

ROBINSON, CHRISTA MM OBOE, May 3, 2020

CPE Bach (1714-1788)

Sonata in G minor, WQ 132, H.562 (1747)

Duration: 13min

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (C.P.E. Bach) was employed as the court harpsichordist to King Frederick the Great of Prussia. It is believed that the Sonata in A minor, WQ 132, H 562 for solo flute, was written for the King, an accomplished flautist. It was written in 1747, and although there isn't a found manuscript for the work (the King prohibited public printing of his royal commissions), it was eventually published in 1763. This particular solo sonata has now been borrowed by oboists for performance. Transposing the work down a whole step to G minor better suits the oboe's range.

C.P.E. Bach grew up in arguably one of the most famous musical families in history, as the 5th son of Johann Sebastian and Maria Barbara Bach. He developed his own unique voice by both paying tribute to the solo sonatas and partitas of his father (notably his Partita in A minor for Solo Flute, BWV 1013), and moving his own composition toward a new, more simple style known as the Galant style, popular between 1720 and 1770. C.P.E. Bach did not employ the popular French dance forms as his father did (Allemande-Corrente-Sarabande-Bourrée), but chose to use a three movement form with tempos of slow-fast-fast (Poco Adagio-Allegro-Allegro).

Although the second movement of C.P.E. Bach's sonata implies a dance-like feel, it is not strict to a particular dance form. Each movement reflects the more modern approach of the time with simple, short melodic phrase lengths, and harmonies progressing slowly throughout each movement, true to the Galant Style. C.P.E. Bach and this new style influenced the writing of his younger brother, Johann Christian Bach (the 18th child of J.S. Bach), who is credited with influencing the Classical style of both Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Six Metamorphoses After Ovid, Op. 49 (1949)

Duration: 13min

A central figure in 20th century British music, Benjamin Britten is known for his large works *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1945) and the *War Requiem* (1962) as well as his many operas including *Peter Grimes* (1945) and *Death in Venice* (1973). Although some of his works experimented with atonality, his music is mostly tonal, with rich harmony and lyricism.

Of his chamber music, Britten composed a substantial number of works featuring the oboe, including the *Phantasy Quartet Op.2* for Oboe and String Trio (1932) dedicated to oboist Leon Goossens, *Two Insect Pieces for Oboe and Piano* (1935) dedicated to oboist Sylvia Spencer, *Temporal Variations* (1936) dedicated to author Montagu Slater, and the *Six Metamorphoses After Ovid Op.49* (1949) dedicated to oboist Joy Boughton.

In this work, Britten sets six stories from *Metamorphoses*, a Latin narrative poem written by the Roman poet Ovid. In each movement, he enriches the program of the text with relevant compositional techniques. For example, in *I. Pan*, Britten writes "senza misura", reflective of the character Pan's free spirit. In *II. Phaeton*, the rapid chariot ride is represented through the driving, unrelenting rhythm in compound meter with a marking of *vivace ritmico*. In *III. Niobe* the marking *piangendo* (crying) is brought to life in the wailing downward melodic gesture presented in the first measure, and repeated throughout. In *IV. Bacchus*, the festive, repetitive and heavy dotted rhythms throughout suggest the dance at a bacchanale. In *V. Narcissus*, Britten composes a conversation between Narcissus and his own reflection by creating a composite melody (two different melodies combined to make one musical line) with "stems down" for Narcissus himself, and "stems up" for his reflection in the water. In *VI. Arethusa*, he writes wave-like arpeggios reflective of both the river god Alpheus, and Arethusa herself, who turns into a water fountain.

- I. **PAN** *who played upon the reed pipe which was Syrinx, his beloved.*
- II. **PHAETON** *who rode upon the chariot of the sun for one day and hurled into the river Padus by a thunderbolt.*
- III. **NIOBE** *who, lamenting the death of her fourteen children, was turned into a mountain.*
- IV. **BACCHUS** *at whose feasts is heard the noise of giggling women's tattling tongues and shouting out of boys.*
- V. **NARCISSUS** *who fell in love with his own image and became a flower.*
- VI. **ARETHUSA** *who, flying from the love of Alpheus the river god, was turned into a flower.*

Ruth Crawford-Seeger (1901-1953)

Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for solo oboe or flute (1930)

Duration: 6min

The compositional talents of Ruth Crawford Seeger were discovered by the American modernist composer Henry Cowell in Chicago, 1925. He noted her interesting use of dissonance and pre-serial techniques, and encouraged her move to New York City to study with Charles Seeger, known for his methodology in dissonant counterpoint. It was in New York, and during this short period of time, that Ruth Crawford Seeger composed the works she is most known for, including the influential *String Quartet* (1931) and the *Four Diaphonic Suites* (1930), from where the *Diaphonic Suite No. 1 for solo oboe or flute* comes.

Though her own composing all but ceased after marrying Charles Seeger, she did work to edit his treatise "*Tradition and Experiment in (the New) Music*", raised her family, and worked with John and Alan Lomax to archive American folk music for children (notably *American Folk Songs for Children* of 1948 and *Animal Folk Songs for Children* of 1950). Although she struggled to have her own works published, her innovative style (proto-serial, dissonant counterpoint, ultramodernist) influenced later composers, notably Elliot Carter, Milton Babbitt and Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006)

Fantasy for Oboe Op.90 (1966)

Duration: 5min

Sir Malcolm Arnold was an English composer who, like his teacher Gordon Jacob (Royal Conservatory of Music), held steadfast against the post World War II trend in serialism and wrote mostly tonal music. In this style, he amassed a body of work including operas, ballets, orchestra works, chamber music and film scores (including the Academy Award winning score to "Bridge on the River Kwai"). He wrote a *Fantasy* for each of the orchestral instruments, and his *Fantasy for Oboe Op. 90* (1966), was commissioned by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to be a test piece for the International Wind Competition in 1966. Despite being commissioned as a test piece, the work now stands as an elegant addition to the standard repertoire.

Bernard Rands (1934-)

Memo 8 for unaccompanied oboe (2000)

Duration: 10min

"I put myself in touch with an area of myself that I would not otherwise be in touch with, and when I offer my music to an audience, I offer them the same opportunity to be in touch with an area of themselves that they wouldn't otherwise be. That, for me, is the main role of music of all kinds." -Bernard Rands

European turned American living composer Bernard Rands has contributed both large scale works, and a vast collection of smaller chamber pieces. His *Memo 8* (2000) is part of a collection of solo works (*Memo 1-8*) composed over a span of almost 30 years. *Memo 8* is dedicated to Richard Killmer, Professor of Music at the Eastman School of music and was commissioned by a consortium of 93 former members of his studio. The piece moves in an organic and through-composed way, with each section marked by a different pitch as a recurring entity. The melodies revolve around and continuously return to that pitch, marking its importance to the structure of the work. The oboist is asked to perform both florid passagework and moments of complete stillness.