



Lieutenant Colonel Jason K. Fetting, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Saturday, June 20, 2015 at 7:30 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Major Michelle A. Rakers, conducting

Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928)

An Epitaph for Béla Bartók (1969, rev. 1986)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Concerto for Violin and Piano in D minor

Allegro
Adagio
Allegro molto

SSgt Chaerim Smith, violin soloist

SSgt Christopher Schmitt, piano soloist

INTERMISSION

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Divertimento for String Orchestra (1939)

Allegro non troppo
Molto adagio
Allegro assai: Vivacissimo

The United States Marine Band performs Wednesdays at 8 P.M. on the lower west terrace of the U.S. Capitol and Thursdays at 8 P.M. at the Sylvan Theater on the grounds of the Washington Monument through August 27, 2015.

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PROGRAM NOTES

An Epitaph for Béla Bartók (1969/86)

Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928)

Born in Helsinki on October 9, 1928, Einojuhani Rautavaara has become Finland's preeminent composer following the great Jean Sibelius. Suitably, after studying composition at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and musicology at Helsinki University, it was Sibelius himself who recommended Rautavaara for the Koussevitzky Foundation scholarship that enabled him to study in the United States. As a result, he studied with Vincent Persichetti at The Juilliard School in New York City and with Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland at the Tanglewood Institute in Lenox, Massachusetts. Rautavaara would eventually return to Finland and serve on faculty at the Sibelius Academy from 1966 to 1991.

While Rautavaara's compositions have been influenced through the years by several styles, including the neo-classicism of Igor Stravinsky and the serialism of Arnold Schoenberg, his later works contain more of a neo-romantic quality infused with lyricism and traditional tonality. His 1954 work *A Requiem in Our Time* earned him international recognition when it won the Thor Johnson Contest for brass and percussion works. Since then he has composed eight symphonies, several concertos, and ten operas, many of which are biographical in nature such as *Vincent* (1987), based on the life of painter Vincent van Gogh.

An Epitaph for Béla Bartók was originally composed for Cello and Piano in 1955, later rescored for string orchestra in 1969, and revised in 1986. This work is one of three musical tributes that Rautavaara dedicated to three legendary Hungarian composers, Bartók, Zoltán Kodály, and Franz Liszt. According to some critics, *An Epitaph for Béla Bartók* is "warmer and more comforting" than anything Bartók himself wrote.

Concerto for Violin and Piano in D minor

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Arguably the greatest musical child prodigy since Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Jakob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy composed some of his best known works before the age of eighteen. He was born in Hamburg, Germany, the son of successful banker Abraham Mendelssohn and grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Felix's sister Fanny was also a talented pianist and composer but since it was frowned upon for a woman to pursue a career in music, she remained an amateur musician and published some of her early music under her brother's name.

Mendelssohn began taking piano lessons with his mother at age six before studying with Marie Bigot of Paris. Arguably his most influential teacher was Carl Friedrich Zelter, with whom he began studies in 1817. Zelter introduced Felix to the great German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who became a dear friend and a tremendous influence on the young composer. Mendelssohn's early compositional successes include his Octet in E-flat, Opus 20 (1825) and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Opus 21 (1826). Deeply influenced by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Mendelssohn is largely responsible for the revival of Bach's music after it had fallen into near obscurity during the late 18th century. When he was only twenty, Mendelssohn arranged and conducted a performance in Berlin of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, BWV 244, the first performance of this work since Bach's death in 1750. In 1835, Mendelssohn was appointed conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and eventually founded the Leipzig Conservatory. In his final years he suffered from ill health and died shortly after his sister Fanny in 1847, following a series of strokes.

The Concerto for Violin and Piano in D minor dates from Mendelssohn's precocious early period. Mendelssohn was just fourteen when he wrote this double concerto and had already composed twelve string symphonies and several other concerti and chamber works by this time. The work was composed for Mendelssohn at the keyboard and family friend Eduard Rietz on the violin. It was first performed at the Mendelssohn home in 1823 for guests and then again for the general public later that same year but would be forgotten until a revival in 1957. Perhaps this piece was overshadowed by the fame of his beloved Violin Concerto in E minor, Opus 64, and his two well-known piano concerti. Nevertheless, the double concerto is a work that reveals Mendelssohn's depth of talent not only as a composer but also as a concert pianist at an astonishingly young age.

Staff Sergeant Chaerim Smith, violin soloist

Violinist Staff Sergeant Chaerim Smith joined “The President’s Own” Marine Chamber Orchestra in November 2007. Staff Sgt. Smith began her musical training on piano at age three and violin at age six, and went on to earn a bachelor of music degree in violin performance from the Manhattan School of Music in 2003. Her notable instructors include Lucie Robert of the Manhattan School of Music and Kenneth Goldsmith of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. Prior to joining “The President’s Own,” Staff Sgt. Smith performed with the Harrisburg Symphony in Pennsylvania and taught violin and piano and freelanced in the New York tri-state area.

Staff Sergeant Christopher Schmitt, piano soloist

Piano player Christopher Schmitt joined “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band in August 2013. Staff Sgt. Schmitt began his musical training on the piano at age five and later attended the New England Conservatory (NEC) in Boston before transferring to The Juilliard School in New York where he earned a bachelor’s degree in performance in 2009 and a master’s in performance in 2011. He is currently working on a doctorate in performance from Juilliard as well. His teachers included Marjorie Lee of Virginia, the late Patricia Zander of NEC, and Julian Martin of Juilliard. Prior to joining the band, Staff Sgt. Schmitt taught privately and gave master classes in New York and in the Northern Virginia area.

Divertimento for String Orchestra, Opus 118 (1939)

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Hungarian composer and pianist, Béla Bartók, began his musical studies on piano at age five and was composing by age nine. He went on to study at the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest where he met and became lifelong friends with fellow composer Zoltán Kodály. Together they developed an extensive collection and analysis of Hungarian, Romanian, and Slovak folk music. Bartók is now considered to be one of the greatest composers of his homeland, alongside Kodály and Franz Liszt, and he is one of the founders of ethnomusicology.

Bartók completed his Divertimento for String Orchestra, Opus 118 in 1939. By this time, he was at the pinnacle of his compositional maturity and was beginning to simplify his style, turning away from the more modernist experiments of earlier works. A year earlier, Bartók had been approached by Paul Sacher, conductor of the Basel Chamber Orchestra in Basel, Switzerland, and was asked to compose a new work. Sacher had commissioned a new piece from Bartók three years earlier; a collaboration that produced his masterpiece, Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. This time, Sacher wanted “something simpler” and Bartók responded with his Divertimento for String Orchestra.

The Divertimento is wholly different from the modern and angular Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta. The work is harmonically more conventional and is completely cast in traditional musical forms; the first movement follows a classical sonata model, the second is in three-part form, and the final movement is a rondo. Even with Bartók’s signature chromaticism and frequent shifts in harmony from major to minor, each movement remains essentially rooted in tonality. In the opening movement, the composer alludes to the Baroque concerto grosso, often pitting a group of solo instruments against the rest of the ensemble. The slow movement is among the composer’s best efforts. The music carefully unfolds with a winding chromatic figure before suddenly becoming more insistent. The central section is highly suggestive of a funeral march, with a repeated bass and a climax complete with shrill and jolting trills in the upper strings. It is perhaps no coincidence that this music was composed under the looming threat of the Second World War. The finale of the work decidedly alleviates the despair and uncertainty of the previous movement. Much of Bartók’s music was deeply influenced by the folk traditions of Hungary and Romania and nowhere is this more apparent than here. Although the melodies are entirely original, the entire movement bubbles with a rustic quality complete with a showcase of gypsy-like fiddle music. The Divertimento for String Orchestra has become a staple of the orchestral repertoire and stands as one of Bartók’s most concise and accessible works. It is also a shining example of a great composer in complete control of his craft.