



Program IV: Grand Finale

Saturday, August 19, 2023

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983): *Image* for Piano Four-Hands (1918)

As a young woman, Germaine Tailleferre changed her last name from "Taillefesse" to spite her father, who had refused to support her musical studies. She studied piano with her mother at home, composing short works of her own, after which she began studying at the Paris Conservatory. Hanging out in artist circles in Montmartre, Tailleferre was the only female in the group of composers known as Les Six (others included Francis Poulenc and Darius Milhaud), which experimented with aesthetics and musical ideas that reacted against the heavy German Romanticism of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss, as well as against the chromaticism and lush orchestration of Claude Debussy. After leaving the Conservatory, Tailleferre studied with Maurice Ravel, who inspired her early efforts to imbue her music with neo-Baroque and neoclassical qualities. Although Tailleferre was a prolific composer of symphonic, chamber, film, and radio music who participated actively in French and international musical life for more than six decades, her own writings and friends' reminiscences reveal Tailleferre to have been extraordinarily modest, and reliable information about her life is relatively scant.

Image is a work for piano four-hands, written in 1918, arranged from the original version for eight instruments (flute, clarinet, celesta, piano, string quartet) by the composer in the same year. Through exquisite melodies and harmonies, and a delicate balance of grace and vigor, Tailleferre paints an evocative sonic picture that showcases her unique artistic voice.

Arno Babadjanian (1921-1983): Piano Trio in F-sharp Minor (1952)

If Arno Babadjanian is an unfamiliar name in the West, he is a national hero in his native Armenia and quite well known in Russia. Babadjanian was born in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. By age five, Babadjanian's extraordinary musical talent was apparent, and the composer Aram Khachaturian suggested that the boy be given proper musical training. Two years later, Babadjanian entered the Yerevan Conservatory, and later continued his studies in Moscow. He eventually returned to Yerevan, where from 1950-1956 he taught at the conservatory. It was during this period that he wrote the Piano Trio in F-sharp minor, which received immediate acclaim and is considered one of his most important works. In three substantial movements, it is passionate and full of memorable melodies with wonderful writing for all three instruments. The first movement, an Allegro, begins in dramatic fashion with the strings playing the main theme in unison. Like a leitmotif, this theme reappears in each of the

following movements. The second movement, Andante, begins very softly with the violin introducing the lovely main theme high on its E-string. Eventually the cello joins in and the theme is intertwined between them in a very original fashion. The Finale, Allegro vivace, is rhythmically quite interesting. Mostly in 5/8 time, it features two themes which stand in stark contrast to each other. The first is rather rough and aggressive while the second is softer and more song-like. The trio ends with an appearance of the opening theme and leads to a short stormy coda.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828): Octet in F Major, D. 803 (1824)

The incredible outpourings of music that we associate with Franz Schubert (450 works published during his brief lifetime) reached a high point in the winter of 1824. In only two months he completed three of his chamber music masterworks, including the Octet in F Major, the largest scale chamber work he ever composed. This timeline testifies to Schubert's genius and commitment: that he completed such a monumental masterpiece in such a short time span (and in the midst of crisis as his syphilitic symptoms steadily worsened) is astonishing.

The Octet—scored for clarinet, horn, bassoon, two violins, viola, cello and double bass—was commissioned by Count von Troyer, chief steward to Archduke Rudolph, one of Beethoven's patrons. An expert clarinetist, Troyer wanted a companion piece for Beethoven's Septet, completed 24 years earlier but still a Vienna favorite. Not surprisingly, the two works have several similarities: Both use the same instruments (though Schubert added a second violin); both are long works with six movements instead of the usual four; both include a slow movement with variations; and both are throw-backs to the 18th century divertimento with its characteristic mixture of martial and pastoral styles.

Beyond these structural similarities, the Octet is characteristically Schubertian, with its emphasis on romantic lyricism and its tendency to swerve into new and often remote keys at the drop of a hat. Further, it reflects, like much of Schubert's music, wide mood swings between joyful exuberance and morbid melancholy. While the Octet was intended as "entertainment" music and a lightness of spirit predominates, Schubert's dark side appears at unexpected moments, particularly in the tragic introduction to the final movement. This dramatic moment passes soon enough, followed by a jubilant rush to the finish.