25 APRIL, 6PM, CONSERVATORY CONCERT HALL

Senior Recital:
LIM HAO WEI, VIOLIN
DR. CHERIE KHOR, PIANO

Beethoven

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C Minor, Op. 30 No. 2

i. Allegro con brio
ii. Adagio Cantabile
iii. Scherzo
iv. Finale, Allegro

Intermission - 10 minutes

Richard Strauss

Violin Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 18

i. Allegro ma non troppo
ii. Improvisation, Andante cantabile
iii. Finale, Andante - Allegro
Programme Notes

Beethoven Violin Sonata No.7

The Sonatas of Opus 30 date to 1802, the same year that Beethoven confessed desperation over his growing deafness to his brothers in the famous Heiligenstadt Testament, and also an unstable period of time in Viennese history due to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Beethoven set out to combat his internal conflicts with admirable determination, writing “I shall grapple with fate; it shall never pull me down”. He drew inspiration from powerful political figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Czar Alexander, whose conquests were built on revolutionary fervor to change the world.

Beethoven’s new creative language led to the creation of many prominent works: The Symphonies Number 2 to 5, a dozen piano sonatas, the Fourth Piano Concerto and the Triple Concerto, Fidelio, the opus 30 violin and piano sonatas, and many other small-scale works. Beethoven essentially redefined the entire genre of the violin sonata; After Beethoven, a violin sonata could have four movements rather than three. It could last more than half an hour rather than a short fifteen minutes, and it could be challenging enough that no amateur could possibly play it. Most importantly, both piano and violin parts were written with equal importance, rather than letting the piano take up the traditional accompaniment role.

The Violin Sonata No.7 shares its impassioned key with several other epochal creations of those years, notably the Fifth Symphony, the Third Piano Concerto, the Pathétique Sonata. The key of C Minor is a grim one, but a powerful representation of Beethoven’s fist-shaking approach to his fate. The first movement Allegro con brio opens with a darkly mysterious and almost menacing subject that is divided into several epigrammatic components, one which was eminently suitable for later developments. The slow and bittersweet Adagio cantabile alternates between simplicity and complexity, sometimes showing restraint and sometimes introducing extremely florid accompaniments. The Scherzo is a stark contrast to its neighbouring movements and truly lives up to its title of a joke, with plenty of rhythmic quirks and rough humour. The Finale, marked Allegro, makes an unusual return to the home key of C Minor. Relentless dramatic tension and Beethoven’s flair for the dramatic mark this uncompromising movement.
German composer Richard Strauss was mainly renowned for his operas and orchestral tone poems. However, he did produce a handful of chamber works, mostly earlier in his career. These include the Cello Sonata, the Piano Sonata, and the Violin Sonata in E-flat Major. The Violin Sonata was written in 1887 and is considered the last of his works that adhered to the classical Sonata form. Following on the innovations of Liszt and Wagner, Strauss, and his contemporary Gustav Mahler, took Romanticism to heady extremes of complexity, intensity and harmonic experimentation. The warm romanticism of the Sonata may be due to the fact that Strauss had fallen in love. He had met the young soprano Pauline de Ahna during that summer on a holiday and they would later marry in 1894.

The work exudes a youthful, optimistic exuberance and an undercurrent of sweetness that pervades even the bold virtuoso writing. The first movement, Allegro ma non troppo, opens with a passionate violin theme which leads into a flowing melody. Brahmschwärmerei, or “Brahms adoration”, had a huge influence on Strauss’ way of writing music. With beauty that matches that of Brahms, ranging from lively to reflective, the movement ends with a strong final flourish. The second movement, titled Improvisation, meanders gently. Its wistfulness and hovering dreaminess are qualities that recur throughout much of Strauss’ oeuvre. Scholars have debated if the sinuous passages midway through the movement were written to mimic the beautiful voice of Pauline. The closing Finale movement opens with a somber introduction in the piano, after which the instruments sally forth with almost orchestral grandeur and sweep. A change in meter and musical direction near the end throw listeners off, with fragments of already-heard material being exchanged between the piano and violin. But soon the main motif is sighted on the horizon, towards which the violin and piano jubilantly rush, and the sonata ends in a blaze of bravura and glory.