

Amernet String Quartet with Laruen Skuce Gross, Soprano February 15, 2015

String Quartet No. 2 (1927)

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)

Moderato *dolce e tranquillo*

Vivace, scherzando

Lento

The prizes are so large (\$5000, \$3000, \$2000) that all the Stravinskys and Ravels will be submitting something . . . it won't hurt to try, since at the worst I shall still have a second quartet. Concerning the quartet itself, I have no idea whether it is of any value! (I only think that it will sound good.)

This, a commentary by the composer Karol Szymanowski, sums up his situation in 1927, when he composed his Second String Quartet in response to a request from the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia to participate in a competition for chamber music composition. It was a difficult period for composing because, as Director of the Warsaw Conservatory at this time, he was deeply involved in restructuring the institution and its educational programs. While his quartet won no prize (the first went to Bartók's Third Quartet), it was well received by chamber players and was widely performed.

In the first part of the twentieth century, Karol Szymanowski was the only composer from Poland with any international recognition. Born in the Ukraine into a cultivated family where he received his first training, he attended the Conservatory in Warsaw, and early began to travel abroad rather extensively—to Western Europe (France, Italy, Vienna) as well as to North Africa. His earliest compositional influence was Skryabin, and after that Wagner and Strauss, but in his travels he discovered the music of Debussy and Ravel, as well as the early ballets of Stravinsky, and he became interested in the music of Arabia and Persia. His earliest work was highly expressionistic, even rhapsodic and improvisatory. But while harmonically complex, it was, finally, tonal. Upon returning to Poland after the War, Szymanowski became interested in the regional music of that country's southern highlands—always known for its music and dance. He also was influenced by the move to compress and simplify expression, a core ingredient of the neo-classical style then emerging in Western Europe. Indeed, the Second String Quartet reflects the composer's receptivity to these aspects of the current musical developments; it is less romantic and more concise than his First String Quartet, and to some degree, more harmonious. Throughout, the influence of his revered folk music remains present in scale patterns, particularly the raised fourth degree (augmented 4<sup>th</sup>), but never to the point of quotation or mimicry.

The first movement might be considered a very concise sonata form. The first part of the exposition comprises a segment with a long-winding theme floating two octaves apart in the violin and cello over the tremulous dissonant accompaniment in the second violin and viola—the whole marked *ppp dolce*. While the exploration of the primary melodic material unfolds in a freely-ordered and leisurely fashion, the secondary thematic material, derived from the first, is more structured. Following the central contrasting section, the last segment of the movement is an exact repeat of the first twenty-two measures of the opening thematic statement—with no

change. There is no return of the secondary material before the coda which slowly dissolves into a simple major/minor plagel cadence in G Major.

The second movement is a complex rondo with multi-varied returns of the main idea, all played out in a whirling triple meter. With thematic repetition as well as variation, the movement is a kind of mosaic; its constituent parts are fashioned both as an outgrowth of one idea to the next, and by literal repetition. Every manner of string technique—pizzicatos, double stops, tremolos, playing on the bridge, glissandos—and all kinds of dynamic changes are used to the purpose. This lively dance with folk-styled overtones, ends definitively with open octaves on C.

The last movement proceeds as a fugato with two expositions. After the first exposition in which the theme has been explored three times—first in diminution and then in augmentation—Szymanowski brings a second fugato with a theme that seems to derive from a phrase in the first.

To this day Karol Szymanowski is revered in Poland for his compositions and for his success in revolutionizing musical education—against serious opposition. In two short years he was able to establish two schools (one for educating future teachers and orchestra members, the other for training composers, virtuosos and conductors) and introduce modern methods for teaching music—including a requirement for students to study both classical and contemporary music literature. It appears that this educational tradition in Poland is alive and well today.

Il Tramonto / The Sunset  
for Mezzo-Soprano and String Quartet

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)

Trained in his native Bologna as a performer on violin and viola, Respighi spent two formative periods in St. Petersburg, where he was engaged as first violist in the orchestra of the Russian Imperial Theater. Taking advantage of the opportunity of being in Russia, he studied with Rimsky-Korsakov from whom he learned valuable lessons in orchestration, as evidenced in his best-known works, the three symphonic poems celebrating fountains, pines and festivals of Rome. Upon returning home he earned a second diploma in composition, became a faculty member at the Conservatory and eventually developed a reputation as a composer. His diverse work list reflects musical ideas common to composers and educators in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; in the midst of the symphonic poems, are works based on chant modes, transcriptions of 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> c. French music for ballet, and settings of three texts by Percy Bysshe Shelley for mezzo-soprano and instrumental ensemble.

In one of these settings, *Il Tramonto*, Respighi adapts his harmonic language to accommodate the text for Shelley's highly romantic and melancholy description of nature that exploits the contrast between the setting sun in the golden west and the hoary frost of the shadowy east. A lady and a lad—who claims to have never seen the sun—meet, but after one night of love and mingling, she wakes to find him dead. She lives on, her life fading away from tears and grief, and eventually becomes a living shell—grey, with transparent hands. After years of mourning and longing, she laments that she has lived, but is no more than an apparition, has lived but mingled as in death, entombed—she and her lover have become each other's ghosts.

Only brief instrumental interludes interrupt the generally restrained expression of the text; a rich, chromatic harmonic language underlies the vocal line, capturing the changing moods of the narration, shifting between recitative and melodic lyricism with an occasional dramatic

outburst. Finally, a kind of peaceful resignation rules, as the forward motion halts briefly, *ppp*, on her only the word "Pace," then fades in a gentle postlude.

### 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  
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.  
"Is it 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.  
Let none believe that God in mercy gave  
That stroke. The lady died not, nor grew wild,  
But year by year lived on - in truth I think  
Her gentleness and patience and sad smiles,  
And that she did not die, but lived to tend  
Her aged father, were a kind of madness,  
If madness 'tis to be unlike the world.  
For but to see her were to read the tale  
Woven by some subtlest bard, to make hard hearts  
Dissolve away in wisdom-working grief;  
Her eyes were black and lustreless and wan:  
Her eyelashes were worn away with tears,  
Her lips and cheeks were like things dead - so pale;  
Her hands were thin, and through their wandering veins  
And weak articulations might be seen

Day's ruddy light. The tomb of thy dead self  
Which one vexed ghost inhabits, night and day,  
Is all, lost child, that now remains of thee!

"Inheritor of more than earth can give,  
Passionless calm and silence unproved,  
Where the dead find, oh, not sleep! but rest,  
And are the uncomplaining things they seem,  
Or live, a drop in the deep sea of Love;  
Oh, that like thine, mine epitaph were - Peace!"  
This was the only moan she ever made.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Il Tramonto

Già v'ebbe un uomo, nel cui tenue spirto  
(qual luce e vento in delicata nube  
che ardente ciel di mezzo-giorno stempri)  
la morte e il genio contendeano. Oh! quanta tenera gioia,  
che gli fè il respiro venir meno  
(così dell'aura estiva l'ansia talvolta)  
quando la sua dama, che allor solo conobbe l'abbandono  
pieno e il concorde palpitar di due creature che s'amano,  
egli addusse pei sentieri d'un campo,  
ad oriente da una foresta biancheggiante ombrato  
ed a ponente scoperto al cielo!  
Ora è sommerso il sole; ma linee d'oro  
pendon sopra le cineree nubi,  
sul verde piano sui tremanti fiori  
sui grigi globi dell' antico smirnio,  
e i neri boschi avvolgono,  
del vespro mescolandosi alle ombre. Lenta sorge ad oriente  
l'infocata luna tra i folti rami  
delle piante cupe:  
brillan sul capo languide le stelle.  
E il giovine sussura: "Non è strano?  
Io mai non vidi il sorgere del sole,  
o Isabella. Domani a contemplarlo verremo insieme."

Il giovin e la dama giacquer tra il sonno e il dolce amor  
congiunti ne la notte: al mattin  
gelido e morto ella trovò l'amante.  
Oh! nessun creda che, vibrando tal colpo,  
fu il Signore misericorde.  
Non morì la dama, né folle diventò:

anno per anno visse ancora.  
Ma io penso che la queta sua pazienza, e i trepidi sorrisi,  
e il non morir... ma vivere a custodia del vecchio padre  
(se è follia dal mondo dissimigliare)  
fossero follia. Era, null'altro che a vederla,  
come leggere un canto da ingegnoso bardo  
intessuto a piegar gelidi cuori in un dolor pensoso.  
Neri gli occhi ma non fulgidi più;  
consunte quasi le ciglia dalle lagrime;  
le labbra e le gote parevan cose morte tanto eran bianche;  
ed esili le mani e per le erranti vene e le giunture rossa  
del giorno trasparia la luce.  
La nuda tomba, che il tuo fral racchiude,  
cui notte e giorno un'ombra tormentata abita,  
è quanto di te resta, o cara creatura perduta!

"Ho tal retaggio, che la terra non dà:  
calma e silenzio, senza peccato e senza passione.  
Sia che i morti ritrovino (non mai il sonno!) ma il riposo,  
imperturbati quali appaion,  
o vivano, o d'amore nel mar profondo scendano;  
oh! che il mio epitaffio, che il tuo sia: Pace!"  
Questo dalle sue labbra l'unico lamento.

Translation by R. Ascoli

String Quartet No.2, Op. 10

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Mäßig (moderato)

Sehr rasch

*Litanei* (Stefan George). Langsam

*Entrückung* (Stefan George). Sehr langsam

Around the time of the completion of his First String Quartet, op. 7, Schoenberg decided that the repetition of musical ideas was no longer really necessary for his audience to follow a musical train of thought. So he embarked on a project to compose as concisely as possible. He writes about this development in one of his later essays:

When I had finished my first *Kammersymphonie*, op. 9, I told my friends: "Now I have established my style. I know now how I have to compose." But my next work showed a great deviation from this style; it was a first step toward my present style. My destiny had forced me in this direction—I was not destined to continue in the manner of *Transfigured Night* or *Gurrelieder* or even *Pelleas und Melisande*. The Supreme Commander had ordered me on a harder road.

Evoking his artistic conscience or moral authority, Schoenberg refers to the "direction" that was blazed open by the Second String Quartet, op. 10, composed in 1908. It was an important turning point, for at this time he abandoned the one-movement form of earlier works (First String Quartet, *Verklärte Nacht* and the Chamber Symphony) and adopted the classic order of four self-contained movements; he

was determined to let each movement reflect his manifest decision to rethink the compositional process and formal structure and improve their effectiveness. As he notes, this was the first step toward composing without a tonal center (“my present style”), and though he doesn’t mention it, it is also the first instance of integrating a singer into the string quartet ensemble (like adding one to a symphony, as in Mahler’s Second). The two elements were interrelated, for Schoenberg’s sensitive response to *Entrückung*, a text by the German poet, Stefan George, led him, finally, to abandon tonality for most—but not quite all—of the fourth movement.

In some sense, the first three movements of Op. 10, are tonal, but here the concept of tonality has moved far beyond the usual hierarchical relationships, even beyond the chromatic dissonance of the previous works. The tonal sense has expanded, the opening chord of a phrase serves mostly as a place to begin, an important point of reference, but not as a guide to the course of the music. Tonal relationships are stretched out over the chromatic spectrum so that the feeling of a “home” needs to be redefined; it is no longer the place to return to—at least not easily. For example, after the two opening measures of the first phrase in F# Minor, the two important pitches in the rest of the phrase—harmonically-speaking—are F# and B# (C#), pitches which effectively “neutralize” F# as a tonal reference; the consequent phrase then opens . . . in A Minor. Several more themes in the exposition begin on F# and “rove” (Schoenberg’s term), until their musical idea comes to a halting point. The development is quite another matter, but the recapitulation begins on F# Major, and arrives back at the beginning tones, F# Minor/Major, only at the end. Here, themes are as important as tonality in the determination of form. Furthermore, several of the themes and motives share common elements (within, as well as between, movements) to the degree that many are variants of each other (remember Brahms quartet, op. 67?). The move to dispense with a key signature in the fourth movement was a response to the first line of George’s text, but this move was, in any case, inevitable. “I feel air from another planet” merely provided the opportunity Schoenberg needed to explore a new tonal universe. Subsequently all that mattered was the union of sound and text.

By thematic design the first movement is a sonata form with three main theme groups and here the tonal structure is highly complex. The form is clearly modeled on Brahms’s sonata form as Schoenberg’s theme groups comprise smaller units to form the whole (e.g., the whole theme might involve a small ternary— a-b-a--opening idea, contrasting idea and opening idea again). Op. 10 opens with a passionate, Schumann-like melody, the first theme is a small ternary form: a principal idea beginning in F# minor, followed by a contrasting one, also in F# Minor, and then a return to the first one, now shifted to D Minor. The second theme group has only two thematic units. The first, a lugubrious-styled waltz tune, that begins on F# Minor, then moves to E# Minor; the key of the second unit, which is less a theme than a lively contrapuntal segment that builds to a climax then calms down before the close.

To open the development Schoenberg returns to the first theme in a new harmonization and a new sound—“*am steg*,” to be played “on the bridge”—and then exercises his genius for developing musical material: by division, combination, inversion and multiplication. The recapitulation begins with the first theme in the key of F# Major (! the key of the flattened tonic in Schoenberg’s harmonic thinking); F# Major/Minor is not restored until almost the end, when it carries on in the coda.

The second movement is a complex scherzo mostly in D Minor, an outburst with three relatively short themes (13, 4 and 3 measures, respectively) of differing character. Separated by fermatas, they come one at a time. The first, a one-note scherzo theme (think LvB’s op 59, no. 1) launches a short contrapuntal essay; the second is a simple four-measure tune played in unison by the first violin and viola, and the third is a miniature essay on silver-quick small motives. The trio introduces a new thematic unit, variations on material from the scherzo, when suddenly—seemingly out of nowhere—comes a remnant of the street tune, “Ach, du lieber Augustin.” Then with just as little fanfare, the Trio resumes and initiates a return to the Scherzo. The movement then finishes with a return to both the trio, a hint of “Augustin”—in the cello (Schoenberg’s own instrument)—and a coda.

Having introduced the element of a song in the previous movement with the reference to “Augustin,” Schoenberg goes a step further and joins a voice to the string quartet in the next movement, a structure that uses, in principle, variation technique. Schoenberg wrote that he was worried that the drama (“Ich bin ein funke nur vom heiligen feuer/ Ich bin ein dröhnen nur die heiligen stimme” of the text might

overwhelm him, and to prevent that he had to resort to the “serious elaboration required by variation.” The main motive is played by the viola in the introduction, to which he adds motifs from the two preceding movements.

*Litanei*, George’s poem is just that, a litany of descriptive details of a difficult personal journey. (See text and translation.) The first two stanzas provide the introduction, the next three detail finite aspects of the struggle, and the last three are a kind of coda that culminates in the poet’s plea for peace. The instrumental introduction briefly explores the movement’s principal theme along with two motifs that come from the first and second movements. A postlude restores equilibrium following the heated drama of the text, as if consenting to the quest for peace.

Beginning with the swirling, weightless figures that slowly expand the musical space into a harmonic universe without any gravitational pull, the last movement brings clarity and release. Following an instrumental exploration of several independent ideas that follow each other without transition, the voice begins already in the new harmonic language freed of tonal expectations. (See text and translation.) The text perfectly captures the movement of George’s poem through three phases of development: first, “Ich fühle luft von anderem planeten” the departure from the known (faces, trees, paths) and the beloved one, now divine; next, “Ich löse mich in tönen,” the dissolution of self and journey beyond the earth, its beings and matters; and, at last, “Ich bin ein funke nur vom heiligen feuer/ Ich bin ein dröhnen nur die heiligen stimme,” he attains total freedom from individuality. Having exhausted the text, the instrumental coda reviews several themes, and then undertakes the move back into the tonal sphere, as ever so slowly, the harmonic threads are gathered in a peaceful cadence on F#Minor, that lastly turns into F#Major.

One last comment: Schoenberg’s first incursion into atonality opened a door into a world, which he, as a conservative revolutionary, had to close before he could go on, thus the fourth movement returns to the opening tonality. In his next work, Three Piano Pieces Opus 11, he continued his explorations of that new world as each of the three pieces begins and ends atonally, and each one progressively discards more vestiges of tonal thinking.

*Litanei* Stefan George (text for the third movement)

<b>Introduction: instrumental theme</b>		Slow
	<b>Variation I- Stanza 1 - Part I</b>	
Tief ist die trauer die mich umdüstert, Ein tret ich wieder, Herr! in dein haus.	Sadness is deep that covers me, Once more I enter Lord! your house.	
	<b>Variation II - Stanza 2</b>	A little faster
Lang war die reise, matt sind die glieder Leer sind die schreine,	The journey was long, my limbs are weak The coffins are empty	
	<b>Variation III</b>	
voll nur die qual.	only full of pain.	A bit slowed down
	<b>Stanza 3 - Part 2</b>	
Durstende zunge darbt nach dem weine Hart war gestritten, starr ist mein arm.	Thirsty, (my) tongue craves wine The fighting was hard my arm is weak	A little faster  Slowing down
	<b>Variation IV - Stanza 4</b>	
Gönne die ruhe schwankenden schritten, Hungrigem gaumen bröckle dein brot!	Grant rest to faltering feet Nourish the hungry Break bread!	Slow

	<b>Variation V - Stanza 5</b>	
Schwach ist mein atem rufend dem traume Hohl sind die hände, fiebernd der mund.	My breath is faint, recalling the vision, My hands are empty, my mouth is feverish	Somewhat faster  Very slowed down A little faster
	<b>Coda - Stanza 6</b>	
Leih deine kühle, lösche die brände, Tilge das hoffen, sende das licht!	Lend me your coolness, quench the burning, Perish the hope, send out light!	
	<b>Stanza 7</b>	
Gluten im herzen lodern mich offen, innerst im grunde Wacht noch ein schrei	Fires in (my) heart burn open in me, down in the depths a cry still wakens	Speed up
	<b>Stanza 8 - Part 3</b>	
Töte das sehnen, schliesse die wunde! Nimm mir die liebe, gib mir dein glück!	Kill longing, close the wound! Take love away from me, give me your peace!	Faster  Very slow Slow
<b>Postlude - instrumental</b>		

*Entrückung* Rapture Stefan George (text for the fourth movement)

Ich fühle luft von anderem planeten. Mir blassen durch das dunkel die gesichter Die freundlich eben noch sich zu mir drehen.	I feel the air of another planet. Familiar friendly faces turned toward me Through the dark and fade away.
Und bäum und wege die ich liebte fahlen Dass ich sie kaum mehr kenne und du lichter Geliebter schatten–rufer meine qualen--	And trees and paths that I once loved I hardly recognize, and you the shadow of My radiant love–cause of my anguish–
Bist nun erloschen ganz in tiefern gluten Um nach dem taumel streitenden getobes Mit einem frommen schauer anzumuten.	You are consumed by glowing fire And after all the strife and tumult, You are a holy apparition.
Ich löse mich in tönen, kreisend, webend, Ungründigen danks und unbenamten lobes Dem grossen atem wunschlos mich ergebend.	I am dissolving in sound, swirling, weaving Full of gratitude and praising the unknown Over, unconditionally, to the great spirit.
Mich überfährt ein ungestümes wehen, Im rausch der weihe wo inbrünstige schreie In staub geworfner beterinnen flehen:	I am overcome by a wild blast, I hear women who cry fervently Thrown in the dust, seized in pious rapture:

Dann seh ich wie sich duftige nebel lüpfen  
In einer sonnerfüllten klaren freie  
Die nur umfängt auf fernsten bergesschlüpfen.

Then I see the dense vapors rising  
In a sunfilled open clearing  
That now reaches beyond the mountain crags.

Der boden schüttert weiss und weich wie molke.  
Ich steige über schluchten ungeheuer.  
Ich fühle wie ich über letzter wolke

The earth thin, soft and white like whey.  
I rise over fearful chasms.  
I feel as though I am beyond the farthest cloud.

In einem meer kristallnen glanzes schwimme--  
Ich bin ein funke nur vom heiligen feuer  
Ich bin ein dröhnen nur der heiligen stimme.

Afloat in a crystalline shining sea--  
I am only a spark of the holy fire  
I am only a roar of the holy voice.

The above translations were based on translations by Carl Engel.

Jean Christensen

The pre-concert presentation will be led by Dr. Jean Christensen, whose specialty is music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It will begin at 2 PM in room 130 and all are welcome to attend.