



## 2013 SUMMER SOLSTICE FESTIVAL

SUMMER PASSION

SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2013

3 PM

CONVOCATION HALL | UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

### PROGRAM NOTES

BY CAITLYN TRIEBEL

Music has the ability to move emotions, transcend the troubles and mundanities of quotidian life, and ignite such passion that is truly unrivalled by the other arts. This program takes three of the most beautiful masterworks in the chamber music repertoire, and presents them in such a way that is sure to transport the listener to a far off time when we could revel in the beauty that surrounded daily life.

**Claude Debussy** (1862–1918) is perhaps one of the greatest masters in inspiring passion and capturing majestic visual impressions. His musical upbringing was not tailored from a young age, as his father hoped he would become a sailor, and he did not receive any formal education until 1872 when he entered the Paris Conservatoire. He had hoped to become a piano virtuoso, but his experiences at the Conservatoire led him to abandon this idea and to focus more on harmony and accompaniment. He began to compose *mélodies* in 1879, and shortly thereafter landed a position teaching piano. He continued to support his composition classes in Paris by accompanying singers and in 1881 and 1882 was able to travel to Russia and Vienna. Debussy was awarded the *Prix de Rome* in 1884 for his cantata *L'enfant prodigue*, and through his travels and training in the remainder of the 1880s, a distinct style began to emerge. Debussy's mature style came to fruition when at the famous 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle the composer encountered Javanese gamelan music. He then began to use ethereal modalities and scale structures in his own compositional works.

Because of the inspiration from Javanese music along with a strong influence from Russian music, Debussy began to abandon traditional forms, harmonic progressions, and tonal organisation, leading to an evocative style that has captured audience admiration ever since. The ***Première Rhapsodie*** for clarinet and piano was composed in 1909–10 and demonstrates many of the distinctly “impressionist” techniques of Debussy’s style. Its beauty attests to the composer’s painterly genius. The *Rhapsodie* begins with a slow, gracious introduction with a beautiful clarinet melody and serene piano accompaniment. The pace quickens when the piano begins an ostinato pattern of triplets and pedal points. The melody is lyrical and passionately suggestive, intensifying with greater syncopation, scale runs, and fluttering trills. With the return of the first tempo, the piano has broad arpeggios and tremolos that build and support the dramatic ecstasy of the octatonic clarinet lines. Debussy uses octave planing and quartal and quintal harmonies in the piano accompaniment, which drive the music forward while

creating a luminescent sonic environment that ties the entire work together in beautiful continuity. The virtuosic conclusion in the clarinet is a triumphant explosion of built-up passions.

Moving back in time to the intensely beautiful and well-known Romanticism of **Johannes Brahms** (1833–1897), we continue our exploration of musical passions. Brahms was a Romantic composer in every sense, demonstrating mastery of the evocative yet controlled German style of Romanticism while living a life that was itself passionate and emotionally rich. Brahms grew up in a family with some economic difficulties, but was well educated from the beginning and had early exposure to music as his father was a musician who played several instruments. Brahms studied piano from the age of seven, and after leaving school taught piano lessons to help in supporting himself and his family. Brahms immersed himself in contemporary Romantic poetry and was an avid reader of everything from literary classics to folk tales. His first extant compositions are dated to 1851, although he was composing before this time.

In 1854, at twenty-one years of age, Brahms composed the **Piano Trio No. 1 in B major, op. 8**, a work that captures his passionate youth and Romantic spirit with elegance and tranquility. The Allegro opens with the main subject in the piano that is then joined by the cello and violin in legato serenity. The second subject enters with a louder dynamic and quickened tempo, creating a rise in passion. Both themes are carried through the modulating development in various thematic alterations. The development section ends with a dramatic passage of sustained chords and luscious harmonies before returning to the opening material in the recapitulation, which ends with a similarly broad and rich chordal texture. The cello begins the Scherzo with a lively staccato melody that is echoed in the piano and violin. The style and use of harmony and rhythm in this scherzo suggests exoticism and intensity, with lyrical folk-inspired melodies emerging from the texture. The trio that follows is more relaxed and lyrical but with the return of the vigorous scherzo theme, the movement ends with drama. The energy of the Scherzo is channeled into an intensely beautiful and graceful Adagio. Soft sonorities and rich harmonies allow the listener to absorb the beauty unhindered. The Allegro begins with an agitated theme that is passed between cello and violin, while the piano builds in intensity to a dramatic climax and finally a return to the second and first subjects.

Hungarian composer **Ernő Dohnányi** (1877–1960) attended the Budapest Academy where he studied piano and composition. He was widely acclaimed as a virtuoso pianist, and had a vibrant performance career across Europe and into the United States. Dohnányi was at the frontier of discovering and promoting specifically Hungarian music, and he was followed in this aspect by Bartók, Kodály, and Weiner to whom Dohnányi showed the utmost support. Because of several bouts of illness and the rise of the Nazi party, Dohnányi's performance career and compositional freedom were greatly hindered by the end of the 1930s. He was the target of numerous unsubstantiated accusations throughout the Second World War, and eventually, in the late 1940s, relocated to Argentina for security. He eventually settled in as composer-in-residence at Florida State University in 1949.

Composed very early in his career in 1895, Dohnányi's **Piano Quintet No. 1 in C minor, op. 1** displays the composer's early propensity for a dramatic and passionate Romantic style. A Vienna premiere was arranged by Brahms shortly after the debut of Dohnányi's quintet, and the work has been in the chamber music canon ever since. The opening Allegro is immediately fiery, its rhythms and melodic themes building quickly to ecstasy and dropping off to quieter lyrical moments. The Scherzo suggests a Hungarian dance, with rapid descending motives at the ends of phrases and continuous energy. The slower middle section of the scherzo is beautifully passionate and maintains the intensity of the faster sections. The cello begins the Adagio with an elegant yet weighty theme that is passed through the entire texture of the ABA movement, with each instrument enjoying soloistic moments. The Finale is triumphant

and animated, with light articulations and expressive dance-like melodies in a rondo form, and the coda reprises the first movement.