "I am quite conscious of the fact that my Pierrot Lunaire are in no way Schoenbergian, but I do not know whether I ever should have been able to write them had Schoenberg never written."

The first song, Nahandove, is explicitly erotic. "Nahandove" is the name of the poet’s lover, and both poet and composer clearly like that name, lingering over it as much as they can. The poet waits for his lover in the moonlight. She arrives, they make love, then collapse together in the warm air; she leaves, and he is left alone, caught in the same longing he felt at the beginning.

If the first song was soft and erotic, the second song is violent and political. It opens with the singer’s shouted "Aoua!" and then she warns "Méfiez-vous des blancs": beware of the white men who came making fine promises but who built forts and tried to subjugate the people. The piano plays a grim ostinato that drives the song to its climax when the natives revolt and drive out the white man; at this climax, the flute shouts out trumpet-like fanfares, but the song fades away on a final warning about the white man. France was fighting a colonial war in Morocco when this song was premiered in Paris, and several members of the audience rose and walked out ostentatiously, proclaiming that they would not listen to such subversive music while their nation was at war.

Il est doux... is a song of complete ease and languor: the poet lies in the moonlight as women move around him, anxious to serve. This atmosphere is captured by the free flute solos and cello in harmonics, as the poet celebrates the "attitudes of pleasure" around him. The final line is all the more effective for being unaccompanied.

Text and Translations

The Sunset

There late was One within whose subtle being, As light and wind within some delicate cloud That fades amid the blue noon’s burning sky, Genius and death contended. None may know The sweetness of the joy which made his breath Fail, like the trances of the summer air. When, with the lady of his love, who then First knew the unreserve of mingled being, He walked along the pathway of a field Which to the east a hoar wood shadowed o'er, But to the west was open to the sky. There now the sun had sunk, but lines of gold Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the points Of the far level grass and nodding flowers Of the flat earth grass and nodding flowers And the old dandelion’s hoary beard, And, mingled with the shades of twilight, lay On the brown massy woods - and in the east The broad and burning moon lingeringly rose There now the sun had sunk, but lines of gold Hung on the ashen clouds, and on the points Of the far level grass and nodding flowers Of the flat earth grass and nodding flowers And the old dandelion’s hoary beard, And, mingled with the shades of twilight, lay On the brown massy woods - and in the east The broad and burning moon lingeringly rose Between the black trunks of the crowded trees, While the faint stars were gathering overhead. "It is not strange, Isabel," said the youth, "I never saw the sun? We will walk here To-morrow; thou shalt look on it with me."
That night the youth and lady mingled lay
In love and sleep - but when the morning came
The lady found her lover dead and cold.
And that she did not die, but lived to tend
Her gentleness and patience and sad smiles,
If madness 'tis to be unlike the world.
But for to see her were to read the tale
Woven by some subtlest bard, to make hard hearts
Dissolve away in wisdom-working grief;
And weak articulations might be seen come leggere un canto da ingegnoso bardo
Her eyelashes were worn away with tears, sorns,
Her lips and cheeks were like things dead -
Her hands were thin, and through their wan-
Jamais tu ne fus si belle,
Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!

...Tu pars, et je vais languir
amid regrets and desires.
Je languirai jusqu'au soir.
Tu reviendras ce soir,
Nahandove, ô belle Nahandove!

II. Beware of the white men

Aoua! Aoua!
Méfiez-vous des blancs,
dwellers on the shore.
In our fathers' time
white men descended upon this island.
One of them said: Here is land,
let your wives cultivate it;
be just, be good,
and become our brothers.

The white men promised, and meanwhile
they were building entrenchments.
A menacing fort arose;
thernder was enclosed
in bronze mouths.
Their priests wanted to give us a god
we do not know;
finally they spoke of obedience
and slavery.
Rather death!
The carnage was long and terrible,
yet for all the lightning bolts they spat forth,
which destroyed entire armies,
they were utterly exterminated.
Aoua! Aoua!
Beware of the white men!

We have seen new tyrants,
stronger, and more numerous,
plant their pavillon on the rivage.
Le ciel a combattu pour nous.

Il a fait tomber sur eux les pluies,
les tempêtes et les vents empoisonnés.
Ils ne sont plus, et nous vivons,
et nous vivons libres.
Aoua! Aoua!
Méfiez-vous des blancs,
habitans du rivage.

III. It is good to lie down

It is good to lie down in the heat of the day,
derunder a leafy tree, and to wait
until the evening wind brings freshness.

Women, approach.
While I rest here
under a leafy tree, delight my ear
with your soothing voices.
Repeat the song of the young girl
while she braids her hair
or, while sitting by the rice patch,
chases the greedy birds away.

The singing is pleasing to my spirit.
Dancing for me is almost as sweet
as a kiss. Step slowly;
imitate the poses of pleasure
and the surrender to voluptuous bliss.

The evening wind awakens;
the moon begins to shine through
the trees on the mountain.
Go, and prepare the meal.

~Translated by Steven Ledbetter
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