



PROGRAM NOTES

Anthony McGill, clarinet; Elena Perroni, soprano; Myra Huang, piano
March 28, 2023 – 7:30 p.m.
Disciples Christian Church

Der hirt auf dem Felsen (“The Shepherd on the Rock”), D. 965

Franz Schubert

Born: Vienna-Himmelpfortgrund, 1797

Died: Vienna, 1828

Composed: 1828

Of the more than 600 songs that Schubert wrote, there are only two that call for another instrument besides the piano. *Auf dem Strom* (“On the River”) has an *obligato* horn part, and *Der Hirt auf dem Felsen* includes a clarinet. These are, incidentally, also the only chamber works by Schubert to use those two instruments.

The Shepherd on the Rock is one of Schubert's last compositions, written just months before his untimely death. It was one of the rare occasions when Schubert accommodated the wishes of a star performer, rather than following his own artistic inclinations exclusively. The star in question was the celebrated Anna Milder-Hauptmann, who had created the role of Leonore in all three versions of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Schubert was hoping that this great soprano might help him get one of his long-languishing operas performed. Therefore, he honored the singer's request for a virtuoso showpiece (it is true that he did so about three years after receiving the

request). Tragically, he died before Milder-Hauptmann had a chance to perform any of his music. She did sing the song eventually, although that unfortunately did little to help Schubert's operas.

The words for the beginning and the end of this song are by Wilhelm Müller, the poet of Schubert's two great song cycles (*Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*). The lyrics for the middle section are by German writer and diplomat Karl August Varnhagen von Ense.

The pastoral setting is an effective foil for emotions as diverse as a peaceful contemplation of nature, a moment of sadness, and an outburst of joy. There is no shortage of the kind of virtuosity Milder-Hauptmann expected, and that was not Schubert's natural way of writing. Yet he managed to adapt the coloratura style to his own artistic personality, and the result is a work that is unique in Schubert's entire output. The clarinet, of course, represents the shepherd's pipe as a more sophisticated counterpart.

*Wenn auf dem höchsten Fels ich steh',
Ins tiefe Tal herniederseh',
Und singe,
Fern aus dem tiefen dunklen Tal
Schwingt sich empor der Widerhall
Der Klüfte.*

*Je weiter meine Stimme dringt,
Je heller sie mir wiederklingt
Von unten.
Mein Liebchen wohnt so weit von mir,
Drum seh'n ich mich so heiß nach ihr
Hinüber.*

*In tiefem Gram verzehr ich mich,
Mir ist die Freude hin,
Auf Erden mir die Hoffnung wich,
Ich hier so einsam bin.*

*So sehnend klang im Wald das Lied,
So sehnend klang es durch die Nacht,
Die Herzen es zum Himmel zieht
Mit wunderbarer Macht.*

*Der Frühling wird kommen,
Der Frühling, meine Freud,
Nun mach ich mich fertig,
Zum Wandern bereit.*

When on the highest rock I stand,
gaze down into the deep valley
and sing,
from afar in the deep dark valley
floats up the echo
of the ravines.

The further my voice reaches,
the clearer its echo
from below.
So far away my beloved lives,
so ardently I yearn to be
where she is.

By deep grief I am consumed,
my joy has gone,
I am abandoned by hope on earth,
and am so lonely here.

So longingly sounded my song in the wood,
so longingly through the night,
drawing hearts to heaven
with wondrous power.

Spring is coming,
spring, my joy,
and now I make ready,
ready for the journey.

Chavah's Daughters Speak James Lee III

Born: St. Joseph, MI, 1975

Composed: 2021

James Lee III, one of the most prominent American composers of his generation, is often inspired by religious themes, which he frequently references through the Hebrew Scriptures, which is why he calls the Biblical women who appear in his recent song cycle as Chavah's, rather than Eve's, daughters. Lee was inspired by the poems of Sister Lou Ella Hickman of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament in Corpus Christi, Texas. Sister Lou Ella published her first volume of poetry,

entitled *she: robed and wordless*, in 2015. She offered the following comments about her book:

I wanted to give voice to many of the women of the Bible who were invisible as well as to those who were given only a few words or none. I wanted them to speak for themselves and tell their story on their own terms.

In his program notes about *Chavah's Daughters Speak*, James Lee III, who chose five poems from Sister Lou Ella's book, writes:

Chavah's Daughters Speak is a cycle of five songs I composed using the text of Lou Ella Hickman. Chavah is the Hebrew name for Eve, the mother of humanity according to the book of Genesis. In this work, I wanted to use texts and thoughts that might have been spoken by women from the Bible who were not given an opportunity to have their expressions recorded in the sacred scriptures. The first song, "after eve...then what?," serves as a type of prologue, which is followed by "absalom's wife," "abishag the shunammite," "the wife of matthew," and ending with "woman bent with infirmity." In the second song, I tried to evoke the emotions a woman whose husband stirred up an armed and military rebellion against his father who was the king of their nation. She was horrified by his

unfaithfulness and during the intensity of one battle, while he was fleeing on his horse, his long hair got tangled in a tree and he ended up being hung from that tree. To his wife, perhaps it was as if he were trapped and entangled in another woman's arms. The next song expresses how the young woman Abishag, the Shunammite might have felt as she was called to be near King David in the royal palace and help to keep him warm in his old age as he was dying. The music continues with a repeated harmony that suggests the inevitability of the king's death. Following this, the nameless wife of Matthew the tax collector recalls how her husband was so busy daily working for the Roman empire and how all that suddenly changed once he heard the words 'follow me' from Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, the last song evokes the joy of a woman who had been physically disabled for much of her life. This last song, in binary form, progresses from darkness to light and joyful celebration.

1. after eve...then what?

like words spoken once
 then forgotten
we lived
 we lived in the ordinary
 wives, mothers, sisters...
a world whose honor or shame would lie
 in what was begotten
countless as words in books
we, the paradox of the obvious, the mundane
 words nameless as the dust
flaming each sunset and sunrise
 a thousand years more

2. absalom's wife

perhaps nothing could be said for vanity
 and yet
 those glistening curls

with the wind brushing his hair black
 he hung
 as if trapped
by some other woman
 tangled in her arms

3. abishag the shunammite

his skin bruised as easily as lilies
his breath was stale
death lingered in his lungs
so why do i weep for him—
this warrior with his ten thousands slain
each echoed in a fragile pulse
beneath the shivering flesh
i, too, shivered when they first brought me here
to blanket his tallow body with my warmth
the king is far away and very old—
that was common knowledge in my village
yet here i am
and so I weep
for legends die
like other men

4. the wife of matthew

soon after the wedding
our lives became a ledger
a daily counting
a mere series of columns and figures
he worked hard
until i wondered how much would be enough
then
everything unraveled
like a thread from my spindle
all because of *follow Me*

5. woman bent with infirmity

unnamed,
i was less than servant animals
voiceless in their grazing or being
led to water
on the fringes
i carried what they would have me be

now called daughter of abraham,

at last i am faithful and free

Romance

William Grant Still

Born: Woodville, MS, 1895

Died: Los Angeles, 1978

Composed: 1954

Originally written for saxophone and piano, William Grant Still's heartfelt Romance has become known in numerous transcriptions and adaptations. With its warm melodic line and lush harmonies, it is a rewarding recital item that many instrumentalists have eagerly embraced over the years. Still always insisted that African-American composers shouldn't be

pigeonholed as jazz musicians and was one of the first to become firmly established in the so-called classical concert world. This erstwhile student of Edgard Varèse was able to draw on a very wide range of experiences from the avant-garde to spirituals to the European Romantic tradition.

Sonata in A minor, D. 821 (“Arpeggione”)

Franz Schubert

Born: Vienna-Himmelpfortgrund, 1797

Died: Vienna, 1828

Composed: 1828

By all accounts, the *arpeggione*, a kind of bowed guitar that was held between the knees like a viola da gamba, was not a very felicitous construction as musical instruments go. It was awkward to hold and to play, and its sound was rather small. Yet Schubert wrote one of his most beloved chamber works for this instrument, obsolete within ten years of its first appearance. The sonata was fully idiomatic for the six-string instrument that Viennese luthier Johann Georg Stauffer had invented in 1823, but it presents challenges when played on a four-string viola or cello, which is the form in which the piece is most frequently heard. The sonata has also entered the repertoire of the clarinet,

which can comfortably play the arpeggione part in the original register.

In its three movements, the sonata moves back and forth between lyrical-expressive and brilliantly athletic passages. Due to those contrasting characters, the opening Allegro remains utterly unpredictable, even though it adheres to classical sonata form. The brief Adagio contains one of Schubert's most beautiful melodies, deeply moving in spite (or perhaps because) of its simplicity. The final rondo, which alternates between the major and minor modes, is relaxed and easy-going, with an occasional touch of melancholy.

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.