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Music in the Mansion

LINCOLN TRIO

DESIRÉE RUHSTRAT, VIOLIN
DAVID CUNLIFFE, CELLO
MARTA AZNAVOORIAN, PIANO

Thursday, February 15, 2024, 7:30pm



PROGRAM

Silver Dagger (2009)
Written for the Lincoln Trio

Stacy Garrop (b.1969)

Piano Trio (1921)
Moderato ma appassionato
Andante molto semplice
Allegro vigoroso

Rebecca Clarke (1886–1979)

Intermission

Piano Trio in C major, Opus 87
Allegro
Andante con moto
Scherzo
Finale: Allegro giocoso

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

PROGRAM NOTES

STACY GARROP

Stacy Garrop was born in Columbus, Ohio and grew up in the Bay Area. Her music is centered on dramatic and lyrical storytelling; as she says, “the sharing of stories is a defining element of our humanity; we strive to share with others the experiences and concepts that we find compelling.”

Garrop has won numerous awards including a Fromm Music Foundation Grant, Raymond and Beverly Sackler Music Composition Prize, and three Barlow Endowment commissions, as well as competitions sponsored by the American Composers Orchestra, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Omaha Symphony, Charleston Symphony Orchestra, and the New England Philharmonic.

Garrop’s works are featured on over 20 CDs, including the Lincoln Trio’s *Notable Women* disc. She has been commissioned by numerous ensembles and organizations including the Albany Symphony, Chanticleer, Chicago A Cappella, and San Francisco Choral Society.

The composer writes: “In 1994, I heard for the first time an Appalachian folk song called ‘Silver Dagger’ at a folk festival. The simplicity of the melody joined with a cautionary love tale enthralled me, and I spent the next several years researching the song. What emerged from my research were dozens of variants of the song, in text as well as melody and title. The variants that I discovered could be grouped more or less under three different titles: ‘Silver Dagger,’ ‘Drowsy Sleeper,’ and ‘Katie Dear.’

All of these versions revolve around the same Romeo and Juliet premise: a boy asks a girl for her parents’ consent to marry. The story has various endings: the parents won’t give approval, so the girl and boy each end their lives with a silver dagger; the girl turns the boy down and sends him away to find another love; the girl forsakes her parents and runs away with the boy; and so on.

In my trio, I incorporate two complete versions of the folk song, one of ‘Katie Dear’ and one of ‘Silver Dagger,’ as well as motives from a variant of ‘Drowsy Sleeper.’”

REBECCA CLARK

Born and raised in England, with a German mother and an American father, Rebecca Clarke spent much of her adulthood in the United States, and claimed both English and American nationality. Her childhood, in particular her father’s cruelty, is described in her memoir. But it is also clear that her family was artistically inclined and her musical studies were encouraged. Clarke enrolled at the Royal Academy of Music in 1903, where she studied violin. She was abruptly withdrawn from the institution in 1905, when her harmony teacher, Percy Miles, proposed marriage. In 1907 she began a composition course at the Royal College of Music. Again, she was unable to finish her studies, as her father suddenly banished her from the family home.

To support herself, Clarke embarked on a performing career as a violist, and in 1912 she became one of the first female musicians in a fully professional (and formerly male) ensemble, the Queen’s Hall Orchestra. With the onset of World War II, Clarke found herself in the United States, where she lived alternately with her two brothers and their families. During this period she returned to composing. Her productivity ended, however, when she accepted a position as a nanny in 1942.

Her best known works, the *Viola Sonata* and the *Piano Trio*, were both runners-up in competitions that were part of the Berkshire Festival of Chamber Music (Massachusetts). One contemporary report implies that during the anonymous competition, some judges mistakenly identified the *Viola Sonata* as written by Ravel, while *The Daily Telegraph* supposed “Rebecca Clarke” to be a pseudonym for Ernest Bloch. Both pieces are powerful and expansive examples of post-Romantic sonata form influenced by the German tradition. The clarity of texture and Impressionist vocabulary of these pieces suggest comparisons with Franck and Debussy.

Clarke’s difficulties in publishing the *Piano Trio*, documented in her diaries, may have discouraged her from pursuing publication of later works. Although she has been identified as among the most important British composers of the interwar years, a complete understanding of her significance will only be reached when more of her music is available for study. The Rebecca Clarke Society was established in 2000 to promote the study and performance of her music. (Adapted from an article by Liane Curtis, President

of the Rebecca Clarke Society, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*)

Liane Curtis has also written: “One of Clarke’s ravishing (and best-known) pieces is her *Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello* . . . A number of women—Clara Schumann, Fanny Hensel, Leopoldine Blahetka, Cécile Chaminade, and Amy Beach (pianists all)—have written for this combination, but the *Trio* by Clarke is one of the few composed by a string player. She knew intimately all the possibilities for sound and color that could be expressed by strings, and her experience as an orchestral and chamber music player colored every page of her scores. Clarke was well acquainted with the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masters . . . and among her contemporaries she most admired Debussy, Ravel, Vaughan Williams, and especially Ernest Bloch.”

Christopher Hyde, reviewing a performance of the *Piano Trio*, wrote in the *Portland Press Herald*: “Clarke’s *Piano Trio*, composed in 1921, was a revelation. Most relatively unknown composers, male or female, have been relegated to obscurity deservedly. Clarke is a notable exception. Her music, while tonal, is fiercely individual, complex but entirely legible, and satisfying in both musical and intellectual terms. And her ability to transform a simple motif made me think of the Beethoven quartet earlier in the program.

“The *Trio* reveals a style that is sui generis but bears comparison with Clarke’s contemporary, Shostakovich. For example, the final *Allegro vigoroso* starts out as a highland dance and turns into a macabre and sardonic parody before resolving into a return of the first movement’s memorable themes.”

JOHANNES BRAHMS:

The *Piano Trio in C Major* finds the 49-year-old Brahms at the peak of his creative powers. Each movement is rich in melodic material, which the composer expands, varies, and transforms. The violin and cello introduce the main theme of the first movement in octaves. The strings play this theme at each of its formal statements in the movement except the last, where, finally, the piano is allowed to offer a brilliant declamatory statement that brings the movement to a sweeping close. The sedate second theme appears first in the piano over a rippling accompaniment figure in the left hand; this figure

actually becomes a third subject in its own right. The development is stormy and expansive, Brahms pouring out transformations and variations of his themes. A traditional recapitulation of all the themes and an extensive coda conclude the movement.

The *Andante con moto* consists of a theme and five variations in the key of A minor. The strings present the main theme, a gypsy-like melody of marked Hungarian flavor set against an accompaniment of chords played on the off beat in the piano. The theme is a double theme: the piano plays an equal role with the strings in the five variations. The first, third, and fifth variations are based on the string melody, while the second and fourth are derived from the piano accompaniment of the main theme. Architecturally, the movement builds to a dramatic peak in the third variation where bold questions in the strings are answered by the piano. The romantic fourth variation is notable because it appears in the contrasting key of A major, its elegant theme first stated in the cello.

Instead of the “jest” implied by its title, the C minor *Scherzo* is dark, shadowy, and full of eerie sounds. The predominant dynamic is pianissimo, demanding the utmost delicacy and control from all three players, particularly the pianist. The soaring melody of the contrasting trio in C Major offers a sunny but momentary respite before the ghostly *Scherzo* returns.

The intensity of the finale’s music precludes the humorous playfulness suggested by the marking *Allegro giocoso*. Two themes come into play in this sonata-rondo, which is similar in form to the last movements of Haydn and Mozart. The first is expressive and impassioned, performed mostly by the strings. The contrasting second theme, lighter in character, pits the duple rhythms of the strings against triplets in the piano. As he develops his themes Brahms makes a great deal of the repeated staccato notes with which the piano accompanies the first theme. The exuberance of the movement forms a brilliant conclusion to this masterwork.

—John Noell Moore

ABOUT THE LINCOLN TRIO

Nominated for a 2017 Grammy Award for Best Performance by a Small Ensemble, the **Lincoln Trio** has become one of Chicago's most celebrated chamber ensembles. Praised for their "joy of sheer technical ability, unanimity of phrasing and beautiful blended tone," the Trio takes its name from their home in the heartland of the USA, the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln. The Trio's polished presentations of well-known chamber works and their ability to forge new paths with contemporary repertoire has led to the group's reputation as a first rate ensemble, drawing an eclectic audience of sophisticated music lovers, young admirers of contemporary programs, and students discovering chamber music for the first time. They were the winners of the 2008 Masterplayers International Competition in Venice, Italy.

Each member is an artist of international renown. Violinist **Desirée Ruhstrat** has performed throughout the United States and Europe, appearing at the White House and performing on a live radio broadcast heard around the world with the Berlin Radio Orchestra; cellist **David Cunliffe** has performed with the BBC and Royal Scottish orchestras as well as touring as a member of the Balanescu Quartet, and pianist **Marta Aznavoorian** has appeared with the Chicago Symphony and has performed at the Kennedy Center and the Sydney Opera House.

Formed in 2003, the Trio has performed throughout the United States, including appearances at the Ravinia Music Festival, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra's Beethoven Chamber Music Series, the Lane Concert Series at the University of Vermont, Central Texas Orchestral Society, Columbus Chamber Music series, and a tour on behalf of the Ravinia Festival celebrating the Lincoln Bicentennial,

including a kickoff celebration in Springfield, Illinois with President Obama. In Chicago they are frequent guests of classical radio station WFMT and have been featured on Arts Across Illinois TV, NEIU's Jewel Box Series, the Fazioli Concert Series, Music in the Loft, University of Chicago, Columbia University, Unity Temple, and the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series. In 2011, on behalf of the Ravinia Festival, the Trio toured in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Vietnam.

Champions of new music, the Trio has performed numerous compositions written for them, including premieres of seven works by members of the Chicago Composers Consortium. The Trio's discography, on the Cedille label, includes:

Notable Women, featuring works by Grammy and Pulitzer Prize winning composers Jennifer Higdon, Lera Auerbach, Augusta Read Thomas, Laura Schwendinger, and Stacy Garrop;

Music from Our Homelands, 20th-century piano trios by composers from the individual players' ancestral homelands of Switzerland (Frank Martin), England (Rebecca Clarke), and Armenia (Arno Babajanian);

Turina: The Complete Chamber Works for Strings and Piano (a 2-CD set);

Trios From the City of Big Shoulders offers engaging, rarely heard piano trios by 20th-century Chicago composers Leo Sowerby, winner of the Rome Prize and Pulitzer Prize for music, and Ernst Bacon, recipient of three Guggenheim Fellowships and a Pulitzer Fellowship; and

Trios from Contemporary Chicago, featuring Augusta Read Thomas, Sean Okpebholo, Stacy Garrop, Shulamit Ran, and Mischa Zupko.

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