

ZLATOMIR FUNG, cello
BENJAMIN HOCHMAN, piano

LEO ORNSTEIN (1895-2002)

Six Preludes for Cello and Piano

1. Moderato sostenuto
 2. Con moto
 3. Presto
 4. Andante non troppo
 5. Non troppo (quasi improvisato)
 6. Allegro agitato
- (approx. 19 minutes)

NIKOLAY SOKOLOV (1859-1922)

Romance for Cello and Piano Op. 19

(approx.. 3 minutes)

JUDITH WEIR (b. 1954)

Unlocked for solo cello

Make Me a Garment

No Justice

The Wind Blow East

The Keys to the Prison

Trouble, Trouble

(approx. 18 minutes)

Intermission

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV (1865-1936)

Entr'acte from *Raymonda* Op. 57 (arr. by Konstantin Rodionov)

(approx. 5 minutes)

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in A major Op. 69

Allegro ma non troppo

Scherzo. Allegro molto

Adagio cantabile

Allegro vivace

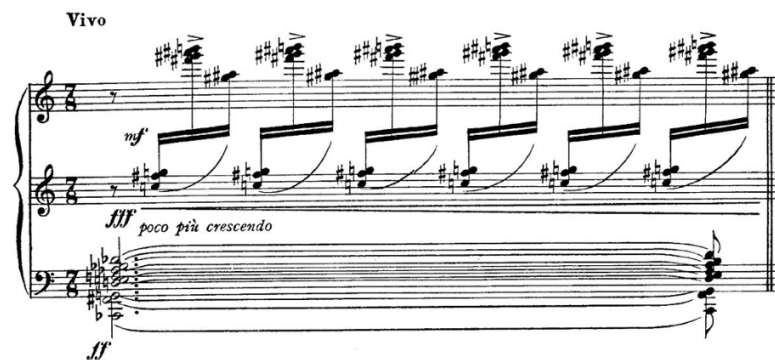
(approx. 25 minutes)

Leo Ornstein

Six Preludes for Cello and Piano

Leo Ornstein was by turns a shocking, then celebrated, then forgotten and finally a revered figure in 20th century music. But then again, he had ample time in his extraordinarily long life to be all of those things. He died in 2002 at the age of 106, making him perhaps the longest-lived composer in history.

Born in Ukraine near the end of the 19th century, he arrived in New York with his family in 1905 and was granted entry as a child prodigy to the music school that would later become Juilliard. As a young pianist he was well received in his playing of the standard repertoire but raised eyebrows with his championing of contemporary atonal music. His own experimental compositions for piano, which were among the first to make extensive use of tone clusters, sparked outrage and even projectile feedback from audiences, comparable of that of the famous Rite of Spring riot of 1913. This excerpt from his *Wild Men's Dance* (ca. 1913-14) gives an indication of what listeners were up against:



But the progressives were enthralled and by the 1920s his bold experiments – described as “the sum of Schoenberg and Scriabin squared” – were considered to represent the ‘future’ of music and he was widely praised as a *futurist* composer, comparable in stature to Stravinsky.

He gave his last public performance in the early 1930s and then virtually dropped out of sight to devote himself to composition and teaching, founding a music school in Philadelphia that had John Coltrane as one of its students. In the 1970s he was ‘re-discovered’ by Yale musicologist Vivian Perlis while vacationing with his wife in a trailer park in Texas and brought back to the public eye. He continued to compose and his final work, the Eighth Piano Sonata, was written when he was in his 90s. This sonata was subsequently recorded by Marc-André Hamelin and reviewed in the New York Times by music critic Anthony Tommasini.

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Ornstein’s overall musical style is hard to pin down because he was so eclectic. Alongside his bold adventures in modernist musical textures he was equally capable of writing in a quasi-tonal lyrical vein. This heterogeneity of styles is on full display in his *Six Preludes for Cello and Piano* published in 1931.

While the harmonic vocabulary of these short movements is atonal, with harmonic functions masked by the pervasive presence of tone clusters, we hear nonetheless the constituent structuring elements of music that we know and understand. Melodies are presented in clear

phrases, often created from small motivic cells frequently repeated within a phrase. No matter how angular the melodies, the cello and piano can often be heard in an intelligible dialogue tossing back and forth musical motives between them. The overall impression is one of music passed through a Twilight Zone filter, strangely familiar at its core but undeniably alien on the surface.

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Prelude 1 (Moderato sostenuto) eases into the suite like a real, honest-to-goodness prelude, full of expectation and a slightly anxious sense of suspense.

I

Moderato sostenuto ♩ = 84 **LEO ORNSTEIN**

The cello is in a contemplative mood, continually ruminating over its opening four-note motive that outlines a mysterious tritone while the piano's rippling arpeggios of augmented chordal harmony keep the appeal of any one key centre constantly at bay.

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Prelude 2 (Con moto) is more animated and varied in its sectional contrasts. It opens with the discreet charm and delicacy of French music

II

Con moto ♩ = 112

but grows more animated as it gnaws ever more obsessively over its motivic content. The return of the opening material brings on a *Dolente* final section in which the cello softly wails in a bewildered chromatic descent with emotional overtones of a religious chant and in this regard it

is useful to note that Ornstein's father was a Jewish cantor, so the music of temple worship was familiar to him.

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Prelude 3 (Presto) is a scherzo in the vein of Prokofiev or Bartók with a propulsive drive created by its *moto perpetuo* rhythmic patterning.

III



But Ornstein displays his feeling for mixing styles when amid all this atonal scamper comes real tonal melody in the contrasting middle sections.

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Prelude 4 (Andante non troppo) brings a change of pace, but this is not your typical slow movement. Its centre of interest is lyrical melody, sometimes reduced to recitative, as in the opening phrases from the cello:

24

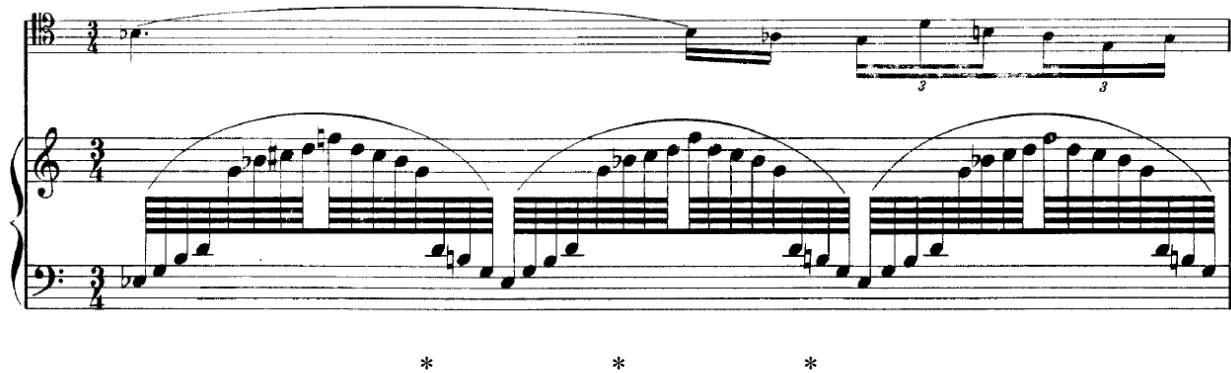
IV



But the lyricism of Ornstein's melodies is both intense and yet remote, giving the impression of coming from somewhere on the far side of Mars.

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Prelude 5 (Non troppo, quasi improvisato) shows Ornstein's manner of juxtaposing sections of different character. After an opening that features a kind of atonal birdsong chatter between cello and piano, the movement is soon taken over by a sustained passage of rhapsodic melody accompanied by sonorous waves of piano tone rippling over the keyboard.



Prelude 6 (Allegro agitato) is a headlong romp of furious driving energy spearheaded by propulsive ostinato rhythms in the piano.

VI



These are constantly in dialogue with scraps of folk melody floating on top of the roiling mass of tonal pulsations below.

Nikolay Sokolov

Romance for Cello and Piano Op. 19

Nikolay Sokolov was an important figure in the conservative nationalist wing of the musical establishment of pre-Revolutionary Russia. A student of Rimsky-Korsakov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he went on to join the faculty of that institution where he specialized in the teaching of strict counterpoint and authored books on the subject that became standard teaching texts for Russian music students at the beginning of the 20th century.

Sokolov is associated with the social circle of his music publisher, the philanthropist and tireless promoter of Russian music Mitrofan Belyayev. Belyayev had a passion for chamber music and from 1886 until his death in 1904 held weekly musical evenings featuring works from the standard repertoire and new works by Russian composers.

Sokolov's *Romance for Cello and Piano* was published in 1894 and would have fit in perfectly on the program of one of Belyayev's Friday-night musical salons. Giving pride of place to the cello's singing tone in its middle register, the work is written in a harmonically conservative but sumptuously elegant late-Romantic style.

Nicolas Sokolow, Op. 19.

Moderato. ♩ = 108.

Violoncello.

PIANO.

Downward-drooping melodic lines, exemplified by the descending scale of the cello's opening phrase, provide ample opportunity for 'sighing' while the frequently occurring motive of a falling 5th gives a wistful hint of Russian soulfulness to the work as a whole.

The texture is almost that of a love duet, so closely are the two instruments intertwined in tonal space as they overlap in exchanging loving phrases between them, sharing the same tonal register.

Judith Weir

Unlocked for Solo Cello

In the 1930s folklorist John Lomax and his son, ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax, toured prisons making recordings of the songs sung by prisoners – mostly black prisoners – in the American South. These recordings, stored in the Library of Congress, came to the attention of Scottish-born composer Judith Weir who created a suite for solo cello based on five of these songs.

Judith Weir is among the most respected contemporary composers in Britain today. In 2014 she became the first woman to be appointed Master of the Queen's Music (the musical equivalent of poet laureate), a post she now continues to hold as Master of the King's Music under King Charles III.

Despite her exalted position in British musical life, she remains a composer, one might say, of the people, inspired as she is by the directness of expression of folk music and the sense of community that it both creates and exemplifies. Her musical style, then, is not avant-garde but seeks an immediate connection with its listener, as amply demonstrated in the five movements of *Unlocked* (1999), the unifying theme of which, the composer tells us, is the hope for a better life.

Each movement is a kind of *fantasia* on characteristic musical motives from a folk-song melody, and the 'back story' of each folk song is evoked narratively in the way that each fantasia plays out on the instrument.

The song *Make Me a Garment* illustrates a type of African-American folk singing known as a "holler," in which the singer spins out variations on a simple melody using an open-throated singing style. The text, which begins *Mama, Mama, make me a garment / And make it long, white and narrow*, is a poignant understated reference to the winding sheet in which a prisoner is wrapped after his execution. The low E that begins and ends this movement, and that frequently occurs throughout, is a reminder of the fate that awaits the singer.

No Justice was originally recorded as sung by a black inmate of the Georgia State Penitentiary at Milledgeville. This protest song about how badly black prisoners are treated begins: *Oh, we don't get no justice here in Atlanta*. The emphatic folksy simplicity of this complaint about harsh living conditions is communicated through the rough percussive techniques used on the instrument. These include including attacking the strings with the fingers of the left hand alone (as in the opening section), slapping the strings with an open hand, and even stomping with both feet on the floor.

The Wind Blow East is not a prison song. It comes from the Bahamas and describes another kind of imprisonment: the forced sheltering required during a hurricane. But it is not the storm outside that the music conveys. The insistent repetition of the opening melody, with its hopeful little run-up figure, evokes life amid the warm gentle breezes of a calmer less turbulent time to come.

The Keys to the Prison describes the delusional conversation between a condemned young prisoner and his mother. The young man says *Mama, they're gonna give me the keys, / To this jailhouse, yes, the keys to this old jailhouse*, vainly believing that he is to get his freedom when in fact he will only be leaving the jailhouse as a corpse. The jangling of the keys is sounded in the opening tremolo. The melody in harmonics at the end ironically evokes the sound of a harmonica disappearing into the distance.

The set concludes with *Trouble, Trouble*, a blues song from Alabama featuring a typical wailing melody of complaint continually interrupted by vivid tremolo reminders of the song's opening line: *Trouble, trouble, I had them all my day*,

Alexander Glazunov

Entr'acte from Act I of *Raymonda*, Op. 57 (arr. by Konstantin Rodionov)

Alexander Glazunov, like Nikolay Sokolov, was a student of Rimsky-Korsakov and like Sokolov as well joined the faculty of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, eventually becoming its director in 1905. And he was also a member of the Belyayev Circle of Russian composers promoted and supported by music publisher Mitrofan Belyayev (1836-1904).

Among the works of his early maturity was his three-act ballet *Raymonda*, choreographed by Marius Petipa and presented at St. Peterburg's Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in January of 1897. This is a work that has remained popular in both the ballet and orchestral repertoires thanks to its skillful orchestration and engaging melodies.

The plot of the ballet concerns a young countess who must fend off the pawing advances of a wealthy Saracen knight until the valiant chevalier crusader who is her true love returns from the Holy Land. In the *entr'acte* near the end of Act I she looks longingly at the portrait of her absent fiancé and daydreams about how happy she will be when he returns.

This *Entr'acte* from Act I was especially popular and the composer himself made an arrangement of it for two cellos and piano, from which the version for solo cello and piano we will hear at this concert is presumably derived.

А. ГЛАЗУНОВ

Andante sostenuto [Спокойно]

Glazunov's original orchestration scores the delightful swaying melody of this *entr'acte* for two clarinets in parallel 3rds and 6ths, a scoring that translates well as sweet double-stops on a stringed instrument such as the cello.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata for Cello and Piano in A major Op. 69

The furrowed brow of care is nowhere to be found in this remarkably sunny and serenely confident sonata from Beethoven's middle period. Composed between 1806 and 1808, it overlaps the composer's work on the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies yet evinces none of the disruptive tumult of the celebrated C minor symphony nor the wondrous, walk-in-the-woods pictorialism of the *Pastorale*. It seems perfectly content to live in its own world, a world characterized by an almost Mozartean sense of balance and equilibrium: between formal sections, between instrumental entries, and between the motivic units used to construct each phrase.

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Consider the opening. A rhythmically tranquil theme, beginning with a rising 5th, is presented by the solo cello in the manner of a fugue subject, its balanced mix of open and stepwise intervals symmetrically arranged on either side of the home-key note of A. This gesture then finds the perfect continuation of its thoughts in the luxuriantly relaxed and songful reply of the piano that drifts as high in its register as the cello ended low.

The second theme of the movement is similarly tongue-in-groove with the aforementioned, being a mirror image of the opening theme with the same rhythmic imprint. And because this chummy mood of sweetness and light can be cloying after a while, in the development section Beethoven transforms his theme into an outpouring of minor-mode pathos in the melodramatic manner of the Italians. The recapitulation is a shortened version of the exposition, but is extended by a coda that pensively lingers over motivic memories of the movement's major moments.

14 **SCHERZO.**

—78—

Allegro molto.

The second movement scherzo is an elegantly playful game of *Where's the beat?* with jumpy syncopations and off-beat accents shoulder-poking you with such willful insistence that you could easily lose track of the rhythmic thread. And a large helping of contrapuntal side-chatter and imitative cross-talk only adds to the mayhem. But while the piano & cello in the opening and closing sections play peek-a-boo with each other's downbeat, they find themselves dancing in lock-step, cheek-to-cheek, in the movement's two contrasting Trio sections.

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The 3rd movement *Adagio cantabile* has puzzled many performers. Its extraordinary brevity, a mere 18 bars, barely gives Beethoven time to stretch out his lyrical limbs ... and then it's over. Glenn Gould has suggested a reason for this, pointing to an emerging pattern in Beethoven's later works: a tendency to break down the walls between movements, and to write sonatas as a single continuous thought:

It's almost as if he wanted to write on one plane and one plane only, that of an allegro mood from beginning to end ... to make things all of a piece.

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Whatever the reason, the *Allegro vivace* last movement, in sonata form, is as toe-tapping a finale as could be imagined, its chuckling good humour kept bubbling by an almost constant 8th-note patter in the piano. And because this sonata lives in a thematic hall of mirrors, its main theme is an inversion of the piano's opening phrase in the first movement.

This finale splits its attention between its bustling first theme and a more poised 'stop-to-smell-the-roses' second theme, with a few chromatic twists and turns in the development section to add a hedge-maze piquancy to its harmonic unfolding. All in all, it manages to be both cute and coy while constantly radiating a sunny disposition that even the mock-worry of its development section cannot efface.

Donald G. Gislason 2023