

# camera lucida

presented by the uc san diego department of music  
in partnership with the san diego symphony  
sponsored by the sam b ersan chamber music fund

monday, february sixth  
two thousand and twelve

Dear Musical Friends!

After a hiatus of two months, and a change of year, we welcome you back to an evening of chamber music. Our last concert was nearly symphonic in scope: Wagner and Johann Strauss, and the only chamber work of Gustav Mahler. But tonight, we reduce our forces to the minimum: one duo, and a pair of trios.

Martinu, of course, manages to make almost a quartet out of his Duo for Violin and Cello, so furiously dense are the two parts. The originality of Martinu's music is in his melding of the atmosphere of folk and dance music with a very sophisticated and ambitious modernist program. In the Rondo, the simple and vigorous round-dance figures seem unproblematic enough, until the harmonies unhitch themselves from the wagon, spiraling into dissonances and chromatic climes that betray a mischievousness and perverse pleasure. And the cadenza sections truly verge on lunacy, both in the ruthless exploitation of the instruments' capabilities, and in their general lack of decorousness. Haunting double stops hint at fretted instruments like zithers or — could it be? — Hawaiian guitars.

But the opening Preludium is a movement of quiet grandeur, heartfelt and moving. Some of the concluding passages in fact prefigure the mystical qualities of the late Shostakovich, stark and expressionistic.

Beethoven and Schumann are almost unthinkable without each other. On the one hand, Beethoven was the single greatest inspiration for Schumann; and on the other, early Romantic elaborations of Beethovenian ideas, by Schumann and Brahms in particular, have completed for us the picture of Beethoven's later output. So it is enlightening to hear these two masters paired off in two masterful Piano Trios.

The famous "Ghost" movement from opus 70 no. 1 is in fact in d minor, that quintessential key for a certain species of Schumannian melancholy, on perfect display in Schumann's Trio. The "Empfindsamkeit" of the Romantics, the "feelingfulness" or "sensitivity" captured in Schumann's marking "mit inniger Empfindung", is laid out as a model in Beethoven's slow movement, "Largo assai ed espressivo" - possibly the slowest of all of Beethoven's slow movements before the final period. A vast and shadowy space, tentatively probed by a halting recitativo, emerges as the uncertain enclosure of this world of complex feelings.

To be experienced, all the same, in this radiant space, our welcoming and acoustically rich musical home. We are delighted to join you here tonight, and for the remaining four concerts between now and June, and we thank our stalwart supporter, Sam Ersan, for our good fortune!

Charles Curtis  
Artistic Director

**Trio in D Major, Op. 70 No. 1: 'Ghost' (1809)**

Ludwig Van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

- I. Allegro vivace e con brio
- II. Largo assai et espressivo
- III. Presto

**Duo for Violin and Cello, H. 157 (1927)**

Bohuslav Martinu  
(1890-1959)

- I. Preludium: Andante moderato
- II. Rondo: Allegro con brio

- intermission -

**Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 63 (1847)**

Robert Schumann  
(1810-1856)

- I. Mit Energie und Leidenschaft
- II. Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch
- III. Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung
- IV. Mit Feuer

Jeff Thayer, violin  
Charles Curtis, cello  
Reiko Uchida, piano

## Mites and Murmurs by Carolyn Chen

Tonight's program features two canonic piano trios in parallel keys of D by Beethoven and Schumann, sandwiching a curious, chromatic string duo by Martinu.

### Beethoven, Trio in D, Op. 70 No. 1: 'Ghost'

The Trio in D is the first in a set of two piano trios Beethoven (1770-1827) wrote in the summer of 1808, dedicated to Countess Marie von Erdödy, in whose Viennese apartment Beethoven resided at the time. The Trio is representative of Beethoven's "middle" or "heroic" period (roughly 1803-12), characterized by the grand scale, emotional directness, and rhetorical urgency of works like the *Eroica* Symphony (1803), *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* Piano Sonatas (1804-05), and *Emperor* Piano Concerto (1809). In spite of his increasing deafness, these were productive years. Between 1806 and 1808, Beethoven wrote Symphonies 4, 5 and 6, and the Violin Concerto (Op. 61), the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, the three Rasumovsky Quartets, and the opera *Fidelio*. In a note to himself in his sketches from 1806, he wrote: 'Just as you plunge yourself here into the whirlpool of society, so in spite of all social obstacles it is possible for you to write operas. Your deafness shall be a secret no more, even where art is involved!'

The first movement, *Allegro vivace e con brio*, begins in a scampering staccato unison gesture, alternately running down over itself and bounding further out. The energetic, fourth-based motive is a foreshortened version of the upbeat theme of an earlier piano sonata, Op.10 No.3 (also in the key of D), here compressed into a fortissimo hurtle that clambers up into what seems at first a triumphant cadence – but then takes two extra steps to land on an F-natural – the unexpectedly lowered mediant, residing just outside of the key realm so confidently established. At first obscured by the resonance of the previous bustle, the cello catches and cradles this interloper, sustaining for a full two bars, over the entrance of a quiet bass octave in the piano, and then inching up a half step to formulate a new singing line, providing a bridge from fanfare to lyricism. Mild, smoothing scalar action in the strings and tinkling piano trills and cascading rolls alternate with the energy infused by vigorous, fourth-based activity, imitative jumping gestures, and the metrical dissonance of triple meter. The movement swings between gallant and idyllic, its wandering scales drifting from determined assertion to sometimes blithe, almost automated relaxation. Still, there is something self-reflexive about the cello's catching of that first wrong note, frozen for a moment, as if mulling over potential mutiny, before rejoining the flow of cheerfully major events.

Shimmering and shadowy, the second movement, *Largo assai ed espressivo*, is what begot the name "Ghost." Beethoven's pupil Czerny likened the second movement to "an appearance

from the underworld. One could think not inappropriately of the first appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet*." In fact, the material originates in pages interleaved with Beethoven's sketches for an abandoned opera on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, beginning with the witch's scene. The chromaticism, sharp dynamic contrasts, and atmospheric tremolos suggest an otherworldly prospect. This slow movement, longer than either of the outer movements, has inspired much subsequent remark and artistic activity – including August Strindberg's 1907 chamber play, *The Ghost Sonata*, which features a family of ghosts, vampires and mummies, meeting without dialogue or gesture. Strindberg described the play as entering "a world of intimations where one expresses oneself in halftones and with a soft pedal, since one is ashamed to be a human being."

Beginning in an expectant hush, with all instruments marked *sotto voce*, familiar gestures are stretched to extremes. The buoyant, travelling staccato eighth notes are condensed into a wrenching fortissimo, dramatically rhetorical, ascending diminished-seventh gesture. The first movement's tensionless ease – of scalar motions and airily fluttering trills effortlessly falling into arpeggios – is here transmuted into a slow-motion piano trill that trailing down through the octaves of the instrument, from silvery high register to indistinct rumbling below, a feather-light accompaniment blooming into threatening tremolo. The tonal differences between these extreme registers would have been even more prominent on a pianoforte of Beethoven's time. Throughout the movement, there is a nearly constant trill or tremolo in the extreme low register, where attacks barely register, but accrue instead as indistinct noise, or unconscious foreboding. The pizzicato ending measures refuse to resolve, sustaining the tension until the beginning of the finale.

The Presto finale is bright, winged, returnedly blithe. Both hands of the piano are restored to a clean and airy, respectable and decent register. Sparkling right-hand arpeggiation stretches out into scales allowed freer rein than ever before, four octaves of clear roaming space. Prior darkness is thoroughly dispelled. The staccato rhetorical gesture, previously an ominous diminished seventh, now runs open-armed as descending dominant sevenths and major triads. There is an extended flirting scene between string dyads and two fingers of the piano. Toward the end, a brief moment of solo piano, in a triumphant fortissimo scale dashing up to the highest register, recalls the clearing-out in the second movement. This time, however, the piano, *delicatissime*, flits chromatically down and up and down, lengthening into triplets before launching into a resolutely affirmative return, dipping a toe in an unexpectedly whimsical pizzicato episode at the last, all shimmer and light to the end.

*A man is waiting, reading a newspaper, looking out of the window, etc., seen first at distance, then again in close-up, and the close-up forces a very intense kind of intimacy. His*

face, gestures, little sounds. Tired of waiting he ends up getting into bed. The close-up enters into the bed. No words or very few. Perhaps just a few murmurs.

- Samuel Beckett, sketch for the television play, *Ghost Trio*, 1968

### Martinu, Duo for Violin and Cello, H. 157

Bohuslav Martinu (1890-1959) was born in the Bohemian town of Policka, the son of a cobbler and church tower watchman/bell-ringer. A prolific composer, Martinu wrote almost 400 pieces, including 16 operas, 15 ballet scores, six symphonies, a number of concertos (for piano, violin, viola, cello, oboe, and harpsichord, amongst others), and many chamber and vocal works. As a young violin prodigy, he entered Prague Conservatory on a scholarship raised by his town, but was expelled for "incurable negligence" in 1910. Back in Policka, he took in violin students, studied Moravian Church music, joined the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra as a second violinist, and avoided military service through ill health. He began to concentrate on composition, sending pieces to leading Czech composer Josef Suk. In 1918, he celebrated the independence of the Czech Republic with a cantata, *Ceska rapsodie* (1918) for baritone, mixed chorus, orchestra, and organ, which premiered to public acclaim at the end of World War I. In 1922, Martinu started official composition study with Suk. Hearing English madrigals for the first time in a performance by The English Singers prompted a study of Renaissance polyphony. Martinu continued to engage with earlier music throughout his life, rediscovering concerto grosso form in Bach, Corelli, and Vivaldi in the 1930s, and studying Beethoven, Notre Dame polyphony, and Monteverdi when writing his symphonies in the 1940s. Other influences included Debussy, Stravinsky, jazz, Czech predecessors Dvořák and Janáček, and Czech and Moravian folk melodies and nursery rhymes.

In 1923, Martinu moved to Paris to study composition with Albert Roussel, whom he admired from playing Roussel's First Symphony and the ballet *The Spider's Banquet* in the Czech Philharmonic. In Paris, he heard jazz, and the music of Les Six and Stravinsky. The Duo for Violin and Cello (1927) dates from this time, though his other contemporaneous works were mostly for the stage – the ballets included *The Revolt* (1925), *The Butterfly That Stamped* (1926), *The Amazing Flight* (1927), and *The Kitchen Revue* (1927). The mixed medium freed Martinu to experiment with artistic trends, such as neo-classicism, surrealism, expressionism, constructivism, and jazz. His set-ups were adventurous. The Kitchen Revue explores love and despair amongst kitchen utensils, and features a Tango fused to a Charleston. *The Amazing Flight* was a "mechanical ballet" conceived without human participants, but instead puppets and film. Based on a comedy by Plautus, Martinu's

first opera, *The Soldier and the Dancer* (1927) features dances for lift-attendants and for firemen, a debate on plagiarism between Plautus and Moliere, a prompter storming the stage to accuse the actors of straying from the script, and a critic in the auditorium berating the production as a "blasphemy breaking all the laws of musical drama."

Two more operas, collaborations with French Dadaist poet George Ribemont-Dessaignes, were written but not performed immediately: necrophiliac suggestions in *Tears of the Knife* (1928) derailed its production until 1969; *Three Wishes* (1929), a film-opera before Berg's *Lulu*, featuring full orchestra, plus banjos, saxophones, accordion, and flexatone, premiered only in 1971. Of his orchestral output in this period, the rondo *Half-Time* (1924), inspired by the stadium crowd of an American football game, was accused by critics of plagiarizing Stravinsky's *Petrushka*. *La Bagarre* (1926), a tribute Charles Lindberg's first non-stop trans-Atlantic flight, was successfully premiered by Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The five-minute orchestral movement *Le Jazz* (1928) builds a big-band sound with saxophones, three jazz singers, and a driving banjo beat.

With the German invasion of France, Martinu, blacklisted for his connections to the Czech resistance, emigrated to Switzerland and then America in 1941. In New York, he composed his six symphonies and also wrote operas for radio and television. He taught at Mannes School of Music, his students including Alan Hovhaness, Jan Novák, and Bart Bacharach.

The Duo for Violin and Cello features syncopated rhythms, closely spaced harmonies, and development through small figures circling a pitch center. The first movement, *Praeludium*, begins with a lamenting descent of a minor third, turned over and over like a pocket worry stone. The counterpoint roves rootlessly, at times alighting momentarily on an alternating reharmonization of the opening third before sliding off into more chromatic roaming. For the most part, the instruments' roles are equal in prominence and function, with the violin finally fluttering into ornamental trills toward the movement's slowing.

The second movement, *Rondo: Allegro con brio*, features inexhaustibly vigorous running triplets, its opening figure tracing out the same descending fourth as the first movement of Beethoven's trio. There are sunnier, more grounded moments, swinging around a clearer center in driving rhythms. Chromatic transpositions slide into the bluesy. The violin ventures into a higher register, singing and skipping in jollity and light. Midway, a searching cello solo launches into a series of moaning dyads, a rare pensive moment. Gradually, they wind up again, returning to fluttering tremolos and rhetorical conviction, working themselves to the limits of their range before beginning again with relentlessly

onward-pressing syncopated gestures to running triplets brightening from the chromatic to tonal.

### Schumann, Trio No. 1 in D minor, Op. 63

In 1847, Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was living in Dresden with his family. In a kind of parallel with Beethoven thirty years earlier, despite complaints of melancholy, exhaustion, weakness, nervous agitation, this was most musically productive time of his life. He conducted, organized concerts, and wrote the grand opera *Genoveva*, paean to virtuous womanhood, and two piano trios (Opp. 63 and 80).

The Trio No. 1 in D minor was sketched quickly between June 9 and 16, and elaborated later that fall. It belonged, Schumann wrote, to "a time of gloomy moods." Fanny Mendelssohn, a close friend of Clara's, died unexpectedly in May of 1847, collapsing while playing piano of a brain hemorrhage at age 42. The Schumann's infant son Emil in died in June, and Felix Mendelssohn in November. Schumann, shaken and concerned about his own fate, described seeing Mendelssohn's body:

*The noble corpse - his forehead - the mouth - surrounded by a smile - he resembles a glorious warrior, like a victor - about 20 years older than when he was alive - two heavily engorged blood-vessels stand out on his brow.*

The Trio may have been partially inspired by Felix Mendelssohn's piano trio in the same key, as well as Clara's Op. 17 Trio in g minor, which was written a year just the year before, and which was often paired with it in 19th-century performances. The second trio of the set, in F, was first performed privately on Clara's birthday, September 13 of that year. John Daverio notes "an unmistakable element of one-upmanship" in Robert's pieces, especially in the prominent contrapuntal textures that parallel the fugato development of Clara's finale, which was particularly praised by Felix Mendelssohn.

The Trio is marked by rich harmonies and textures, expansiveness of form, and novel theme combinations. The first movement, *Mit Energie und Leidenschaft* ("With energy and passion"), begins with a cadential figure in the violin (an ascending fourth followed by a half-step fall) and a turning figure in the piano's bass. In the second measure, the voices are exchanged, with the violin taking on the turn, and the piano asserting the fourth and fall. A repeating dotted motive transitions into triplets jumping between piano and strings. Amidst surging waves of restlessly turning energy, another world emerges, an ethereal sul ponticello pianississimo string chorale set against shimmering high register triplet chords in the piano – a peaceful respite temporarily modulating to A-flat major before the return to the storm.



In the second movement, a scherzo marked *Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch* ("Animated but not too quickly"), strings climb in rhythmic unison through the nervous dotted rhythm against a splitting-apart piano counterpoint, chasing one another over rugged terrain, but subsiding for a moment into an undulating B section, in which everyone is distributed quarter notes with which to rise and fall more smoothly (though the piano's right hand retains a syncopated distance).

*Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung* ("Slowly, with intense sensation"), the third movement's wistful lyricism begins in the violin, singing a theme that resembles a forlorn version of the first movement's syncopated leap and chromatic fall. The vulnerable, inward-curling melody seems searching for a humble place to crawl, trapped, in persistent harmonic ambiguity, in a slow-motion writhe. Violin and cello, so strictly synchronized moments ago, come unglued, entering in tender solos, then tenuously winding around one another, constantly drifting chromatically away from sense of key, as well as sense of meter – forte-piano accents abound on second and fourth beats. A more moving midsection (*Bewegter*) finds rhythmic consistency and greater momentum in triplet piano chords that recall the lost spidersilk world of the first movement. The dirge returns, still hanging unresolved at the movement's close.

The Finale, *Mit Feuer* ("With fire") jubilantly recasts the ascending fourth motive in the major, returning to vibrant canonic interplay between strings and piano and quick switches of mood and texture. Double-stopped droning vaguely recalls pastoral bagpipes. The scherzo's piano figuration returns in transition, doubling the line at a syncopated octave, creating an amplifying echo of affect – doubly happy, doubly threatening. The brooding energy of the first movement is loosened into flurries and cascades of sound, running faster and faster into a gloriously brilliant cadence.

Robert Schumann on a conversation with Felix Mendelssohn:

*When I told him about the great telescope and about a remark I read somewhere that to the inhabitants of distant planets we would appear, when viewed through the telescope, somewhat like mites on a piece of cheese [he said] 'Yes, but The Well-tempered Clavier would still inspire them with respect.'*

## About the Performers

Hwang at the R.D. Colburn School and made her orchestral debut with the Los Angeles Repertoire Orchestra at the age of nine. As a youngster, she performed on Johnny Carson's Tonight Show. She holds an Artist Diploma from the Juilliard School, a Bachelor's degree from Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Claude Frank and Leon Fleisher, and a Master's degree from the Mannes College of Music, where her principal teacher was Edward Aldwell.