



A Far Cry

Memory

Saturday, Feb. 8, 7:30 p.m.

Program

Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten

Arvo Pärt
(b. 1935)

Serenade No. 6 in D Major, "Serenata Notturna," K.239

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

I. Marcia. Maestoso

II. Minuetto

III. Rondo. Allegretto

Introduction and Allegro for Strings, Op. 47

Edward Elgar
(1857-1934)

—Intermission—

Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
(1840-1893)

I. Pezzo in forma di sonatina. Andante non troppo—Allegro moderato

II. Valse. Moderato. Tempo di Valse

III. Elegia. Larghetto elegiaco

IV. Finale (Tema russo). Andante—Allegro con spirito

A FAR CRY is presented by arrangement with
Middleton Arts Management.

98B Long Highway, Little Compton, RI 02837

PLEASE NOTE

- Latecomers will be seated at the house manager's discretion.
- Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
- Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus!

Program notes

By Kathryn J Allwine Bacasnot

Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

Arvo Pärt wrote of Benjamin Britten: “Just before his death I began to appreciate the unusual purity of his music—I had had the impression of the same kind of purity in the ballads of Guillaume de Machaut. And besides, for a long time I had wanted to meet Britten personally—and now it would not come to that.” In observation of that grief, his *Cantus* opens and closes with composed silence. Then, the bell tolls, sending the divided strings into a sequence of descending A-minor scales imitating at varying speeds, growing and swelling like ripples produced by a pebble dropping into a placid lake; the creative life of one person reaching outward, forever impacting others.

The Estonian Pärt had compositional beginnings in serialism, which earned him an official slap on the wrist from the Soviet government. Later, Pärt’s studies of J.S. Bach and Gregorian chant slowly evolved into a personal compositional style that continues to be at the heart of his oeuvre: *tintinnabuli*, the ringing sound of bells that alludes to a pitch’s sound wave being mathematically divided into the overtone series, the basis of Western music theory and its harmonic progressions. A single pitch is actually an entire sequence working together—the “fundamental” and its “partials,” to use the lingo (much like the “notes” of flavor that combine to produce a particular taste of wine). Thus, when you hear the fundamental A-natural you also hear the partials from the A scale sounding sympathetically in a pattern: A, E, A, C-sharp, E, etc. The musical universe orbiting a single note.

Serenade No. 6 in D Major, “Serenata Notturna,” K.239

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

What do “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” and “Serenata Notturna” have in common, other than they both allude to the night? [Insert Jeopardy theme music here.] Answer: They are both serenades. “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” is a nickname for the Serenade No. 13 in G Major, K. 525. Fact:

historically, serenades were pieces performed outside, usually in the evening. Thus, they are quite literally “a little night music.”

In the years surrounding the composition of the “Serenata Notturna,” the prolific teenager/ twenty-something Mozart penned a list that reads like the lyrics to the holiday song “The 12 Days of Christmas”: 16 minuets for orchestra, eight minuets for piano, six piano sonatas, five violin concertos, four symphonies, two church sonatas, two masses and an opera. That’s not even half of his output during the decade, for, included are a smattering of divertimentos and serenades—nearly one of each per year.

The real treat of hearing the Serenade No. 6 in D Major (“Serenata Notturna”), K. 239 is that it is not “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik,” (which was written a little over a decade later). With so much Mozart from which to choose, it’s rather astonishing that audiences are somehow always tuned into the same top 40 hits. What can sometimes come across as precious in “Eine Kleine” is elegantly precocious in “Serenata Notturna.”

In 1776, while the United States was declaring its independence, Mozart wrote this piece for strings divided into two groups and timpani. Serenades have a somewhat vague formal structure, but by the classical era the genre had settled in to a comfortable multi-movement form, often kicking off in sonata form and containing at least one movement made up of a minuet and trio. (In this piece it’s the second movement.) The addition of timpani in “Serenata Notturna” adds a kind of humorous gravity to the mostly light and frothy spirit of the string arrangements: it’s the dark to their light, the espresso to the milk foam. The contrast is particularly prevalent in the rondo of the third movement, where the timpani has its own variation before the rondo theme glitteringly nudges back, eventually evaporating serenely into the evening air.

Introduction and Allegro for Strings, Op. 47

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

If one wanted to supply Elgar’s career with a subtitle, a plausible choice could be, “The Agony and the Ecstasy.” Success did not come quickly or easily for the composer, and those doubts

were exacerbated by insecurities of social class and lack of formal training. (Plans to attend the esteemed Leipzig Conservatory evaporated into nothing because he didn't have the money.) He felt these shortcomings so acutely that he once responded to an invitation to attend a luncheon in honor of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee by writing, "You would not wish your board to be disgraced by the presence of a piano-tuner's son and his wife." Elgar spent years dabbling in business and teaching, cobbling together a living taking whatever musical engagement he could, all whilst struggling to maintain his own belief that he could "make it" as a composer.

Then, in 1899, it happened. His *Enigma Variations* became a hit and changed his career from that point onward. The new fame eventually took him to New England, where he was given an honorary doctorate from Yale University, thanks, in part, to Samuel Sanford, a professor there. Immediately after his return from the United States, Elgar started composing a new piece (dedicated to Sanford) for string quartet and string orchestra. The format is often seen as a throwback to the concertino and ripieno of the baroque concerto grosso. Diana McVeagh notes that Elgar said he "learnt to write for strings from Handel" (perhaps a catalyst for the idea of a baroque type of set-up), and "knew well that a single voice can be more flexible, more wayward, than a group." The lyrical theme, introduced by a solo viola line, is said to have been derived from the memory of a Welsh tune the composer heard during a visit.

Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Tchaikovsky once wrote, "I don't just like Mozart, I idolize him." In an era predating recording devices, the only way one could become familiar with hearing the works of a composer was to either attend concerts where the music was being performed, or be wealthy enough to hire people to play it for you at home. So, to broaden public knowledge of his idol, in 1887 Tchaikovsky rearranged four Mozart pieces into the Suite No. 4 in G Major, Op. 61, "Mozartiana". Seven years earlier, he wrote the Serenade for Strings in C Major, the first movement of which was meant to be reflective of Mozart, whom he thought was "devoid of self-satisfaction and boastfulness...a

genius whose childlike innocence, gentleness of spirit...are scarcely of this earth."

How appropriate that those sentiments found an outlet in a serenade, a genre richly cultivated by Mozart who transformed them from the musical toss-offs they historically were (often serenades were only performed once and enjoyed casually in the evening, like an audible amuse-bouche) into sublime concert works worthy of repeat performances.

The Serenade for Strings is distinctly Tchaikovsky, yet distilled. Here he leaves aside his occasionally bombastic sensibilities and overt desire for virtuosity in order to showcase his extraordinary gift for lyrical melody, which in this setting sparkles like a rare jewel catching and embracing rays of light. In a letter to his patroness and friend Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote, "It is a heartfelt piece and so, I dare to think, is not lacking in real qualities."

Observed as "string quintet in texture," it begins with a lush descending homophonic motif commencing what will be a tense relationship between gravity and anti-gravity via long descending and ascending lines throughout the larger structure of the first three movements. The effect is a work that breathes with lines working in harmony of movement—which is perhaps why George Balanchine set the work to choreography. The charming Valse of the second movement glimmers all the more next to the noble melancholy of the *Élégie*, featuring melodies infused with signature Tchaikovsky yearning and striving. The *Finale* temporarily appears to break the tug between rising and descending in its suspended hovering, like an autumn leaf fluttering in midair right before it is carried away in a flurry of an upward breeze ... or, in this case, a whirlwind of Russian folk melodies, which are in turn abruptly brought to an end with the solemn return of the opening material. It returns only briefly, however, before it dissolves effortlessly in a seamless metamorphosis back into vivacity.

Program notes by Kathryn J Allwine Bacasmot. Kathryn is a pianist/harpsichordist, musicologist, music and cultural critic, and a freelance writer. She is a graduate of New England Conservatory and writes program annotations for ensembles nationwide.

About the performers

Called a “world-wide phenomenon” by Boston’s WBUR, **A Far Cry** has nurtured a distinct approach to music making since its founding in 2007. The self-conducted orchestra is a democracy in which decisions are made collectively and leadership rotates among the players (“Criers”). This structure has led to consistently thoughtful, innovative and unpredictable programming — and impactful collaborations with celebrated performers and composers. Over the past year, A Far Cry has risen to the top of Billboard’s Traditional Classical Chart, been named Boston’s best classical ensemble by *The Improper Bostonian*, and celebrated two Grammy nominations for its *Visions and Variations*. Boston Musical Intelligencer sums up the group: “In its first decade, this conductor-free ensemble has earned and sustained a reputation for top-drawer playing, engrossing programming and outstanding guest artists.”

A Far Cry’s omnivorous approach has led to collaborations with artists such as Yo-Yo Ma, Simone Dinnerstein, Roomful of Teeth, the Silkroad Ensemble, Vijay Iyer and David Krakauer. A Far Cry’s 13th season in 2019-20 includes nine Boston-area concerts as part of the group’s own series, and a celebration of the conclusion of a 10-year residency at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum with three concerts—the last a blowout/collaboration with Boston hip-hop luminary Moe Pope. The orchestra also tours its “Memory” program, with concerts at the University of Colorado, Wake Forest University and a debut performance at the Kennedy Center in March.

Recent tour highlights include two new commissioning projects: Philip Glass’ third piano concerto with soloist Simone Dinnerstein and *The Blue Hour*, “a gorgeous and remarkably unified work” (*Washington Post*) written by a collaborative of five leading female composers—Rachel Grimes, Angélica Negrón, Shara Nova, Caroline Shaw and Sarah Kirkland Snider—and featuring Grammy-winning singer Luciana Souza.

A Far Cry’s Crier Records launched auspiciously in 2014 with the Grammy-nominated album *Dreams and Prayers*. The label’s second release, *Law of Mosaics*, was included on many 2014 Top 10 lists, notably from *New Yorker* music critic Alex Ross and WQXR’s Q2 Music, which named A Far Cry

as one of the “Imagination-Grabbing, Trailblazing Artists of 2014.” In 2018, Crier Records released A Far Cry’s *Visions and Variations*, featuring variations by Britten and Prokofiev, and Ethan Wood’s re-imagining of Mozart’s “Ah vous-dirai-je Maman.” The album received two Grammy nominations, including one for Best Chamber Music Performance.

The 18 Criers are proud to call Boston home, and maintain strong roots in the city, rehearsing at their storefront music center in Jamaica Plain and fulfilling the role of Chamber Orchestra-in-Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Collaborating with local students through educational partnerships with the New England Conservatory and Project STEP, A Far Cry aims to pass on the spirit of collaboratively empowered music to the next generation.

Violin

Alex Fortes
Catherine Cosbey
Jae Cosmos Lee
Janny Joo
Jesse Irons
Katherine Winterstein
Megumi Stohs Lewis
Omar Chen Guey
Zenas Hsu

Viola

Ashe Gordon
Jason Fisher
Sam Kelder
Sarah Darling

Cello

Aristides Rivas
Michael Unterman
Rafael Popper-Keizer

Bass

Karl Doty
Lizzie Burns

Timpani/Bell

Chihiro Shibayama