



Lieutenant Colonel Ryan Nowlin, Director

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES
Thursday, October 17, 2024 at 7:00 P.M.
Lang Recital Hall
Levine Music
Washington, DC
GySgt Trevor Mowry, coordinator

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745)

Trio Sonata No. 3 in B-flat, ZWV 181

Adagio
Allegro
Largo
Tempo giusto

GySgt Trevor Mowry, oboe
SSgt Matthew Gregoire, bassoon
SSgt Sara Matayoshi, violin
MSgt Russell Wilson, harpsichord

Steve Reich (b. 1936)

Electric Counterpoint (1987)

Fast
Slow
Fast

SSgt Jeffrey Grant, marimba and vibraphone

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Grosse Fuge, Opus 133

GySgt Foster Wang and SSgt Sara Matayoshi, violin
GySgt Sarah Hart, viola
SSgt Clayton Vaughn, cello

PROGRAM NOTES

Trio Sonata No. 3 in B-flat, ZWV 181

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745)

Jan Dismas Zelenka was a composer of Czech descent who spent much of his career composing sacred works and playing the violone (an instrument analogous to the modern double bass) for the royal court at Dresden. Although he enjoyed the close friendship and professional esteem of some of the greatest composers of the baroque era, his music largely fell into obscurity in the century following his death. However, recognition of his contrapuntal mastery, virtuosic part writing, and harmonic ingenuity has led to his music being played more frequently in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Zelenka's Trio Sonata No. 3 in B-flat, ZWV 181, from a set of six trio sonatas composed circa 1720, features many hallmarks of his compositional style. Unlike many trio sonatas from the period, which relegate the bass voice as an accompaniment, the bassoon features just as prominently as the upper voices throughout. The intertwining violin and oboe parts trade off taking the lead while navigating the surprising harmonic shifts created by Zelenka's chromatic writing. This kaleidoscopic style can be heard in the opening movement as the main theme vacillates between contented major keys and angsty minor ones. The third movement, with its prominent usage of the "Sicilian" rhythm, hints at Zelenka's familiarity with Italian opera styles of the day. The second and fourth movements share boisterous energy, technically challenging parts for all three voices, intricately weaved imitative counterpoint, and sudden declamatory minor-key outbursts that punch through the generally festive atmosphere.

Electric Counterpoint (1987)

Steve Reich (b. 1936)

Electric Counterpoint (1987) was commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival for guitarist Pat Metheny. It is the third in a series of pieces (following *Vermont Counterpoint* in 1982 and *New York Counterpoint* in 1985) where a soloist plays against a pre-recorded tape of themselves. In *Electric Counterpoint* (1987) the soloist pre-records as many as ten guitars and two electric bass parts and then plays the final eleventh guitar part live against the tape. In this transcription, Staff Sergeant Jeffrey Grant has adapted, recorded, and performed all the written guitar parts on marimba and vibraphone, including those on the recording.

Steve Reich has become an important composer by showing listeners the mastery he holds over the minimalist genre. Minimalist music can often contain long passages of repeated rhythmic notes and patterns. Reich often builds complex melodies by repeating and adding small groups of notes to themselves; almost imperceptible in the moment until a vast new melody has been created over time.

Grosse Fuge, Opus 133

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

German composer Ludwig van Beethoven is celebrated as one of history's greatest composers. Among his most well-known works are the "Moonlight Sonata," Symphonies No. 3 (*Eroica*), and No. 9 the final movement of which features the famous "Ode to Joy." His revolutionary compositions pushed the boundaries of classical form, particularly in his later years. The Grosse Fuge, or Great Fugue, exemplifies this innovative spirit and is one of the most groundbreaking works of his career. Originally composed as the final movement of his Quartet in B-flat, Opus 130, the Grosse Fuge received mixed reactions at its première, which Beethoven himself did not attend. The audience called for repeats of the inner movements of the quartet, but showed little enthusiasm for the Grosse Fuge. Upon hearing this, Beethoven famously criticized the audience, referring to them as a bunch of "cattle." The fugue's complexity left both listeners and performers perplexed, leading to a private request for its removal. In a response surprisingly uncharacteristic of Beethoven's headstrong personality, he complied and published it separately as Opus 133.

Today, quartets often perform the Grosse Fuge both as the original final movement of Opus 130 and as a standalone work. The Grosse Fuge is characterized by its jagged rhythms, dissonant harmonies, and dense textures, created through intricate counterpoint and a double fugue. Its raw, relentless intensity demands a wide range of extreme expression, requiring both technical prowess and emotional depth from performers. In a 1962 article, "My Reflections on Being Eighty," Igor Stravinsky wrote:

Now at 80, I have found new joy in Beethoven. The Great Fugue...now seems to me the most perfect miracle in music. It is also the most absolutely contemporary piece of music I know, and contemporary forever...Hardly birthmarked by its age, the Great Fugue is, in rhythm alone, more subtle than any music of my own century...I love it beyond everything.