

The Chamber Music of
IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)

The Owl and the Pussycat

Rebecca Zafonte, soprano
Yoshiko Sato, piano

Duo Concertant

Diane Pascal, violin
Chris Molina, piano

Three Pieces for Solo Clarinet

Bruce Williamson

- PAUSE -

Two Poems and Three Japanese Lyrics

Charity Dove, soprano
John Van Buskirk, conductor
Chris Molina, piano

EunShin Lee, violin	Alison Hale, flute/piccolo
Katrina Monta, violin	Jana Atcheson, flute
Cori Tolda, viola	Bruce Williamson, clarinet
Michael Close, cello	Jason Sabol, clarinet

Elégie

Devin Arrington, violin

Sonata for Two Pianos

Marianne Finckel
John Van Buskirk

APRIL 25, 2001

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PROGRAM NOTES

THE OWL AND THE PUSSYCAT (1966) was Stravinsky's final composition. Set to the poem of Edward Lear, the song was written with a touching illustration by the composer as a Valentine for his second wife, Vera. According to Robert Craft, "The Owl and the Pussycat" was the first English poem she learned by heart. The soprano's melody is tuneful and unstructured, adapting itself in an almost improvisatory manner to the words of each verse, while the piano accompaniment counters this melody with a single line in octaves. Stravinsky remarks, "The rhythmic cell suggested a group of pitches, which I expanded into a twelve-note series in correspondence to the stanzaic shape of the poem. The piano octaves form a syncopated canonic voice as well as a double mirror, the vocal movement being reflected between the upper and lower notes. Octaves are peculiarly pianistic; no other instrument produces them so well."

DUO CONCERTANT (1932): "For many years I had taken no pleasure in the blend of strings struck in the piano with strings set in vibration by the bow. In order to reconcile myself to this instrumental combination, I was compelled to use the minimum number of instruments, that is to say only two, for in that way I saw the possibility of solving the instrumental and acoustic problem of associating the strings of the piano with those of the violin. The mating of these instruments seems to bring about greater clarity than the combination of a piano with several stringed instruments, which tends to confusion with the orchestra."

THREE PIECES FOR SOLO CLARINET (1919) "represent one of the first attempts at reviving the unsupported and self-sufficient melodic line in 20th century music. Since the heyday of the baroque flute sonata, solo works for the woodwinds had gone completely out of fashion. Stravinsky's originality was to revisit the genre without an underlying harmonic structure, thereby redefining autonomous melody. These three pieces are often reminiscent of the *Rite of Spring* with their obsessive rhythms, their frequent use of pivot notes and their rejection of the Romantic canons of phrasing and melody out of a preference for Russian folk patterns. In their extreme conciseness, they epitomize the composer's artistic achievement in his early period. It is a remarkable paradox that he should have chosen the clarinet, which had been the Romantics' favorite instrument, to express such a highly original approach." — Philippe Manoury

TWO POEMS BY KONSTANTIN BAL'MONT (1911) and THREE JAPANESE LYRICS (1913) form bookends to the *Rite of Spring*. Stravinsky composed the Bal'mont songs during a brief return to Russia — some writers have suggested they show a musical return as well. Shortly thereafter, while working on the ballet, Stravinsky "read a little anthology of Japanese lyrics.... The impression which they made on me was exactly like that made by Japanese paintings and engravings." The poems he chose for musical setting are by 8th and 9th century Japanese poets whose names form the titles of the songs themselves. The choice of instrumentation, according to the composer, reflects his contact at the time with another exotic source, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Stravinsky would use the same combination of instruments in arranging the Bal'mont songs for chamber ensemble in 1954.

ELÉGIE (1944) was written for Germain Prévost of the Pro Arte Quartet, in memory of its original founder and leader, Alphonse Onnou, who had passed away in 1940 at the age of 46. The piece is in G minor with a prominent A flat. The first section is predominantly harmonic with a theme and accompaniment; the second, following a G major chord, is a fugue for two voices, including a stretto with the second voice in inversion. A series of five chords brings the key back to that of the beginning and to the recapitulation of the first section. The work may be played either on viola or violin; the musician is directed to play with the instrument muted for the duration of the piece.

SONATA FOR TWO PIANOS (1943) "was written in Hollywood — at that time a buzzing intellectual hive. Surprisingly, Stravinsky's works stemming from that period are largely neglected, possibly because the music of the 1940's generally seems a 'regression' from the more complex, dissonant style of the years preceding and following World War II. Conceived first as a solo piano piece and later reworked for two pianos in order to clarify the contrapuntal writing, the Sonata ... is a model example of the neo-Classical style. The first movement in particular is true to the textbook requirements of the sonata-allegro form with its exposition, development, and recapitulation, including its traditional key relationships. The second movement is a stately theme — incorporating a canon in inversion around an arpeggiated G major triad — with four variations. The last movement is in simple ABA form, with opening and closing material in a modal F major (the key center of the first movement) surrounding a middle section *un peu à la russe* in G — the key of the second movement. At the first performance of this work, Nadia Boulanger was one of the pianists, and she later teamed up with the composer in a performance at Mills College, California." — Paul Jacobs