

February Meeting

Tuesday, February 7, 2017

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

6:30 PM registration and social 7:00 PM meeting and program



Eric Halen, Co-Concertmaster Houston Symphony

Eric Halen joined the Houston Symphony as Assistant Concertmaster in 1987. In 1997, he assumed the position of Associate Concertmaster and served as Acting Concertmaster for the 2005-06, 2008-09, and 2009-10 seasons. Eric grew up in a family of violinists. His parents were both professionals, and his brother David is Concertmaster of the Saint Louis Symphony.

After earning his bachelor's degree at Central Missouri State University where he studied violin with his father, Dr. Walter Halen, he received his master's degree at the age of 20 from the University of Illinois, while studying with Sergiu Luca. At age 23, he became artist-teacher of violin at Texas Christian University.

Mr. Halen teaches orchestral repertoire at Rice University. He plays a violin made in 1616 by Antonio and Hieronymus Amati.



Christopher French, Associate Principal Cellist

Christopher French is the associate principal cellist of the Houston Symphony. Before joining the orchestra in 1986 he held titled positions in both the Shreveport and Honolulu symphonies. Chris is the seventh of a full octave of musical siblings. He enjoys performing with the Bad Boys of Cello, the alter ego of the Houston Symphony cello section. The Bad Boys have played in venues as disparate as homeless shelters and elementary schools in an effort to eliminate the classist misconceptions about classical music.

Chris is a graduate of North Park University in Chicago where he was winner of the Performance Award. He participates in the Mainly Mozart Festival in San Diego, Music in the Mountains in Durango, CO, and the Grand Teton Music Festival.

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Program

Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967)

Duo for Violin and Cello, op. 7

Allegro serio, non troppo

Adagio

Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo lento

Duo for violin and cello, Op. 7, was composed at the start of World War I (1914), but not played in public until a full decade later when it was heard in Salzburg as part of the 1924 ISCM Festival. In the century since its birth it has become a

cornerstone in the scant repertoire for violin and cello duo -- a miniature ensemble that has been heartily neglected by composers. The Kodály Duo is in fact bested in popularity only by the Ravel Sonata for violin and cello of 1920-1922.

The Duo's three movements follow the traditional fast-slow-fast plan. As one would expect, the first movement (Allegro serio, non troppo) is full of rhapsodic folk-music gestures that gush forth from the one instrument and then the other (Kodály was, after all, Bartók's comrade-in-arms in fusing together central European folk music and traditional art music). The solo cello ushers in the central Adagio movement, and then the violin joins in with great, fluctuating passion. The finale begins with a wandering, rhetorical Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo lento; one can easily hear the instruments' gestures as words rather than abstract musical cells. After this introductory section, a sparkling Presto -- the body of the movement -- takes off.

(description by Blair Johnston found on AllMusic web site)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Sonate pour Violon et Violoncelle (1922)

Allegro

Trés vif

Lent

Vif, avec entrain

Maurice Ravel openly admired Debussy for his musical achievements, but refused to accept accusations of imitating his work. The desire for tonal and harmonic gradation is one of many similarities, which have been drawn between the work of the two men. Upon Debussy's death in 1918, Ravel became widely recognized as France's leading composer and was even offered the Légion d'Honneur in 1920, but being a man who considered popularity an offense, he publicly refused the decoration. Between 1920-1924 he wrote works which gave homage to his predecessors including his Sonata for Violin and Cello, which he dedicated to Debussy's memory.

The work was a continuation of Ravel's interest in counterpoint, and he considered it a turning point, stating that in the piece "the music is stripped down to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody." The music was not only stripped of harmony, but Ravel stripped the traditional sonata down to merely two instruments. In doing so, difficulties arose as Ravel sought to solve the problem of balancing parts by eliminating them. This bold move was based upon Debussy's notion of "depouillement" (economy of means) and was of interest to Satie, Stravinsky, and the postwar generations of composers.

Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello was written following a period of physical and emotional recovery from the turbulence of the war, his own bout of dysentery, and the death of his mother. Similar to his Piano Trio and String Quartet Ravel employed a cyclical structure in his sonata. With a focus on coherent and reasoned development of form, the work contains four movements, which are marked in the following order: allegro, très vif (a scherzo), lent, and vif, avec entrain. The work is built upon two main themes, both of which are stated in the first 50 bars of the opening allegro movement. The first is an alternation of the minor and major triads and it is heard in its entirety in the second movement, a bit in the third, and in the middle of the fourth. The second theme is the succession of consecutive sevenths and is the more common of the two, appearing in the beginning of the second and third movements and in a climactic moment in the middle of the finale. The two methods Ravel used to continuously reintroduce the two themes throughout the work were an alternation of a single motif between the two instruments and a separation of parts to maintain clear counterpoint. In the third movement, the concepts of the first two themes combine when minor and major sevenths alternate as did the minor and major thirds of the first movement. This compositional decision reinforces the success of Ravel's achievement to accurately develop the work. The Sonata for Violin and Cello was a piece of thoughtful detail which superbly demonstrated the potential of Debussy's notion while helping Ravel to continue to stand out among his contemporaries.

(description by Meredith Gailey found on AllMusic web site)
