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Sunday, April 18, 2018, at 3 pm
Eternal Spring

Edgar Meyer, double bass soloist-leader

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Suite No. 1 in G Major for Unaccompanied Cello
I. Prélude
II. Allemande
III. Courante
IV. Sarabande
V. Menuett I
VI. Menuett II
VII. Gigue

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI (1821–1889)
Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B Minor
I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegro

Intermission

EDGAR MEYER (B. 1960)
Concerto in D for double bass and orchestra
Movement I
Movement II
Movement III

WOLFGANG AMADÈ MOZART (1756–1791)
Serenade in C Minor for winds, K. 388
Movement I: Allegro
Movement IV: Allegro

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Program Notes - CONCERT IV

Suite No. 1 in G Major for Unaccompanied Cello

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(1685–1750)

- The six cello suites are bread and butter for all cellists
- Baroque suites open with a prelude, followed by a series of dances
- All movements are in the same key, in this case G major
- This first suite has a sunny disposition throughout

All Bach's unaccompanied string music dates from the years between 1717 and 1723, when he was in service to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. The Prince loved music, and encouraged his *Kapellmeister* to compose instrumental pieces, rather than limiting himself to church music. Leopold employed a court orchestra that was then one of the finest in Europe, although small by modern standards: about 20 players. Bach almost certainly composed the cello suites for Christian Ferdinand Abel, the Prince's principal cellist.

Today, the six solo suites are particularly beloved to cellists. It was not always so. Bach was nearly a forgotten composer in the nineteenth century. Those who *were* acquainted with his music regarded it as academic, useful for pedantic purposes, but not suitable performance material. Not until the early 20th century, when Pablo Casals began to play the Bach Suites in public did they acquire a broader audience. Their popularity today is undisputed. They vary widely in difficulty, which means that even beginning cellists can learn a couple of the easier movements, incorporating Bach into their repertoire early in their studies. Most classical bass players study the Bach Suites, and they regularly appear as required audition material for orchestras.

All the Cello Suites consist of six movements, opening with a prelude. A standardized group of dances follows: *Allemande* (the term means "German;" a dance in moderate duple time), *Courante* (literally "running"; French *courantes* were in moderate 3/2 or 6/4 time), *Sarabande* (a dignified dance in slow triple meter), and *Gigue* (a relative of the English/Irish jig; the French type is usually in brisk 6/8 time with contrapuntal texture and dotted rhythms). Bach varied this formula by inserting another "wild card" movement between the *Sarabande* and *Gigue*: *Menuetto*, *Bourrée*, or *Gavotte*. For the G major suite, he chose a pair of minuets.

The entire suite has an intimacy, warmth, and openness that draw us into what we may imagine as the sunlit anteroom of Bach's composing studio. Pablo Casals is said to have described the overall mood of this suite as optimistic. His characterization is a wonderful thought to govern our listening.

Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B Minor

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI

Born 22 December, 1821 in Crema, Italy
Died 7 July, 1889 in Parma

- Bottesini was nearly as famous as Paganini and Liszt in his day
- He wrote nine operas that were produced between 1848 and 1880
- He is celebrated for his contributions to double bass technique
- The concerto is classical in structure, and tuneful in content

"The Paganini of the double bass," they called him during his lifetime. Giovanni Bottesini may be forgotten today, but in the mid-nineteenth century he was renowned throughout Europe and America as double bass virtuoso, conductor and composer. In a pre-airplane era, he managed to tour the United States *twice* by 1853. He also conducted in Paris, Russia, Scandinavia and Spain, finding a particularly warm reception on the podium of international opera houses.

Who was this man? Born into a musical family in the small northern Italian town of Crema, Giovanni Bottesini showed sufficient talent on violin as a child for his father to inquire about educational opportunities in music when the boy was 14. The Milan Conservatory in 1835 replied that scholarship openings remained only in bassoon and double bass. Giovanni switched to bass, landed the scholarship, and was winning prizes within a couple of years. By the late 1840s he was playing principal bass in Venice's Teatro San Benedetto orchestra, where he struck up a friendship with Giuseppe Verdi during rehearsals for a production of Verdi's early opera *I due Foscari*. The friendship lasted a lifetime: at Verdi's invitation, Bottesini travelled to Cairo in 1871 to conduct the premiere of *Aïda*.

Bottesini himself was primarily a composer of opera, which likely accounts for the operatic texture of his concerto. The orchestra is clearly in a supporting role to the double bass—here, a *primo uomo*—whose lines are overtly coloratura. Listeners familiar with Schubert's *Arpeggione* sonata may sense a kinship to this concerto's first movement, but the resemblance is superficial. Bottesini clearly had a thorough command of harmony, form, and the concepts of development that prevailed in the mid-nineteenth century. His great achievements in this concerto, as in his other works, are twofold: the expansion of the double bass' range, and the unprecedented exploitation of its obvious expressive capability as a virtuoso and lyric instrument.

Performances of Bottesini's music, including the Second Concerto, are rare even today, because the works are so demanding. He left a cadenza for the first movement of daunting difficulty. For these performances, Edgar Meyer plays his own cadenza, written when he was nineteen. "I have a particularly personal point of view about this concerto because I learned it when I was so young," he comments. "I'm very aware of Bottesini the double bass player in this piece, the way it fits on the instrument. But I make a point of adapting a piece until it feels like I wrote it. Of course, it was easier to write an extroverted cadenza when I was younger. I'm not sure I could write this particular cadenza today."

Bottesini's autograph is for double bass and piano. The concerto exists in several orchestrations. This afternoon's performance is a version for solo double bass and strings.

Concerto in D for double bass and orchestra

EDGAR MEYER

Born 24 November, 1960 in Tulsa, Oklahoma
Currently residing in Nashville

- Meyer has composed three double bass concerti—this was the first
- Elements of bluegrass and jazz join forces with modern orchestra
- Sliding and "bent" pitches give the slow movement a sultry air
- Notice how much of the fingerboard this piece uses
- The range of the double bass is enormous—practically the span of a piano!

Edgar Meyer is one of the few double bass soloists whose recordings have enjoyed widespread commercial success outside classical music. He has performed and recorded with several bluegrass ensembles, and his chamber music ventures have included unusual fusions of classical music with bluegrass and jazz. Since the mid-1980s, Meyer has been a regular guest at such prominent chamber music festivals as Santa Fe, Aspen, Caramoor, Chamber Music Northwest, Marlboro and Tanglewood, performing traditional literature as well as his own original compositions. Meyer's reputation as a composer has drawn the

attention of other prominent string players. He has written music for Joshua Bell, Carter Brey, Hilary Hahn, Yo-Yo Ma, Mark O'Connor, and Daniel Phillips.

Like many composer-performers before him, Meyer was writing for himself when he composed the Double Bass Concerto. The piece grew out of his expanding solo career in the early 1990s. "My friend Peter Lloyd convinced Edo de Waart to let me audition for him in 1992," Meyer recalls. De Waart immediately engaged him as a soloist with the Minnesota Orchestra for the next season. Meyer mentioned that he was also a composer and suggested a new work. "I always wanted to write a concerto," Meyer says. "Playing concertos was a primary goal for me as a young instrumentalist. It went hand in hand with wanting to write music." He finished the work in early 1993. Meyer played the première in March, 1993 with de Waart and the Minnesota Orchestra.

The Double Bass Concerto was not only Meyer's first concerto, but also his first orchestral piece. He was already an experienced composer of chamber and solo music, however, and believes that the concerto is an outgrowth of his writing for smaller ensembles. Meyer's concerto is unapologetically in D major, complete with key signature. That fact might encourage one to label it as conservative, at least tonally. Its three-movement structure also relates it to the traditional concerto. "It's no more or less traditional than other twentieth-century concertos," the composer observes. "The piece is traditional in the sense that it is built on a long-term harmonic scheme with clear motivic relationships among the movements. My ties are pretty deep to the nineteenth century, tied together with my experience and love of all music, not necessarily limited to classical music."

Indeed, equally evident in this work is Meyer's experience in both jazz and bluegrass. He resists the term "crossover" in describing his music. "For me, crossover implies starting in one place and going to another. I'm starting from both places," he explains. "It's all music I've grown up with and love."

As a virtuoso bass player, Meyer was interested in expanding the horizons of his instrument with this work. He faced challenges inherent in the bass itself. "It has some clear limitations," he acknowledges. "The instrument is dark and soft. It actually has a nice range, a six-octave range, which is useful. But dark and soft are two things that are not natural for concertos."

The problem is one of balance. A large orchestra runs the risk of overpowering a solo instrument, particularly one that does not have the advantage of high frequency, such as violin, or a different timbre, such as piano. Meyer solved the problem in the time-honored way: by restricting the orchestra to chamber proportions and keeping the bass in the spotlight. "This concerto exists on the bass, with the way I play and with the bass itself. The way it fits on the instrument is very much a reflection of me. That is the essence of the piece."

Meyer's score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, solo double bass, and strings.

Serenade in C Minor for winds, K. 388 (Movements I and IV)

WOLFGANG AMADÈ MOZART
(1756–1791)

- Mozart's works in minor mode are always fraught with emotion
- His mastery of Italian opera taught him how to write for woodwinds
- Listen for oboes and bassoons in close imitation in the canonic Minuet
- Mozart later arranged this Serenade for string quintet. In today's performance, Mr. Meyer "doubles" the bassoon lines to add a rich character to the sonorities.

Mozart's serenades bear various names: divertimento, cassation, *notturno*, even partita. In the 18th century, the terms were largely interchangeable. For the most part they signified multi-movement pieces for instrumental ensemble, usually intended for entertainment as background music, and often for outdoor performance. Most of Mozart's works in this category are light or ceremonial.

The C minor Serenade, K. 388 is one of three that he composed for wind instruments. (The other two are K. 361 in B-flat major for 12 winds and double bass, and the Serenade in E-flat major, K. 375.) This C minor work is altogether different from the other two: complex, dark, and emotionally fraught.

The Emperor's Wind Band

By simple virtue of its minor key, K. 388 is set apart from the others. Its origins are the same, however, in one key respect. When he ascended to the Austrian throne in 1780, the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II was intent on increasing musical activity. One of his acts was to expand the imperial wind band (called a *Harmonie*), whose members were drawn from his official court orchestra. Such ensembles had gained in popularity among the Austrian nobility since the mid-1750s.

Initially he sought wind arrangements of tunes from popular operas. With the Emperor's imprimatur, the *Harmonie* became more fashionable. As other ensembles like it sprang up in Austrian culture, the Emperor's court composers and other Viennese musicians began to write background music for banquets and imperial occasions.

Mozart benefitted enormously from his experimentation with the limitations of scoring for winds alone. The expertise he developed in orchestration bore its richest fruit in the great piano concerti of the 1780s. That command was already in full evidence in the C Minor Serenade, K. 388, which he completed in 1782.

Uncertain origins—and an ingenious re-purposing

Its origins are uncertain. Mozart tended to write solely on commission, and imprecise references in his letters to his father Leopold suggest that the original version may have been written for a Prince Liechtenstein. There is no record of its performance in Mozart's lifetime.

In its original woodwind scoring, K. 388 is one of Mozart's masterpieces from the early 1780s. He clearly thought highly of this work, arranging it in 1787 for string quintet. The Serenade's four-movement structure relates it more to the emotional and psychological depth of Mozart's symphonies and other large chamber works than it does to the entertainment music generally associated with serenades. As biographer Ivor Keys has written:

> It is hard to imagine a function of a social nature at which this kind of unprecedented and disturbing serenade would have been acceptable.

Several modern critics—and one psychiatrist—have pinpointed this work as a pivotal example of Mozart's manic-depressive tendency. Mozart scholar H.C. Robbins Landon espoused that theory:

> There could have been *no question* in his mind of writing "popular" works when these black moods were upon him: if anything could bring relief, it was the therapy of composing these baleful pieces.

Yet in his own remarkable way, Mozart succeeds in mitigating the agonized outcries of his Quintet with passages of exquisite tranquility.

Mozart wrote K. 388 for two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons. For this performance, Mr. Meyer doubles the bassoon part.

Program Notes by Laurie Shulman © 2017
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Edgar Meyer, bass

As both a performer and a composer, Edgar Meyer has formed a role in the music world unlike any other. Hailed by *The New Yorker* as "...the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively un-chronicled history of his instrument," Mr. Meyer's uniqueness in the field was recognized in 2000 when he became the only bassist to be awarded the Avery Fisher Prize and also by a MacArthur Award in 2002. Mr. Meyer's most recent recording is a collection of Bach trios with Chris Thile and Yo-Yo Ma, and he was honored with his fifth Grammy award in 2015 for his bass and mandolin recording with Chris Thile. As a composer, his music has been premiered and recorded by Emanuel Ax, Joshua Bell, Yo-Yo Ma, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Bela Fleck, Zakir Hussain, Hilary Hahn, and the Emerson String Quartet, among others. This year the Nashville Symphony and the Aspen Music Festival and School commissioned his first purely orchestral work which was premiered by the Nashville Symphony in March 2017. Additionally, Bravo! Vail and The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields commissioned an Overture for Violin and Orchestra that was premiered by Joshua Bell and ASMF in June 2017.

"...the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively un-chronicled history of his instrument."

–The New Yorker

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