

**South Bay Chamber Music Society**  
March 29 & 31, 2019

*Musicians of the Pacific Trio:*

Edith Orloff, piano  
Roger Wilkie, violin

Program Notes by Boglárka Kiss, D.M.A.



Nowadays, the musical term *sonata* may refer to a genre as well as a compositional form. As a genre, the *sonata* became standardized during the Classical era and is generally thought of as a multi-movement work for one or two instruments. *Sonata form* became distilled over a period of approximately half a century in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Most commonly, it is a compositional structure that is featured in the symphony, concerto, sonata, and other chamber works.

Our very own Robert Thies pondered the role of pianists in chamber music, focusing on sonatas in his article, “I am Not an Accompanist.” Please click the following link to read his article:  
[http://robertthies.org/rthies\\_main/documents/CMTarticle.pdf](http://robertthies.org/rthies_main/documents/CMTarticle.pdf)

**Sonata for Piano and Violin in B-flat Major, K 454 (1784)**  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)



The Sonata in B-flat Major is in a class all by itself among Mozart's violin and piano sonatas. Mozart wrote the work for the Viennese debut of a remarkable touring virtuoso violinist who, very unusually for her time, was a woman. Her name was Regina Strinasacchi; she was 22 or 23 at the time of her concert with Mozart.

Having procrastinated to write the work, Mozart had no time to notate the piano part before the performance. The story goes that, after giving Strinasacchi her music, he had an empty sheet on the piano, as he played a part that only existed in his head. According to Mozart's widow, even Emperor Joseph II found out about the ruse, as he was looking through his opera glasses and noticed that Mozart had no music in front of him.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction, which is very unusual among Mozart's sonatas. The work features an operatic flair throughout as well as bold modulations, particularly in the slow movement. In the closing *Rondo*, Mozart dazzles the listener with a plethora of shimmering melodic ideas.

**Sonata for Violin and Piano in g minor**  
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)



The last years of Debussy's life were decidedly difficult. He underwent debilitating treatment for cancer, witnessed the devastation of World War I, and struggled financially. Nevertheless, in 1915, Debussy set out to write *Six Sonatas for Various Instruments*. He completed three of the six works before his death in 1918: the sonata for cello and piano, the sonata for flute, viola, harp, and the sonata for violin and piano. The fourth and fifth sonatas were planned for oboe, horn and harpsichord, and for trumpet, clarinet, bassoon and piano. For the sixth work, Debussy had hoped to combine the instruments used in the first five sonatas.

The *Sonata for Violin and Piano* was to be his final composition, and he himself admitted to struggling with writing it. However, once it was complete, he commented, "In keeping with the contradictory spirit of human nature, it is full of joyous tumult . . . Beware in the future of works which appear to inhabit the skies; often they are the product of a dark, morose mind."

The brief work alternates brilliant outbursts with more somber passages throughout. True to his style, Debussy obscures both meter and key in the opening of the first movement, and takes the listener on a journey from subdued simplicity to dance-like passages and a feverish closing section. The second movement has a light dance-like quality to it, while the third revisits ideas from the first, and features glissandos, arpeggios and trills before bringing the work to its animated close.

## Fratres

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)



Estonian composer Arvo Pärt is one of the most unique and popular contemporary composers, mostly known for his *tintinnabulation* style. Although his early compositions featured the serial technique, which got him in some trouble with the Soviet Composers' Union in the 1960s, Pärt soon embarked on a journey to find his own sound world. He studied Baroque and Classical techniques, but it was when he immersed himself in the structures of medieval plainchant and Renaissance music as well as the contemplative rituals of the Russian Orthodox Church that he found his own voice. He explains,

Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers—in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning.... Tintinnabulation is like this. Here I am alone with silence. I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements—with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of the triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation.

He conceived of music with two basic elements: A melodic line, which is often stepwise, accompanied by bell-like triadic harmonies. The relationship between these two elements is predetermined by a scheme that is unique to each piece. Within this loose structure, his works show remarkable variety and flexibility with their own sound palettes.

Among his most popular works that feature *tintinnabulation* are *Tabula rasa* and *Fratres* (Brothers), the latter of which is on today's program. The instrumentation is not specified in the original version of the work, and today it exists in numerous arrangements. The only version in which the musical material is somewhat changed is the arrangement for violin and piano: The melodic line, carried by the violin, plays virtuosic variations on it, all the while ensuring that the serenity of the work remains intact.

## Sonata for Violin and Piano D major, Op. 94 bis Serge Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Needing a break from his opera project *War and Peace*, Prokofiev traveled to the countryside to write a ballet and his *Sonata for Flute and Piano*. Prokofiev later wrote that the flute “had for a long time attracted me, and it seemed to me that it had been made little use of in musical literature. I wanted this sonata to have a classical, clear, transparent sonority.”

Among those present in the audience at the premiere of the sonata in 1943 was renowned violinist David Oistrakh who later persuaded Prokofiev to arrange the work for violin and piano. Both versions remain a mainstay in their respective repertoires to this day.

The work is in four movements and is written using traditional formal structures and features beautiful melodies throughout. The opening movement is in sonata form with a flowing melody contrasted with march-like dotted rhythms and figurations. The playful *Scherzo* is followed by a gentle slow movement, while the closing fourth movement has a distinct dance-like character with moments of humor—the movement even features passages from dreaded piano exercises.

Aside from the musical connection that Oistrakh and Prokofiev shared, they enjoyed a long-standing chess rivalry as well. Prokofiev had been an avid chess player since childhood, and forged friendships with several international chess champions as an adult. When he returned to Russia in the 1930s, Prokofiev found Oistrakh to be a good chess partner. Oistrakh later recalled:

Prokofiev was an avid player, he could spend hours on end thinking over his moves. Living next door to each other, we often played blitz-contests and I wish you could see how excited he was drawing all kinds of colorful diagrams of his wins and losses, and how happy he was with each victory, as well as how devastated each time he lost...



Oistrakh (left) and Prokofiev at their official chess match.

Their chess rivalry led a Moscow chess club to organize an official chess match between them in 1937. The two players even had a secret wager: Both of them were to go on a concert tour, though only one was actually needed. They decided that the loser of the match would be the one to do it. The two completed seven of the ten planned games, with Oistrakh admitting defeat, and going on the concert tour.

The two musicians remained friends until the end, and when Prokofiev died the same day Stalin's death was announced, David Oistrakh and Mstislav Rostropovich, who were both engaged to play at the wake of the fallen autocrat, also played at their friend's wake in his honor.

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