

TCU FACULTY RECITAL

Elisabeth Adkins, violin

Edward Newman, piano

Monday, September 16, 2024, 7:00 p.m.

PepsiCo Recital Hall, TCU

Program

Sonata for Violin and Piano, op. 18 (1887)

Richard Strauss

Allegro ma non troppo

(1864-1949)

Improvisation: Andante cantabile

Finale: Andante-Allegro

Pause

Second Sonata for Violin and Piano (1978)

William Bolcom

Summer Dreams

(b. 1938-)

Brutal, fast

Adagio

In Memory of Joe Venuti

Selections from *Porgy and Bess*, (arr. by Jascha Heifetz)

George Gershwin

Summertime/A Woman Is A Sometime Thing

(1898-1937)

My Man's Gone Now

It Ain't Necessarily So

Bess, You Is My Woman Now

**RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949) SONATA IN E-FLAT FOR VIOLIN AND
PIANO, OP. 18 (1888)**

The last years of Richard Strauss's life were not happy ones—certainly not what one would expect for a composer who, even before his 21st birthday, had already been hailed as the successor of such giants of German music as Wagner and Brahms. Through more than half a century he had validated this reputation with such stunning tone poems as *Don Juan*, *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Death and Transfiguration*, and *Don Quixote*, and a long succession of operas, some shocking like *Salome* and *Elektra*, others enchanting like *Der Rosenkavalier*. His was truly a life of music, and he was accustomed to ignoring politics while he pursued his own musical path. But sadly, his last two decades were dominated by the rise of the Nazis under Hitler and the catastrophic war that would devastate the Germany he knew. His own life was similarly devastated when the Nazis capitalized on his renown by naming him head of the Reichsmusikkammer—actually a figurehead for such policies as forbidding the employment of Jewish musicians and prohibiting the performance of works by Jewish composers (even such threats to the purity of German art as Mendelssohn!). Eventually some of Strauss's own operas were banned in reprisal for his protests on behalf of his Jewish colleagues, and he was ordered to resign "for reasons of ill health." Though the Allies finally cleared him of charges of collaboration in 1948, after a campaign on his behalf by musicians all over the world, the unfortunate affair did taint his reputation and the popularity of his music.

But the work featured today comes from his early years, a time when he was occupying himself with chamber music as a vehicle for developing his compositional techniques. Although he was only twenty-four when he completed the *Violin Sonata*, it was the last and most mature of his chamber works and speaks out with the characteristic "Strauss voice."

A noted study of chamber music from Strauss's lifetime (1929) shows the high regard in which he and the sonata itself were held by his contemporaries:

Only virtuosi should attempt this most effective, scintillating piece, which owes much to Schumann, less to Brahms. It opens with a fiery, powerfully rhythmical *Allegro ma non troppo* which contains a beautiful 2nd theme. The piano part is brilliantly written, though without overpowering the violin. In the absence of an actual *Scherzo* in this sonata, the *Improvisation-Andante cantabile* is generally considered to be the most effective movement. It is in character a *nocturne*, ardent yet simple in its melody, with an impassioned middle section. The *Finale*, which makes greater demands on the virtuosity of the violinist than many a concerto, opens with a short introduction for piano alone, in which the main theme is foreshadowed. The vigorous and cheerful theme itself, which appears in the succeeding *Allegro*, has a peculiar rhythm. It is succeeded by an expressive air for the violin, with a rustling piano accompaniment. Later on there appears a skipping, dance-like motif which is more or less a substitute for a *Scherzo*. The coda winds up to an effective climax in 6/8 (2/4) time. This sonata was a distinct landmark in the young composer's development, and deserves particular attention as representing the close of his creative activity in chamber music. . . .

This exciting work does expand the expectations of chamber music—the violin part has an almost operatic sweep, while the writing for the piano suggests orchestration—and it provides a thrilling opening to today's concert.

--Alis Dickinson Adkins

William Bolcom (b. 1938)

Second Sonata for Violin and Piano (1978)

Commissioned by the McKim Fund at the Library of Congress, the Second Sonata was first performed by violinist Sergiu Luca with William Bolcom at the piano. Like many of Bolcom's works, it uses techniques current in the *avant garde* music of the mid-twentieth century, mixed with strong influences from jazz and popular music. Indeed, this piece is almost a survey of twentieth-century modern styles, with a humor and cheekiness that is Bolcom's own.

The first movement begins with a hypnotic slow "boogie-woogie" figure in the piano, evoking the "Summer Dreams" of the title, overlaid with non-harmonic chromaticism and large leaps from the violin. The effect is as if two characters were reacting to the same atmosphere, yet unaware of each other. A crystalline section in 5/16 has a quirky, jerky style that uses chord clusters with sudden leaps and accents. This yields to a recitative in the violin that connects back to the warm opening, with overtly "jazzy" elements added.

At this point in music history the second movement, "Brutal, fast," can almost be heard as a parody of consciously ugly "honk-squeak" contemporary music that characterized the latter half of the twentieth century. The movement is, however, tightly crafted, with elements of dark humor, growing to the middle and disappearing at the end.

"Adagio", the third movement, begins with an accompanied recitative, which effectively expresses abandonment, loss, and the alienation of the individual that this style seems particularly fitted to capture. The soliloquy dissolves, mutating into a deeply-felt and moving chorale in the piano, with the violin commenting from the outside. The violin then joins the piano chorale in one of the most beautiful portions of the piece. Alas, this comfort proves fleeting, and the violin falls away at the end.

The final movement is dedicated "To the Memory of Joe Venuti", one of the first well-known jazz violinists, who died just before the completion of this sonata. Bolcom fuses jazz elements, signature slides favored by Venuti, and a tongue-in-cheek wit that makes this sonata a favorite of tonight's performers.

--Elisabeth Adkins

George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987) arranger
Four Songs from *Porgy and Bess*

Jascha Heifetz loved Gershwin's music, and transcribed several of his pieces for use as encores on his own recital performances. These transcriptions rise above mere arrangements, showing a masterly, musicianly approach that preserves the colors, harmonies and *feel* of the originals, with all the technical brilliance and expression available to one of the finest violinists in history. Heifetz manages to incorporate counterpoint, with two vocal lines frequently going at once in the violin part; the piano is an equal partner, weaving in and out with melodic fragments as well as evoking the rich orchestration of Gershwin's original songs. The violin is challenged to convey a huge range of expression, from the deep sincerity of the gorgeous vocal lines in *Summertime* and *Bess*, the racking loss of *My Man's Gone Now*, to the world-weary cynicism of *A Woman is a Sometime Thing* and the devilishly sophisticated humor of *It Ain't Necessarily So*. These pieces continue to provide a technical challenge along with lasting musical rewards.

--Elisabeth Adkins