



The Three Violin Sonatas by Béla Bartók:
Guillermo Figueroa, violin
Sheng-Yuan Kuan, piano

LYNN

Conservatory of Music

2015-2016 Season

The Three Violin Sonatas by Béla Bartók:
Guillermo Figueroa, violin
Sheng-Yuan Kuan, piano
Thursday, January 14, 2016 – 7:30 p.m.
Count and Countess de Hoernle International Center
Amarnick-Goldstein Concert Hall

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Sonata No. 2 for violin and piano, Sz. 76 (1922)
Molto moderato
Allegretto – Poco piu vivo
(the two movements are played without pause)

Sonata for Solo Violin, Sz. 117
(1944)
Tempo di ciaccona
Fuga
Melodia
Presto

Intermission

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano, Sz. 75 (1921)
Allegro appassionato
Adagio
Allegro – Allegro molto

Biographies

Guillermo Figueroa

Renowned both as conductor and violinist, **Guillermo Figueroa** is Music Director of the **Music in the Mountains Festival** in Durango, Colorado and Music Director and Conductor of the Lynn Philharmonia. He was also the Founder and **Artistic Director** of *The Figueroa Music and Arts Project* in Albuquerque. Additionally, he was the Music Director of both the **New Mexico Symphony** and the **Puerto Rico Symphony**. **With this last orchestra** he performed to critical acclaim at **Carnegie Hall** in 2003, the **Kennedy Center** in 2004 and **Spain** in 2005.

His international appearances as a Guest Conductor include the **Toronto Symphony**, **Iceland Symphony**, the **Baltic Philharmonic** in Poland, **Orquesta del Teatro Argentino** in La Plata (Buenos Aires), **Xalapa** (Mexico), the **Orquesta de Cordoba** in Spain and the **Orquesta Sinfonica de Chile**. In the US he has appeared with the symphony orchestras of **Detroit**, **New Jersey**, **Memphis**, **Phoenix**, **Colorado**, **Berkeley**, **Tucson**, **Santa Fe**, **Toledo**, **Fairfax**, **San Jose**, **Juilliard Orchestra** and the **New York City Ballet** at Lincoln Center.

Mr. Figueroa has collaborated with many of the leading artists of our time, including Itzhak Perlman, YoYo Ma, Hilary Hahn, Placido Domingo, Joshua Bell, Olga Kern, Janos Starker, James Galway, Midori, Horacio Gutierrez, the Emerson and Fine Arts String Quartets, Ben Hepner, Rachel Barton Pine, Pepe and Angel Romero, Elmar Oliveira, Vadim Gluzman and Philippe Quint.

Mr. Figueroa has conducted the premieres of works by important composers, such as Roberto Sierra, Ernesto Cordero and Miguel del Águila. An advocate for new music, Mr. Figueroa and the NMSO won an Award for Adventurous Programming

from the League of American Orchestras in 2007. A Berlioz enthusiast, he created the most comprehensive **Berlioz Festival** in the US in 2003 for the composer's Bicentennial.

A renowned violinist as well, his recording of Ernesto Cordero's violin concertos for the Naxos label received a Latin Grammy nomination in 2012. Figueroa was **Concertmaster** of the **New York City Ballet**, and a **Founding Member** and Concertmaster of the **Orpheus Chamber Orchestra**, making over fifty recordings for **Deutsche Grammophon**. Also accomplished on the viola, Figueroa performs frequently as guest of the Fine Arts, American, Amernet and Orion string quartets. He is Violin Professor at the Lynn Conservatory.

Figueroa has given the world premieres of four violin concertos written for him: in 1995 the *Concertino* by Mario Davidovsky, at **Carnegie Hall** with **Orpheus**; in 2007 the *Double Concerto* by Harold Farberman, with the **American Symphony at Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center**; in 2008 the *Violin Concerto* by Miguel del Aguila, commissioned by Figueroa and the NMSO and in 2009 *Insula, Suite Concertante*, by Ernesto Cordero with the **Solisti di Zagreb** in Zagreb.

He has appeared at the **Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival**, **Music in the Vineyards** in California, Festival Groba in Spain and **Music from Angel Fire**. Figueroa has recorded the **Three Violin Sonatas by Bartok** for the Eroica Classical label, with pianist Robert Koenig, and an album of virtuoso violin music by for the NMSO label, with pianist Ivonne Figueroa.

Mr. Figueroa studied with his father and uncle at the Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico. At the Juilliard School his teachers were Oscar Shumsky and Felix Galimir. Conducting studies were with Harold Farberman in New York.

Mr. Figueroa performs on a 1686 Stradivarius violin, known as the "Figueroa Strad".

Sheng-Yuan Kuan

Pianist **Sheng-Yuan Kuan** has performed at the Kennedy Center, Weill Recital Hall, Taiwan National Concert Hall, and Musikverein in Vienna. She is a featured artist at the Heifetz International Music Institute, KUAF/Fulbright Summer Chamber Music Festival, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's Chamber Music by Candlelight series, and the Sylvia Adalman Chamber Concert Series at Peabody Conservatory. Tim Smith of the Baltimore Sun praised Ms. Kuan as "(having) admirable technical finesse and expressive flair at the piano."

Ms. Kuan has collaborated with famed musicians such as Nobuko Imai, Stefan Jackiw, Espen Lilleslatten, Richard Stolzman, KengYuen Tseng, Time for Three, and members of the Borromeo and Parker Quartets and Apollo Trio. She also made appearances at music festivals such as Bowdoin, Aria, Sarasota, Yellow Barn, Gijon Piano Festival and Norfolk Summer Music Festival.

Ms. Kuan has received accolades from many competitions, including the 13th Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna (Best Female Pianist Award, 2009), the 12th Taipei Chopin International Piano Competition (3rd Prize, 2008), Corpus Christi International Competition in Texas (2nd Prize, 2008), and New York Kosciuszko Chopin Piano Competition (3rd Prize, 2003). She was also the recipient of Honolulu Morning Music Club Scholarship, Peabody Conservatory's Career Development Grant, Chamber Music Awards and Accompanying Assistantship.

Currently serving as the collaborative pianist at Lynn University, Ms. Kuan holds degrees from the Yale School of Music and the Manhattan School of Music. She is a candidate of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the Peabody Conservatory under the guidance of Professor Boris Slutsky. Her teachers have included Peter Frankl, Scott McCarrey and the late Constance Keene.

Béla Bartók

The Three Violin Sonatas

By Guillermo Figueroa

Béla Bartók, acknowledged as one of the most important composers and creators of the 20th century and of all time, was nevertheless mostly known as a concert pianist and an important musicologist during his lifetime. It was not until after his death in 1945 that the monumental proportions of his achievement as a composer began to be understood and fully appreciated.

Greatly influenced by Brahms and Strauss in his youth, Bartók grew keenly aware of the need to find his own musical language. This began to develop in the course of numerous and lengthy trips through the Eastern European countryside. During these travels, and often in the company of kindred spirit Zoltán Kodály, he collected and documented (with the aid of a primitive gramophone machine) thousands of examples of what he considered the true folk music of the peasantry; not the sweetened, stereotyped “gypsy” tunes handed down by Liszt



and Brahms, but original melodies and modalities that went back many centuries. This deep involvement with diverse cultures and their music, predominantly that of his native country's peasants, formed the roots of a profoundly original harmonic and melodic idiom, which dominated his compositions for the rest of his life, and which makes him, in the eyes of his people, the musical embodiment of the Hungarian soul.

The *Three Violin Sonatas* represent two different stages of Bartók's creative life: *The Two Sonatas for Violin and Piano*,

from his most radical and experimental early period, and the *Sonata for Solo Violin*, one of the four last great works that he completed shortly before his death.

***Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano* (1922)**

The *Second Sonata* finds Bartók in his most adventurous and atonal phase, while never losing sight of his folkloric roots. Written shortly after a successful trip to Paris, during which he met Schoenberg, Debussy and Stravinsky, it is one of his most 'international' works. In great contrast to the *First Sonata*, the thematic materials are brief, sparse and rigidly controlled. Only the *Third* and *Fourth String Quartets* approach this intensity and concentration of thought. The two movements are played without pause, and one can almost perceive the outline of a traditional *czardas*.

The first five measures of the *Sonata* present most of the material to be developed throughout the entire work. The initial low F# in the piano and the high E in the violin form a major second, or inversely, a seventh, important intervals in the harmonic structure. The violin melody gives rise to everything that follows, although the two instruments at times seem to be inhabiting different worlds. Cluster chords in the piano and wide melodic leaps in the violin create an almost surreal mood. The second movement begins with a seeming inversion of the original melody heard in the first movement. Here, frequent metric changes and sarcastic phrases create an atmosphere of nervousness. The speed and intensity build inexorably until, after a furious violin cadenza, the initial first movement theme returns in a statement of frantic exultation. The music then slowly dissolves, ending in a surprising and gloriously radiant C Major.

Sonata for Solo Violin

The *Sonata for Solo Violin* is created in a period of desperation and anxiety for the composer, due to his serious illness (later

revealed to be a form of leukemia) and to his enforced exile from his beloved homeland. In 1944, nearly in poverty, and living in the urban jungle of New York, so far from the warmth of the home environment he had known all his life, a commission from the violinist Yehudi Menuhin compels Bartók to overcome his anguish and produce a work that reaches the heights attained by Bach in his solo violin works, and which gives testimony to the indomitable strength of his spirit.

Bartók follows the model of Bach's unaccompanied Sonatas (not the Partita model), and he even suggests a combination of the two by including a movement in *Tempo di Ciaccona*, except that he places it at the beginning of the work, not at the end, as Bach does. Also inversely from Bach, the movements go from more to less dramatic tension, with the heaviest emotional weight in the first two. Like Bach, Bartók greatly expands the limits of violin technique; double and triple stops, *glissandi*, double harmonics and 'Bartók pizzicati' (pulling the string and letting it slap against the fingerboard) are all used to great effect and purely musical purpose.

The *Tempo di Ciaccona* makes immediate reference to the German master's *Ciaccona* (Chaconne). But while Bach's movement is a classic set of variations on a harmonic sequence, Bartók's is a fully developed *sonata form* movement, with the forceful double dotted figures suggesting not just its French Baroque origins but also the characteristic Hungarian 'snap'. The tonality is G initially, as well as the recapitulation. The somber second theme group, centered on E flat, relaxes the rhythmic tension, and develops a complex counterpoint. An extensive *coda*, based on the second theme, brings the movement to a tranquil end in G Major, which serves as the dominant key to the next movement, in C.

The *Fuga* is extremely complex, in four voices, built on a disjointed and highly chromatic theme that revolves around the note C, never settling on the Major or minor mode. Inversion, augmentation, imitation and other techniques derived from

Bach's fugues are used to create a heated, expressionistic and obsessive atmosphere. At the end, just when the music seems to reach a triumphant and affirmative conclusion, Bartók brusquely dispels all semblance of conformity with the same brutal minor triad that began the movement.

After two such intense movements, there is no choice but to relax the tension. This is achieved in the *Melodia*, a deceptively simple ABA form movement, based on a melancholic and folk-song infused melody. It's curious that this melody reminds us of the theme of the second movement of Brahms' Double Concerto, since Bartók employs here one of Brahms' favorite formulas, that of using the relative third from the work's main tonality as the key of contrasting movements (in this case E flat, the lower third of G, the main key of the whole *Sonata*). Let's not forget that Brahms was the first great model for the young Bartók. After the central section, built on tremolo chords (reminiscent of the classic Hungarian folk instrument, the *cimbalom*), the melody returns in highly ornamented fashion, ending in ethereal double harmonics.

The final *Presto* is basically a Rondo, alternating mysterious passages in chromatic quarter tones (reminiscent of the 2nd movement of his 4th String Quartet) with diatonic rhythmic passages in a dance-style. These are in the classic 3/8 meter of the Gigue that conclude nearly all Baroque Suites. The next to last interlude develops a wistful melody, based on a scale with the flattened sixth, giving it a modal touch. The dance music returns but gradually slows down to a halt, after which a surging scale rushes the music to its affirmative conclusion in G Major. Yehudi Menuhin prepared an edition of the *Sonata*, the only one available until very recently, with Bartók's grudging approval. This edition changed some passages, including the extraordinary and innovative music in quarter tones in the last movement. Tonight's performance presents Bartók's original version and is based on the new edition made by Peter Bartók, the composer's second son, and on my analysis of the original

manuscript of the *Sonata*, a copy of which Peter Bartók gave me in 1995.



Peter (left) and Béla Bartók in 1932

Sonata No. 1 for Violin and Piano

This is a work written on a grand scale, in the manner of Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata* or the E flat Sonata by Strauss. The rhapsodic, passionate style of the first movement, as well as the great abundance and richness of thematic material, give a picture of a feverish mind bursting with ideas. Curiously, many of these elements are never shared by the two instruments, which are also often in different tonalities. This bi-tonality is a central feature of the harmonic scheme, resulting in a feeling of ambiguity that is never resolved (the famous bi-tonal ending of Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* comes readily to mind). The great leaps and yearning contours of the melodies are highly expressionistic. There is also evidence of Bartók's fascination with Debussy's music, in a passage that is suggestive of Debussy's *Clair de Lune*.

The second movement, in simple ABA form, starts with a plaintive, anguished melody in the violin alone, to which the piano coolly and dispassionately responds with clear, bell-like chords. In the central section the bell-tolling becomes obsessive and menacing, before the first part returns, highly ornamented in the manner of a *cadenza*.

The final allegro finds Bartók at his wildest, barbaric mode. All the virtuoso and Gypsy elements of violin playing are displayed in a *moto-perpetuo* of blazing speed and primitive energy. The many humorous and burlesque interruptions do little to stop the final outburst of *Tzigane* fire and spirit.



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- Jon Robertson, dean

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