

# Rosalie Piano Trio

# Meeting of the Minds

## Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Divertimento in Bb major for piano trio, K. 254

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote his Divertimento in Bb major for piano, violin, and cello in August 1776 while still in Salzburg under the unsatisfactory employ of Archbishop Heironymus Colloredo. By this time, the exciting years Mozart had spent touring Europe as a child prodigy had ended, and, within a year, he would be seeking new opportunities in Paris and Mannheim, before ultimately landing in Vienna in 1781.

The piano trio was still a developing genre when Mozart approached it. This Divertimento is, in fact, seen as the first mature piano trio written by Mozart, and therefore is sometimes labeled as his Piano Trio No. 1. The many sonatas for piano and violin that Mozart wrote while still a child can be considered the Divertimento's closest precursors; some even allow the optional participation of cello. In these childhood sonatas, the piano is the lead instrument while the violin is more of an accompanist. The same might be said of the Divertimento where the piano now has two accompanists (i.e. violin *and* cello), except that the violin does begin to gain some autonomy. Another six piano trios followed during Mozart's Vienna years, although one of these was assembled

posthumously from incomplete fragments. It was not, however, until the final three piano trios were written in 1788 that all three instruments became equal partners as is expected of modern works in the piano trio genre.

The term "divertimento" is one that was used often by Mozart and his Classical era contemporaries. The divertimento was a lighter piece, often played as evening entertainment and sometimes outdoors. The term "divertimento" was often interchangeable with "serenade" – one which Mozart applied to thirteen works, including the famous *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (*A Little Night Music*) heard on yesterday afternoon's program by the Young Artists Chamber Orchestra. Yet, for Mozart, the divertimento often seemed to imply something even lighter than a serenade. Certainly the playful character of the divertimento is heard in this work for piano trio.

There are accounts of several performances of Mozart's Divertimento in Bb major within the composer's lifetime. Mozart once wrote to his father Leopold about an attempted performance in Munich where a violinist with the court orchestra named Dupreille lost his place in the opening bars of the second movement. Leopold later wrote back that the composer's sister Nannerl had played the piano part in a successful performance with the visiting musicians violinist

### Mozart and His Family, c.1780

Left to right: his sister Nannerl, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and his father Leopold. A portrait of his mother Anna Maria who had died in 1778 hangs on the wall.



Anton Janitsch and cellist Joseph Reicha. From there, the Divertimento apparently found a place at household music gatherings across Salzburg. Today while there are many recordings of Mozart's Divertimento for piano trio, this work is far from one of his best-known or most-heard compositions, and so we are pleased to present it here as part of this afternoon's program.

### **Samuel Stokes (Born 1980)**

#### *Scion of Eisenach* for solo cello

Currently based in Natchitoches, Louisiana, composer Samuel Stokes wrote his *Scion of Eisenach* in 2014 as part of a composition call by cellist Maksim Velichkin. *Scion of Eisenach* was one of fifteen new compositions selected by Velichkin to be performed at his Homage to Bach concert given in Glendale, California on May 4, 2014. Johann Sebastian Bach was born in the German town of Eisenach in 1685 and, therefore, he is the "Scion of Eisenach" referenced by the title. As Dr. Stokes has stated, however, "as a result of Bach's profound impact on music throughout the world, we might all consider ourselves *scions* of Eisenach." That a concert in homage to Bach could be given certainly testifies to this notion, but even more definitively composers throughout the ages have written works inspired by Bach's music from the preludes of Frédéric Chopin to the *Dumbarton Oaks Concerto* of Igor Stravinsky and to the *St. John Passion* of Sofia Gubaidulina.

Dr. Stokes displays his admiration for the music of Bach in several ways. As a pianist, Stokes has studied several of the preludes, fugues, and inventions composed by Bach; as an undergraduate, he also took cello lessons, learning the famous prelude to Bach's first Suite for solo cello. Stokes has attempted to emulate the contrapuntal style of writing Bach employed in his cello suites, although the harmonic language Stokes uses is quite different. Stokes has also made use of the so called B-A-C-H motif – a four-note theme using the pitches B-flat, A, C, and B natural which under their German names spell "Bach." The notes of the B-A-C-H motif are both the first four and the last four notes heard in *Scion of Eisenach*; the motif is also developed throughout. There are several fleeting moments where the allusions to Bach's music are more immediately audible, but *Scion of Eisenach* is more about what a twenty-first century composer has learned from Bach than a mere rehashing of this eighteenth century master's music. Sheet music for *Scion of Eisenach* is available for purchase online at [www.sheetmusicplus.com](http://www.sheetmusicplus.com).

### **Al Benner (Born 1955)**

#### *Grace Variations* for violin and cello

*Grace Variations* is a series of variations on the well-known hymn tune "Amazing Grace" written by another composer based in Natchitoches, Al Benner. "Amazing Grace" has always been a favorite tune of Benner's, and it can be heard in many of his compositions. Dr. Benner recalls "I have used excerpts of it – either apparent or 'hidden' – in numerous works or as various complete variations." The earliest set of variations on "Amazing Grace" appears in the third movement of Benner's *Grace Quartet* (1988-89), which has been played separately many times under the title *Faith*.

Different from *Faith*, the *Grace Variations* for string duet heard on this afternoon's program was composed for the specific occasion of Al and his wife Lisa's wedding in 1990. In its original version, *Grace Variations* was written for violin duet to be played at the Benners' wedding by two of their good friends who were violinists. Although some of the variations are far reaching, the most beautiful aspect of *Grace Variations* is that the familiar hymn tune is never lost – like grace itself, the melody is always present.

In 1997, Benner created the arrangement of *Grace Variations* for violin and cello heard this afternoon as well as another version for two cellos. The former was premiered in 1999 at the University of Miami with violinist Heather Grier and cellist Benjamin Salsbury. As for the latter, Paul Christopher, in fact, gave its premiere with cellist Daniel Jang in a Louisiana Composers Consortium concert at the Louisiana School for Math, Science, and the Arts (LSMSA) in Natchitoches in 2007. Paul Christopher has also commissioned a work from Benner called *Open Ayre* for solo cello which Christopher premiered in 2013. Likewise, Lin He has participated in the world premiere of another work by Benner – *On Mystical Wings* for violin and piano – which was debuted at ArtsFest 2011 in Baton Rouge. Paul Christopher and Lin He gave their first performance together of *Grace Variations* last year on September 3, 2015 at Abendmusik Alexandria.

### **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

#### Piano Trio No. 2 in G minor, Op. 26

Last night we heard the West Edge String Quartet perform the *American Quartet* by Antonín Dvořák – one of the key works among the fourteen string quartets authored by this Bohemian composer. This afternoon we hear his Piano Trio No. 2 in G minor, an earlier work by no means lacking in Dvořák's characteristic charm. While it is known that Dvořák wrote a total of six trios for violin, cello, and piano, only four of these survive to the present day.

The other two are believed to be lost or destroyed by the composer. Although the Fourth Piano Trio called *Dumky* is the best-known, all four are considered cornerstones of the piano trio repertoire.

Dvořák composed his Second Piano Trio in 1876. This was a time full of major changes in Dvořák's career: although at the outset of the 1870s his compositions were virtually unknown, by the decade's close his music was familiar throughout Europe. In 1871, Dvořák resigned from his post as violist with the Bohemian Provisional Theatre Orchestra where he had met and befriended the ensemble's conductor Bedřich Smetana. Smetana was at that time the leading composer of Bohemian nationalist music, and he encouraged



**Antonín Dvořák, 1868**

Dvořák to turn away from his German models and instead look to integrate Bohemian subjects and folk themes into his music. Taking Smetana's advice, Dvořák soon found himself writing more individualistic works and composing at a quicker pace than ever before. His new works soon caught the attention of Johannes Brahms who was by then one of the most highly-regarded composers in the music capitol that was Vienna. With Brahms as his advocate, the publisher Simrock began issuing Dvořák's music and then commissioned a set of *Slavonic Dances*. With the publication of his *Slavonic Dances* in 1878, Dvořák achieved fame across Europe and eventually the United States as well.

While the Second Piano Trio was composed amid these major events, it was a much more personal work than the *Slavonic Dances* or one of the symphonies from this same decade. Composed in January of 1876, the Trio did not hear its first public performance until June 1879 when violinist Ferdinand Lachner and cellist Alois Neruda joined Dvořák himself on piano for its premiere in Turnov. Set in the ominous key of G minor, the Second Trio was composed soon after the death of Dvořák's eldest daughter while still in infancy. The first movement *Allegro moderato* is particularly tragic, but Dvořák seems to gradually accept his loss as the Trio progresses. The second movement *Largo*, although set in Eb major, is dominated by an introspective theme which is first introduced by the cello. The third movement *Scherzo* is lightly-scored if not completely healed emotionally, and the instruments often play in alternation with one another. The fourth movement *Finale* brings up reminiscences of the first movement, even adopting its G minor key signature for a time, before concluding in a triumphant G major.

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**About Jackson.** Jackson Harmeyer is a composer, music scholar, and advocate of music. Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College located in Natchitoches, Louisiana in May 2013 after completing his undergraduate thesis "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." As series director of the successful Abendmusik Alexandria chamber music series from May 2014 to April 2016, Jackson played a vital role in the renewal of interest in chamber music across



Central Louisiana. This interest has encouraged the creation of the annual Sugarmill Music Festival and the new series Nachtmusik von BrainSurge, both of which Jackson will remain active in as concert annotator and creative consultant. Jackson has in fact written program notes for many of Central Louisiana's key music presenters, including the Rapides Symphony Orchestra, Arts Council of Central Louisiana, and Northwestern State University. He also blogs at MusicCentral where he shares concert experiences, gives listening recommendations, posts interviews with contemporary composers, and offers insights into his own compositions. Jackson has followed classical music around the world, including trips to Colorado's Aspen Music Festival and the BachFest Leipzig in Germany. As a composer, he has worked to integrate a modern vocabulary into established classical forms in ways that are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His four-movement Suite for solo guitar, Op. 21 received its world premiere on November 5, 2015 and has also been aired on public radio. In fall 2016, Jackson will begin graduate studies at the University of Louisville with the ultimate goal of earning his doctorate in musicology.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at  
[www.JacksonHarmeyer.com](http://www.JacksonHarmeyer.com).