Jiang Yukun Viola Senior Recital

26 April 2018 | Thursday 1PM

Liu Jia, piano
Deng Yung-Ping, clarinet

Sergie Prokofiev
Romeo and Juliet, op. 64
  I. Introduction

Arnold Bax
Sonata for viola and piano
  I. Molto moderato
  II. Allegro energico ma non troppo presto
  III. Molto lento

Intermission (10’)

Max Bruch
Double Concerto in E minor, Op. 88
  I. Andante con moto
  II. Allegro moderato
  III. Allegro molto
Programme Notes

**Sergie Prokofiev-Romeo and Juliet, op. 64 I. Introduction**

Sergei Prokofiev composed his score for the ballet, “Romeo and Juliet” during the years 1935 and 1936. Based on Shakespeare’s infamous play about the tragic lovers, Prokofiev’s setting is one of the most evocative ever to be put on the stage. By then in his mid-40s, Prokofiev was reaching the height of his artistic powers as evident in the incredibly rich and varied textures, dramatic settings and soaring melodies used in the score. The version played in today’s recital is an arrangement for Viola and Piano by the great Russian violist, Vadim Borisovsky. Borisovsky has chosen several of the ballet's most melodic pieces and arranged them in a manner to best display the widest range of violistic possibilities.

The Introduction establishes the big melodic themes that will permeate the entire ballet score and return again and again.

**Bax - Sonata for viola and piano**

Arnold Bax’s Viola Sonata. Written for violist Lionel Tertis, it’s one of Bax’s greatest and most characteristic works. With its folksong elements and great energy, the piece dominated the first half of the programme.

The sonata is in three movements, a fast, diabolical scherzo flanked by more reflective outer movements, a form later adopted by many British composers not least Walton in his Viola Concerto, only seven years later. Although the work is not cyclic in the true sense of the word, the opening idea reappears at the end of the last movement. The music reveals a genuine poetic vision, and achieves a quiet but intense beauty by comparatively simple means. Of particular importance are a rising figure heard at the outset, and leaps of an octave and of a fifth. The opening, with its high tinkling piano offsetting the sombre hue of the lower register of the viola, immediately transforms us into Bax’s personal world as the music slowly emerges from this tentative opening to the superbly glowing climax. While not overtly ‘Celtic’ in manner, and with no subjective programme admitted by Bax, here we are surely hearing his final absorption of his various influences into a remarkable personal style and a universal expression.
Max Bruch- Double Concerto in E minor, Op. 88

This work from late in Max Bruch’s career, though written when atonality and dissonance were coming to the fore, is very much music of the Romantic age, or at least of the period’s more classically reserved, Brahmsian element. Bruch avoids sharp contrasts and dramatic outbursts; he seems to be taking his cue from the similarities between the two solo instruments, whose ranges are practically identical. It’s the viola that gets the first word in the opening Andante con moto, in a short, rhapsodic passage punctuated by orchestral chords. The clarinet then voices the same material itself, and the two instruments begin to intertwine. But the clarinet utters the first statement of the movement’s true principal theme, a long, slow, autumnal melody. Bruch then undertakes a pattern of phrase trading between the soloists, rounding off the movement’s subsections with small duets. The composer basically employs sonata form, but the structure is obscured by the slow harmonic and metrical motion; the music seems more rhapsodic than it really is.

Although marked Allegro molto, the second movement sounds no faster than the first, thanks to Bruch’s reliance on longer-held notes. The soloists here work in duet far more consistently than in the first movement. Again, the writing is highly lyrical, although it lacks truly memorable melodies. Pizzicato accompaniment brings a little more animation to the movement’s second episode, although the solo lines remain long and maintain a nostalgic feeling. The first section returns in full, and what initially seems to be a reappearance of the second section turns out to be merely a coda.

The concluding Allegro molto promises more vigor with its opening brass fanfares and swirling string figures, the latter soon picked up by the soloists in turn. If the slow movement at times suggested late Richard Strauss, particularly the later composer’s Duet Concertino, the more outgoing portions of this movement seem to have influenced the early symphonies of Franz Schmidt. These animated passages, spurred on by the orchestra, alternate with slightly more subdued sections showcasing the soloists, who work through busy material derived from the opening section.