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Honors Recital Presentation

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Honors Recital Presentation

David A Rutter

HONORS PROJECT

Submitted to the Honors College
at Bowling Green State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with

UNIVERSITY HONORS

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Advisors:
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Fritz Kreisler – Tempo di Minuetto

Fritz Kreisler, the composer of this first piece, was a lot of things. He was an author and essayist, a war hero, a poetic orator, a versatile composer, an incredible virtuoso and according to dozens of accounts, a “gentleman without fear or reproach”. To many of his critics though, Kreisler was also a bit of a liar.

The story goes something like this: Kreisler had made a name for himself by notating a number of pieces, transcribing and reimagining them for his adoring audiences. Throughout the 20th century, he would take old often forgotten pieces and notate them so that they could return to modern audiences. During the midst of a revival focusing on 17th and 18th century works, Kreisler was praised for these transcriptions. They were responsible for resurrecting the efforts of past greats like Couperin, Vivaldi, Pugnani and a number of others. In 1935, about 20 years after his first of many transcriptions, Kreisler’s ruse had a light shown on it. It was revealed that these works to which Kreisler had credited a number of late composers were actually recent compositions, compositions by Kreisler, himself. The irony in this is that his critics and audiences had been praising him for roughly two decades for his authentic contributions to the revival movement, when for all that time, these works were created by none other than Kreisler, himself.

Needless to say, some of his critics were not pleased with having the wool pulled over their eyes. They claimed that his pieces had been riding the coattails of departed composers for two decades. To many of them, this was an artistic felony – to Kreisler, a clever ruse. He had been reverse plagiarizing for years. To his critics, he merely had this to say, “who ever had heard a work by [these composers] before I began to compose in their names? They lived exclusively as paragraphs in musical reference books, and their work, when existing and authenticated, lay mouldering in monasteries and old libraries”. When pressed on why he had done all this, he politely and unapologetically claimed that he would have felt “impudent and tactless to repeat [his own] name endlessly on [his] programs.” So he decided to use others’ names instead.

This boisterous attitude and clever charm are the qualities that have come to define Fritz Kreisler to modern audiences. This first piece, *Tempo di Minuetto (In the Style of Pugnani)*, is, in my opinion, a fantastic flagship for this infamous character.

George Frideric Handel – Sonata No 2

George Frideric Handel was a German, trained in Italy, who wrote for the English. He was vastly successful with his compositions and is, to this day, one of the most recognizable musical idols to have influenced western music. His sonatas, however, to no fault of his own, are a point of historical contention. In 1732, British publisher, John Walsh collected a number of Handel's works for solo instrument and figured bass. This was, keep in mind, unbeknownst to Handel. Three of those pieces were for violin. Handel might not even have composed two of those three at all, but with those and nine other sonatas for varying instruments; Walsh published his twelve "Handel" sonatas completely without the composer's permission. Over the years, different scholars and publishers have made multiple attempts at trying to assemble the most authentic collection of Handel's sonatas. It is an ongoing and heavily debated subject to this day! Don't worry, though, for all the purists in the audience, the one I'll be performing tonight is one of the few confirmed Handel composition, unchallenged by scholars.

One thing that we do know for certain in regards to Handel and his works is the great reverence with which his fans and admirers considered him. Ludwig van Beethoven claimed that Handel was "the greatest composer that ever lived... to him I bow the knee". Mozart is quoted in a conversation with a German playwright in saying "Handel knows better than any of us what will make an effect; when he chooses, he strikes like a thunderbolt..."

I think that to many of us, hearing such iconic composers speak of a Baroque composer with such high praise might be a little surprising. Going through high school orchestra not too long ago myself and working with children in orchestras today, it's not uncommon to see eyes roll when your teacher brings out Baroque music to read. I think that there exists a common misconception that music from the Baroque period is kind of hard to connect to emotionally. Without the dramatic vibrato or back-bending technical flare of more Romantic music, Baroque music can seem somewhat limited or stiff to some audiences. But Handel himself was nothing but a character. He was an enormous bear of a man, dwarfing the Englishmen he entertained. He was known for his fiery temper, huge appetite, and at times, his colorful ability to curse in sometimes up to four or five languages, depending on the account! He was a man of incredible passion and character, sometimes nicknamed "the Great Bear". But he was capable of producing incredibly tender and affectionate music as well.

His fans adored him, publishers wanted his works so badly they were willing to pirate them, and composers to this day idolize him.

I hope that with this performance, I can deliver to you that same bear-sized character; those thunderbolt effects that had such an influence on even Mozart himself.

JS Bach – Partita No 2 - Allemanda

Johann Sebastian Bach is perhaps the most recognizable name in all of western art music. The footprint that the Bach lineage left upon musical tradition is absolutely monumental. Like many other artistic geniuses throughout history though, JS Bach's works were not truly appreciated until after his death. It was not until roughly 100 years after his passing did he begin to be recognized as the master of counterpoint that he was. The intelligence with which he composed enabled him to create music that was both structurally intricate and stylistically appealing for the time, all while delivering incredibly emotional effects as well.

The effect this next piece has on me, the Allemanda from Bach's 2nd Partita, is, incredibly human – almost conversational. Though this is currently a point of musical contention amongst historians, as are so many of the facts surrounding Bach's personality and intentions, his second partita is often thought to include a tombeau, from the French word for "tomb". Written not long after his wife's passing, it is argued that this partita was composed to commemorate her, containing a number of hidden liturgical references. While this might cast a somber light on this composition, it is important to consider what death may have meant to Bach. After losing his wife and mother of his seven children, Bach certainly must have mourned her passing. He was almost certainly sustained by his faith though. He was a devout Christian, composing dozens of religious works and holding a number of positions performing for cathedrals and churches around Europe. Bach would not have seen death as an end. Rather, death, in his faith, promised heavenly bliss and reconnection with God. I can only imagine this as possibly one of the most bittersweet experiences that can be had in this world – the loss of his beloved wife, but the knowledge that she lives without suffering in the company of God.

Speculation or not, I am very aware of this sentiment throughout this piece. As I said, it feels very human – conversational, like a prayer wrought with both pain and faith.

Charles de Bériot – Concerto IX mvt. 1

This final piece on my recital is one that holds a wide range of emotions for me. Its composer, Charles de Bériot, was an extremely accomplished individual in what is now a long line of virtuosos and composers. He is considered by many to be the violinist responsible for earning the Belgian school, a specific style of violin performance, its place in history. His virtuosity was even often compared to that of the almost supernaturally talented Nicolò Paganini. He played for audiences around Europe, kings and queens, and some of the most influential pedagogues of his era. With this incredible success and virtuosity, he was truly a “rock star” of his day. This flair and technical superiority is clearly evident in this next piece.

Despite all of his accomplishments, though, his life was also marked by pain and loss. Around 1830, de Bériot was madly in love with Maria Malibran, a prima donna of equal fame and ability. Touring together and delighting audiences around Europe, they married in 1836. Six months later, though, Maria passed away. Though the exact cause of her death is somewhat debated, her passing ultimately devastated de Bériot. The man who had been defined by his virtuosic performance abilities left the stage for two whole years and lived in seclusion in Brussels. Though he eventually married again, his eyesight slowly degraded and his left arm was left paralyzed. Still, into his late years, blind and unable to play, de Bériot kept composing. In 1858 he was almost entirely without sight, but he nonetheless completed one of his most successful and well-recognized concertos.

This is its first movement. When I play it, I am reminded of de Bériot’s brilliant flare for virtuosity and entertainment. But in it, I still sense a level of tension and angst that can only be expressed by a composer who has known great loss. This duality creates a depth of expression that has earned Charles de Bériot his place amongst music’s finest contributors.

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