

🏹 Notes About the Program 🏹

D'un Matin de Printemps – Lili Boulanger

Lili Boulanger was born into a prominent Parisian musical family. Her father, Ernest Boulanger, won the Prix de Rome in 1836. Her older sister, Nadia, would become an influential composer and teacher (her pupils included Aaron Copland, Elliot Carter, Astor Piazzola, and Philip Glass). Tragically, Lili suffered from poor health for virtually her entire life. At age two, she had a severe case of bronchial pneumonia that devastated her immune system. Soon after, she developed “intestinal tuberculosis” (which modern medicine diagnoses as Crohn’s disease). Lili’s health had many ups and downs, and she would ultimately pass away before her 25th birthday. (For comparison, Franz Schubert lived to the ripe old age of 31.) Despite sporadic schooling due to her chronic illness, Lili Boulanger won the coveted Prix de Rome in 1913, being the first woman to do so. (In addition to her father, prize recipients include Hector Berlioz, Charles Gounod, and Claude Debussy.) Regrettably, her prize winners’ residency in Rome was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I. Boulanger would attempt to finish the residency later, but her rapidly failing health once again made it impossible.



Remarkably, *D'un Matin de Printemps* (Of a Spring Morning) was “conceived by the composer in three different versions simultaneously [violin/flute and piano, piano trio, orchestra]. These were the last pieces Lili Boulanger wrote with her own hand. Her manuscripts for these works betray the increasing effects of her illness. The notes are minuscule.” Despite the circumstances in which it was written, as the title suggests *D'un Matin de Printemps* is full of life and vigor. Boulanger blends the colorful sound world of French Impressionism with the hard edges of modernism for a stunningly unique effect.

Sonata in C Major, Op. 119 for cello and piano – Sergei Prokofiev

In 1936, after nearly two decades living in the west, Prokofiev returned to Russia, hoping to become established as the country’s foremost composer. Unfortunately, he was stepping into a worsening political situation, and, after having his passport confiscated during a routine inspection, he became trapped in a nightmare scenario. In the late 1940s, Andrey Zhdanov, the Soviet Union’s head of Cultural Policy, enacted strict decrees on acceptable standards of art and music. As a result, much of Prokofiev’s music was banned



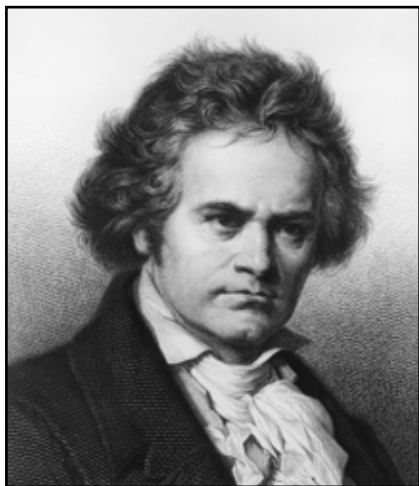
from public performance. Remarkably, Zhdanov’s Committee of Artistic Affairs approved Prokofiev’s op. 119 Sonata, which debuted in a 1950 performance by pianist Sviatoslav Richter and cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Arguably, the sonata’s reliance on triadic sonorities and folk idioms (as well as sheer luck) helped it escape censorship.

The first movement opens with a cello solo spanning the instrument’s lowest register. The piano enters with subdued accompaniment before expanding into increasingly melodic territory. When it is the cello’s turn to accompany, it does so with guitar-like strummed four-note chords. The second movement features a playful opening melody and mischievous interchanges between cello and piano, contrasting with a lyrical trio section. Like the first movement, the cello writing exploits the low register and large pizzicato chords. The final movement, like the first, is memorably melodic. It concludes with a return to material from the first movement’s opening, reworked into a grand apotheosis complete with big runs and thickly voiced chords (in the tradition of composers such as Tchaikovsky or Mussorgsky). Prokofiev’s utilization of the bass register continues to the last note—the cello and piano’s lowest C played in unison.

Sonata for clarinet and piano – Ben Dorfan

Shortly after premiering my chamber work *Mythos* in 2017, Jeff Gallagher asked me to write a piece for him—and I was happy to oblige. Originally scheduled to debut with Santa Cruz Chamber Players in May of 2020, this performance is still a world premiere!

Each movement draws from a diverse set of influences. The first is modeled after Anton Webern and Alfred Schnittke; the second movement channels Manuel de Falla’s “Nana” from *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas*. The third movement is indebted to Johannes Brahms, Béla Bartók, and Steven Sondheim. Enjoy!



Trio in B-flat major, Op. 11 for clarinet, cello and piano – Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven completed the op. 11 trio in late 1797, having recently recovered from a severe illness. Although Beethoven and his early biographers attributed the disease to “typhus” (which was something of a catch-all term), there are various theories regarding the true diagnosis—possibly meningitis due to secondary syphilis. What’s indisputable is that Beethoven’s hearing loss would begin soon after.

While the standard trio instrumentation is violin, cello, and piano, the op. 11 trio is unique for swapping out the violin for clarinet. Fearing this unusual format would affect the work’s marketability, Beethoven wrote an alternative part for the violin

(history has confirmed that the clarinet was a brilliant choice, as the work is nowadays rarely performed with violin).

The first movement is instantly recognizable with its stark octaves ascending by half step. The music unfolds lightly and cheerfully, arguably occupying Mozart's sound-world just as much as Beethoven's. The second movement begins with an elegant cello solo. The stormy yet subdued development launches unexpectedly from Eb minor to the tonally distant region of E major. Soon returning to the home key of Eb major, the piano erupts in rippling arpeggios which transition into the movement's concluding section. As far as slow movements go, it is as lovely as it is miniature. The final movement's theme is an earworm taken from Joseph Weigl's opera *Lamor Marinaro ossia Il Corsaro*, earning the trio its nickname *Gassenhauer* ("popular melody"). Humorously, the aria's lyrics roughly translate as "Before I go to work, I must have something to eat!" Beethoven caps off his nine short variations with a 6/8 finale bringing the trio to an energetic finish.

L'Histoire du soldat Suite – Igor Stravinsky

After a promising start to his career (with *The Firebird* in 1910, *Petrushka* in 1911, and *The Rite of Spring* in 1913)—by 1918, Stravinsky found himself in dire circumstances. Stranded in Switzerland because of World War I, he had no income and no home to return to. (Stravinsky's family estate was lost with the collapse of the Russian government.) Hoping to make a quick profit, together with friend and collaborator Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, "they started discussing the possibility of writing a piece which could do without a big hall, a huge public; a piece with... only a few instruments and only two or three characters...to be read, played, and danced."

Despite tremendous obstacles to producing a modernist theater production in wartime Switzerland, Stravinsky and Ramuz managed to cobble together the necessary funding and personnel, largely thanks to support from industrialist-philanthropist Werner Reinhart. Unfortunately, the September 28 premiere in Lausanne would be the stage version's only performance for several years. The very next day, all public halls were closed due to the 1918 Flu Pandemic (Stravinsky himself falling ill only days later). While Reinhart had secured them against a loss, Stravinsky and Ramuz probably earned less than two thousand francs for the better part of a year's work. (Today, this sum would be worth less than ten thousand dollars.)

In January of 1919, Stravinsky wrote, "Numerous requests have been addressed to me for a piano-and-violin reduction (in which the violin would have the more substantial role), so I have decided to arrange a little suite of the work, employing a clarinet along with these two instruments. I would like the suite to be presented in London this season." It's likely Stravinsky's true motivation was to salvage some income from the project, an ongoing point of contention with Ramuz who felt that the concert suites



(Stravinsky wrote several) cut him out of his fair share. The inclusion of the clarinet in the trio arrangement is an apparent nod to Stravinsky's benefactor Reinhart, who himself was an amateur clarinetist.

The first movement of the Suite, *Marche du Soldat*, depicts the soldier trudging home from the war. Flourishes from the violin and clarinet punctuate the animated melody; in the piano's bass register, we hear the steady beat of the soldier's footsteps. The second movement, *Le Violon du Soldat*, establishes the violin as a symbol for the soldier's soul. Here, the violin writing sparkles with double stops and soloistic passages layered above the piano's persistent four-note ostinato. *Un Petit Concert* is a small celebration of the soldier beating the devil at cards. Even in trio arrangement, this movement sounds thickly orchestrated, with multiple overlapping melodic lines reminiscent of Stravinsky's earlier ballet works. The fourth movement, *Tango-Valse-Ragtime*, portrays the soldier attempting to cure a sick princess and win her hand in marriage. Here, Stravinsky demonstrates his mastery of musical style, emulating each of the three dances accurately while also staying true to his own voice. In the final movement of the suite, *Danse du Diable*, the soldier's frantic fiddle playing torments the devil, causing him collapse. Of course, the soldier's victory will be short-lived as his soul is ultimately fated to be taken by the devil.

– program notes by Ben Dorfan



Acknowledgements

This concert has been in the works since early 2019, and it could not have gone forward without tremendous community support. I am thankful for the performers on this program who have been wonderful to work with and ever so patient as we waited for the pandemic to abate. A big thank you goes to my friend and collaborator Stuart Wilson for engineering this weekend's concert recording. This concert's present form is indebted to Dr. Anatole Leikin, who advised me on preparing the program notes and provided chamber music coaching. I am grateful for my parents, who have always believed in my musical potential, for friends and family who have traveled far to attend this concert, and for my wife—who has given moral support to my musical endeavors and tolerated countless chamber music rehearsals in our home. I thank the SCCP board of directors for their belief in me as a concert director and Carol Panofsky for designing this beautiful program booklet. Last but certainly not least, I thank SCCP donors, sponsors, and YOU, our fantastic audience!