

VERIZON HALL
FRIDAY, MARCH 23
8 PM

MASTER MUSICIANS, STRINGS SERIES

SARAH CHANG, VIOLIN
ASHLEY WASS, PIANO

BEETHOVEN
Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47 “Kreutzer”
Adagio sostenuto; Presto
Andate con Variazioni
Presto

—*Intermission*—

DANIELPOUR
River of Light
Commissioned by the Linda and Isaac Stern Charitable Foundation
in memory of Isaac Stern with the cooperation of the
Washington Performing Arts Society

PROKOFIEV
Sonata No.2 in D major, Op. 94bis
Moderato
Scherzo: Presto
Andante
Allegro con brio

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(b. Bonn, baptized November 17, 1770; d. Vienna, 1827)

Violin Sonata in A major, op. 47, “Kreutzer”

In March 1803 Beethoven’s patron Prince Lichnowsky introduced him to the 24-year-old violin virtuoso George Polgreen Bridgetower. The violinist was visiting Vienna, fresh from hit concerts in Dresden, having lived in London since his West Indian father had showed him off there as a child prodigy at the age of 12. After including the young violin virtuoso in a quartet reading at the home of the famous violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Beethoven arranged to give a public concert with Bridgetower on May 22—postponed to the 24th—and immediately set to work on a violin sonata for the occasion.

Because time was short Beethoven drew on sketches for two movements begun earlier that year, and added a finale that he had originally written in 1802 for the A major Violin Sonata, op. 31, no.3, but had discarded and replaced because it was too “brilliant.” Even with these “short cuts,” Beethoven was scrambling to finish the piece in time, and summoned his student Ferdinand Ries at 4:30 one morning to copy out the violin part of the first movement. Poor Bridgetower had to read the middle variation movement from Beethoven’s messy manuscript at the concert, while the composer played from sketches. Luckily the last movement, because of its earlier origin, was in decent shape.

Bridgetower later wrote that Beethoven was pleased with his playing, especially when he improvised an imitation of a “flight” in the piano in the repeat of the fast part of the first movement. For his part Beethoven highly recommended Bridgetower as “a capable virtuoso who has a complete command of his instrument.” The composer wrote in his typical punning style on a draft score in quasi-Italian—untranslatable since “mulattica” and “mulattico” are made-up words—“*Sonata mulattica composta per il mulatto Brischdauer; gran pazzo e compositore mulattico*,” meaning something like “A sonata of mixed colors, for the mulatto Bridgetower, big crazy person and mixed-up composer.”

So why did Beethoven dedicate the Sonata to French violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer instead of Bridgetower? Late in his life Bridgetower reported that he and Beethoven had been constant companions at the time the Sonata was composed and that the first copy bore a dedication to him. Before he left Vienna, however,

they had a quarrel “about a girl” and when Beethoven published the work he dedicated it to Kreutzer. Beethoven may have been trying to help pave the way for a projected visit to France, but there seems to be no evidence that Kreutzer ever played the Sonata.

This powerful Violin Sonata, associated with two violin virtuosos, is Beethoven’s most popular and brilliant. The composer acknowledged this quality when he labeled it: “written in a highly concertante style, almost in the manner of a concerto.” Russian author Leo Tolstoy also recognized its power when he used the first movement of the *Kreutzer* Sonata in his short story of the same name to incite his tragic hero to a crime of passion. Leoš Janáček, in turn, based his First String Quartet on Tolstoy’s story.

The *Kreutzer* Sonata is Beethoven’s only violin sonata to open with a slow introduction. He presents the violin alone at first, in regal A major, but the demonic, tempestuous main part of the movement occurs in A *minor*. A momentary halt of the driving momentum allows the chorale-like second theme to illuminate the scene briefly. It bears a certain relationship to the slow introduction, which Beethoven also recalls in the coda.

A rich theme begets four variations—the first playful, the second with repeated notes in perpetual motion, the third with an air of tragedy, the fourth ethereally florid—followed by an extended introspective coda. Bridgetower recalled about the premiere: “Beethoven’s expression in the Andante was so chaste, which always characterized the performance of all his *slow movements*, that it was unanimously hailed to be repeated twice.”

The transplanted finale caps the Sonata brilliantly. A crashing A major chord cancels the remote key of the variation movement and launches a whirling movement based on the rhythm of the fast Italian dance known as the tarantella. Leading a merry chase through quasi-fugal terrain, “hunting” calls, break-neck “spinning” passages, and witty restarts, Beethoven ingeniously unfurls a sonata-rondo that pauses only to regain momentum.

—Jane Vial Jaffe

RICHARD DANIELPOUR

(b. New York, 1956)

River of Light

Among the most honored composers of his generation, Richard Danielpour has written a

wide range of orchestral, chamber, instrumental, ballet, and vocal works. He has been commissioned by an impressive parade of international musical institutions, festivals, and artists, and his music has been championed by such soloists as Yo-Yo Ma, Jessye Norman, Dawn Upshaw and Emanuel Ax; chamber ensembles including the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio and the Guarneri, Emerson, and American String Quartets; and conductors such as Leonard Bernstein, Kurt Masur, Charles Dutoit, and David Zinman. His first opera, *Margaret Garner*, with Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, was hailed as a triumph during its recent sold-out runs at the Michigan Opera Theater and Cincinnati Opera.

Danielpour has received a Grammy® Award, a Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Award, and grants and residencies from the Barlow Foundation, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Copland House, and the American Academy in Rome. He was one of the first composers invited for a coveted residency at the American Academy in Berlin. He was only the third composer—after Stravinsky and Copland—to be signed to an exclusive recording contract.

An active educator, Danielpour believes deeply in the nurturing of young musicians. Beyond serving on the faculties of both the Curtis Institute of Music and the Manhattan School of Music, he also spends a great deal of time giving master classes throughout the country, and coaching and mentoring young musicians.

Commissioned by the Linda and Isaac Stern Foundation, Danielpour composed *River of Light* for Sarah Chang, who plays its premiere in a series of ten concerts throughout the U.S. beginning on March 18, 2007, in La Jolla, California. Danielpour writes about the work:

“I composed *River of Light* with a metaphor in mind, that of ‘crossing the river’—or, in more direct language, preparing to meet one’s maker. The notion of the river as a symbolic boundary separating the here and the hereafter is as old as civilization itself. While crossing that river is for some a fearful idea, its peaceful passage requires a degree of trust and in some sense, preparation.

“Writing this work may have been a small step for me toward that ‘trusting’ and ‘preparing’; and, although I hope to be here for many

years to come, I know I must begin to practice, in simple ways, the art of dying—even as all of us practice the art of being alive. For me, part of the practice of living and dying is grappling with the fact that a loved one, family member or friend can be here one moment, and gone the next. I found this to be especially true of Isaac Stern, to whose memory this piece for violin and piano is dedicated. To me, Mr. Stern seemed to be the kind person who would never actually die. Obviously the memory of his work and life is still very much with us. My practice as a human being leads me to ask, ‘Why do we have to die?’ *River of Light*, if not an answer to that question, is my attempt to prepare for the inevitable.”

SEGEI PROKOFIEV

(b. Sontsova, Ekaterinoslav district, Ukraine, 1891; d. Moscow, 1953)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D major, op. 94bis

Prokofiev’s D major Violin Sonata first came to life as the D major Flute Sonata, completed by the end of the summer of 1943. He had written to L. T. Atovmyan on August 12: “The Sonata for flute is almost finished. I still have to polish the recapitulation of the finale. It has turned out to be quite bulky, with four movements and about 40 pages.” Despite the reported bulk of the work, it is one of the composer’s lightest and most lyrical compositions. “I wanted this Sonata to have a classical, clear, transparent sonority,” wrote Prokofiev.

Flutists gained enormously by this addition to their repertoire, as did violinists when shortly thereafter Prokofiev consulted with David Oistrakh and arranged the Sonata for violin and piano. Said Prokofiev, “We found that the flute part was easily adaptable to violin technique. Very few changes were needed, most of them dealing with the bowing. I left the piano part unchanged.” Violin techniques that he incorporated included harmonics, double stops, and the varied articulations of pizzicato (plucked) and arco (bowed) playing.

The Sonata also remained in the original D major, the “ideal” violin key—the key of his First Violin Concerto and the violin concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, and Tchaikovsky. Prokofiev called it his Second Violin Sonata, because the First in F minor, though completed in 1946, had been begun in 1938.

The Flute Sonata was introduced on December 7, 1943, by N. Kharkovsky with pianist Sviatoslav Richter at a concert at the Moscow Conservatory. Prokofiev was in the

audience, and the work was enthusiastically received. In March 1944 Shostakovich praised the Sonata as a “perfectly magnificent work.” Naturally David Oistrakh first performed the violin version, accompanied by Lev Oborin in June of 1944. Josef Szigeti then had great success with it in New York. Thus the Sonata was launched.

The four-movement work follows the slow-fast-slow-fast movement sequence of the typical Baroque *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata), though its individual movements follow later Classic-period designs. The opening movement, marked Moderato, is a lovely, lilting sonata-form movement, strictly Classical in outline even to the repeat of the exposition, but full of Prokofiev’s inventive harmonies.

The ensuing buoyant Scherzo is interrupted by a pensive middle section. Prokofiev’s playfulness appears in the cleverly displaced accents of the first theme. The Andante is simple and songlike in quality, written in the remote third-related key of F major. The finale, a playful sonata-rondo, recalls the fast movements of the composer’s *Classical Symphony* in wit and piquant harmonies. Prokofiev’s humorous side surfaces again in the etude-like double-octave passages in the piano.

—Jane Vial Jaffe