Emerald’s Masters Recital

26 Nov 2018
7 pm
YSTCM Concert Hall

Antonio Vivaldi  Ida Gotkovsky  Barbara York  Francis Poulenc
Bassoon Concerto in B-flat major, RV 504 | Antonio Vivaldi

I have always had an affinity for music from the Baroque and before, and it’s on my bucket list to learn all of Vivaldi’s bassoon concerti, so I knew I had to do one for this recital. Due to the concerti only having been discovered decades after their conception, and there being no conceivable date for when they were written, one can only guess their chronological order. In the catalogue by Peter Ryom, they are grouped according to the keys they were written in. For Vivaldi’s bassoon concerti, they are the numbers RV 466-504.

Vivaldi was a prolific composer, bearing more than 850 works to his name. Originally having trained for ten years as a priest, he ceased his duties to conduct Mass just a few years after he was ordained - citing poor health - and turned his energies into his musical career. He held conducting, composition and teaching positions at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, an institution known for taking in orphaned and needy girls, and training them to specialise in music. They were well-known at a time where performing musicians were mostly male, and it was rare to have an all female orchestra and chorus, especially at a very high calibre. Interestingly, there were also female tenors and basses at the Pietà although the bass parts were most likely sung an octave higher, with strong support from the basso continuo.

The high quality of the musicians at the Pietà, and Vivaldi’s compositional prowess lead to his numerous concerto output, of which 39 (two of which are incomplete) are for the bassoon. While records have named outstanding flute or violin players associated with the Pietà, unfortunately no records of bassoonists have survived. Due to the compositional techniques employed by Vivaldi, such as multiple leaps and rapid scalic/arpeggiated passages, one can surmise that the bassoon concerto was written for someone technically very capable - especially for an instrument that was rarely, if never, featured as a solo.

At the time of Vivaldi’s death, only over a hundred of his works had been published, with most of his work from his time at the Pietà to be discovered in the 1920s, and more widely performed only after World War II. Most of the Classical and Romantic era went by without knowing his music. With the benefit of hindsight comes privilege, and as such we are indeed able to appreciate what we have today.
Variations Concertantes (1972/73) | Ida GOTKOVSKY (1933 - )

I was first introduced to this piece by Prof. Zhang Jin Min, and while at first it seemed like a mammoth task, the music eventually grew on me, and I discovered an amazing composer in the process.

Gotkovsky is a prize-winning French composer whose work is extensive and includes that for orchestra, ballets, operas, band works, choruses and numerous chamber works. She is currently a professor of theory at her alma mater, the Paris Conservatory. Her teachers when she was a student include Olivier Messiaen and Nadia Boulanger.

Gotkovsky's music credo is: "To create a universal musical art and to realize the oneness of musical expression through the ages by means of a contemporary musical language with powerful structures."

Variations Concertantes was used as the 1970 competition piece for the Paris Conservatoire's annual bassoon competition. The first and last movements seem to be the inspiration for the first and final movements of her Concerto for Trombone (1978), as well as same-titled movement Lineaire in the Quartuor de Saxophone.
I was attending the 2014 New York International Double Reed Society Conference when I heard the premiere of this work and was immediately taken in by the piece. It became my dream to play it one day and I’m glad to present this today, albeit only the outer two movements.

This sonata takes its inspiration from a book by Irish author John Connolly, *The Book of Lost Things*. Set in England during World War II, the protagonist is a boy, David, who had lost his beloved, story-telling mother to an illness and finds solace in a world replaced by fantasy. In this escape from reality, The Crooked Man is both David’s enemy and protector, reminiscent of the character Rumpelstiltskin.

The adventures experienced by David and his fellow imaginary travellers are dystopian version of well-known fairy-tales such as Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood. Perhaps, he was also losing the warmth associated with his tangible comfort from books when he lost his mom. At the end, David finally meets the wife and son he lost when they died at childbirth.

In the composer’s words, “The concept for this piece involves overcoming the darkness in oneself as well as in others.”

Barbara York is a Canadian composer who works both in Canada and the United States. She is also a concert accompanist, and choral and theatrical music director. She has written works for saxophone, tuba, and orchestra, and her score for the Canadian musical, *Colette*, won the Dora Mavor Moore Award in 1981. She currently resides in Pittsburg, Kansas.
Poulenc was taught music by his mother from the age of 5, and showed an affinity for it. However, due to his father's wishes, he did not pursue it academically and instead attended a conventional school. He encountered Igor Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* and *Rite of Spring* around the time of their premieres in 1911 and 1913 respectively, and this left a lasting impression on the young Poulenc in his mid-teens.

From 1914, Poulenc started studying with Ricardo Viñes, a prominent Spanish pianist based in Paris. Viñes would then introduce him to the likes of Satie and Falla. In 1917, Poulenc became an orphan at the age of 18 after the death of his father; and that of his mother, 2 years before. He immersed himself in the intellectual and literary circles of Paris and 1917 was also the year that he had his first public performance, as well as the year that he became acquainted with Stravinsky, which developed into a long and close friendship between the two composers.

Subsequent years of compositional activity led to the fateful concert in 1920 where the critic Henri Collet coined the term “Les Six”, of which Poulenc was a part of. Poulenc approached Charles Koechlin in 1921 for formal lessons despite having already attained a status of some sort, because he had “obeyed the dictates of instinct rather than intelligence”. Shortly after, his commissioned work *Les biches* would achieve success in 1924.

Regarding the *Trio for piano, oboe and bassoon*, Poulenc wrote in a letter dated September 1924 to Darius Milhaud that “... the trio is much more important than my other chamber music.” After consulting Stravinsky at a dinner meeting in April 1926, Poulenc made some adjustments to the score before premiering it himself a month later. There currently exists two versions of the Trio, the latest of which was published only in 2016, after a manuscript recently surfaced that is thought to have postdated the 1926 version. The two versions show a remarkable difference, with some parts being swapped in the bassoon and oboe parts. However, Poulenc did two recordings of the 1926 version in 1929 and 1957. Some people believe that the newly surfaced trio is merely a draft to 1926 version that Poulenc might have sent out to his close friends in one of his letters. In today’s recital, we are presenting the first edition of the *Trio*.