SATURDAY, JUNE 18 :: 5 PM

Rolston String Quartet
Luri Lee, violin | Jason Issokson, violin
Hezekiah Leung, viola | Peter Eom, cello

Frederic Chiu, piano

STRING QUARTET IN B MINOR, OP. 33 NO. 1, HOB.III:37 (1781)
Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Allegro moderato
Menuetto
Adagio
Finale: Fuga a due soggetti

Jörg Widmann (b. 1973)

:: INTERMISSION ::

PIANO QUINTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 44 (1842)
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Allegro brillante
In modo d’una marcia: un poco largamente – Agitato
Scherzo. Molto vivace
Allegro, ma non troppo

The Rolston Quartet replaces the Castalian Quartet for this evening’s concert.
PIANO QUINTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 44

Robert Schumann (b. Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; d. Endenich, nr. Bonn, July 29, 1856)

Composed 1842; 31 minutes

1842 was Schumann’s chamber music year. After writing his three string quartets in just five weeks in the spring, his health collapsed. So, he spent part of the summer together with his wife touring Bohemian spas in search of a cure. Rejuvenated, he sketched out the music of his Piano Quintet in just five days. Two weeks later, on October 12, the full score was complete. Many revisions followed, including dropping the idea of a fifth movement. With the clarity of form reached in his final version of the work, Schumann was to achieve a success with the public that all too frequently eluded him.

It is a highly unified work in which the various themes reappear and are transformed. The brilliant opening theme is presented in moods both turbulent and dreamy. A rather startling transformation of a theme comes about in the second movement, as a stormy, intensely romantic central section evolves out of the solemn tread of the surrounding funeral march. Similarly, in the Scherzo third movement, after making brilliant play out of what would be to another composer plain old scales, Schumann teases out a theme of its first trio section from an upside-down version of the main theme from the opening movement. The crowning point of this contrapuntal mastery comes towards the end of the finale when the main theme of the movement is combined with the opening theme of the quintet as a double fugue, over 50 radiant, virtuoso measures. Throughout the Piano Quintet, Schumann’s piano writing strikes a wonderful balance between the intimacy of chamber music and the virtuosity of the piano concerto.

Robert Schumann was the first to combine the string quartet – a medium he had just begun to explore – with the piano, an instrument that was seldom absent from his compositions. Mozart almost stumbled across the genre when he published several of his piano concertos for soloist and four single strings. Schubert came close to writing a piano quintet with his Trout Quintet but dropped the second violin in favor of a double bass. Half a century earlier, Boccherini began to investigate the medium. No one, however, was to realize the potential of combining string quartet and piano with the success that Schumann brought to his only piano quintet. He dedicated it to his wife, the renowned pianist Clara Wieck, who gave hundreds of performances in both public and private settings. One month after the ink was dry, she gave the very first private performance at the Leipzig home she shared with Robert. Then, early in January 1843, she gave the public première at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. From this point on, the Quintet has never left the repertoire.

From this point on, the Quintet has never left the repertoire.

— Program notes © 2019 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: khnnotes@sympatico.ca

Due to the late replacement of the Rolston String Quartet in place of the Castalian Quartet, program notes were not available in time for inclusion in the program book.