MASTER’S RECITAL

Sarah Tanner, oboe
with
Paula Martinez Marrugo, bassoon
Alison Post, piano

March 24, 2021
Marsh Auditorium
6 pm

Program

Sonata in F major (1771) ................................................................. Anna Amalia (1723-1787)
  Adagio
  Allegretto
  Allegro ma non troppo

Song of the Nightingale (1986)....................................................... Felicitas Kukuck (1914-2001)
  Ruhig
  Folksong from Flanders
  Trost der Nacht
  The Nightingale


Niobe (1987) ......................................................................................... Thea Musgrave (b.1928)

Concerto for Oboe and Strings (1944)............................... Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
  Rondo, pastorale
  Minuet and Musette
  Pastorale

This recital is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music.
Program Notes

Sonata in F major (1771)

Anna Amalia (1723-1787), Princess of Prussia and Abbess of Quedlinburg, was not able to truly start her formal studies and later career in music composition until later in her life, despite expressing interest at a young age. Her childhood was tainted by her controlling and abusive father who forbade her to study something as “frivolous” as music. However, even after her father died, her beloved newly crowned brother still expected her to pursue a life more suited to the sister of the king. When Amalia was 20, her brother discovered that she was with child, only to then discover that she had secretly married one of his soldiers, the infamous spy Fredrick van der Trenk. Her brother quickly annulled the marriage, arrested Trenk for espionage, and sent Amalia away to live at Quedlinburg Abbey. It was here that Amalia would later become abbess and begin her formal music studies. She studied with a student of J.S. Bach.

Amalia’s music is characterized by the empfindsamkeit or sentimental style of late Baroque German music. The style also characterized the music of C.P.E. Bach, with whom Amalia was both a contemporary and family friend. Amalia mostly composed religious works and chamber pieces, such as this one. Originally written for flute and keyboard, the piece is performed by a variety of appropriate Baroque instrumentations such as flute and continuo, violin and harpsichord, or in this case, oboe and organ.

Song of the Nightingale (1986)

Felicitas Kukuck (1914-2001) was a German composer during WWII. Originally a pianist, her true passions were teaching and composing. Being of Jewish heritage as well as being a woman in a male dominated profession, Kukuck faced many hardships and obstacles throughout her life and career. Despite constant obstacles, she persevered and had an impressively successful career as a music educator, piano teacher, and composer. A student of famous composer Paul Hindemith, she too held herself to the challenge of composing music for a variety of ability levels. Kukuck wrote a substantial amount of vocal music, both sacred and secular, and a small collection of instrumental music. She is said to have composed daily and well into her old age, continually finding new inspiration in various texts and literature.

In this piece for solo oboe, Kukuck depicts the melancholic sound character of a nightingale’s sorrowful song. In the composer’s own words, “the oboe is the only instrument that is best suited to interpret” a nightingale’s song. She further explains how the oboe portrays how “the nightingale breaks overwhelmingly out of the anchorage of the melody and lets us hear the great melodic richness.”

Dayflower (1995)

Chizuko Yoshida (1916-2013) was a Japanese composer from Nagoya City, Japan. She attended the Kunitachi College of Music in Tokyo. During her career she was also a member of Japanese Society for Rights of Authors, Composers and Publishers as well as the Federation of Women Composers in Japan. Although she predominantly wrote Japanese songs for voice, she wrote three chamber pieces featuring the oboe, including this one.

A dayflower is a plant native to East Asia and parts of Southeast Asian. The plant is called “dayflower” because each bloom only lasts a day; the blooms are characterized by having two large blue petals. In this duet for oboe and bassoon, the two instruments represent the two petals of the dayflower and the piece itself represents the brief but beautiful lifespan of a single bloom. When it starts, I imagine the sun rising as each petal slowly opens and then suddenly the music, like the small yet striking flower, fully blossoms. The flower has been seen and used in aspects of many East Asian cultures, practices, medicines, and art. Its presence is interwoven throughout history and societies the way that the two musical lines are constructed and developed around each other. The piece ends softly with two sustained notes, which to me illustrate the two petals falling to the ground as the day comes to an end.
Niobe (1987)

Thea Musgrave (b.1928) is a Scottish-American composer widely respected and celebrated for her powerful compositional voice and innovative writing style. Her vast collection of works includes pieces for symphony orchestra, solo or chamber concerto and orchestra, chamber orchestras, uniquely orchestrated chamber ensembles, and has even proven her skills in opera. She is also known to incorporate unique electronic or prerecorded tracks as well as actual spatial and acoustic manipulations, all with the intent of adding to the “dramatic affect” of her music. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1928, she studied first at the University of Edinburgh and then later at the Paris Conservatory with the famous Nadia Boulanger. Musgrave’s music is rich and based on strong conventional forms and genres while being distinctly contemporary and innovative.

In this piece for oboe and recorded tape, Musgrave portrays the tragic story of Niobe. In Greek mythology, Niobe, daughter of the King of Sipylus and wife to the King of Thebes, has seven sons and seven daughters. Proud of her progeny, she boasts about them to the Titan Leto, who only had two children, the twin gods Artemis and Apollo. To punish Niobe for her pride, Leto sends Artemis to kill all of Niobe’s daughters and Apollo to kill Niobe’s sons. Afterwards, Niobe was so grief-stricken and wept so much that the gods took pity on her and turned her to stone so that she could forever weep her children. While Musgrave is not the first composer to tell this narrative, her piece has a unique and memorable portrayal. In this piece, the oboe portrays Niobe in her bitter lamenting. She is angry, distraught, and destroyed with such deep sorrow and pain of loss. Musgrave shows this by pushing the oboe to extremes in range and control. The tape features these distant voices, high wails and screams, and bell tolls to mark the death of her children. Not only does it depict the horrible slaying of her children, but it also creates that distance between Niobe and everything else as she loses herself to grieve.

Concerto for Oboe and Strings (1944)

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was a prominent British composer throughout the first half of the 20th century. Drawing from influences of British Renaissance music and English folksong, Vaughan Williams’ works helped redefine what British music was and was meant to sound like, as opposed to its more German style in the 19th century. Vaughan Williams was another composer that thought it important to make music accessible and available to players of all levels, from student and amateur to professional. Throughout almost all his works, there is the characteristically pastoral and idyllic styles of English folksong. Another common characteristic of his music was his prevalent use of modes or modality instead of true major and minor tonalities.

In this concerto, it is easy to hear the influence of English folksong and Vaughan Williams’ tendency towards modality. In the first movement, “Rondo pastorale”, he truly illustrates the awestruck beauty with a touch of whimsy of the British countryside. The second movement, “Minuet and Musette”, we hear the meeting of two dances: a stately dance in triple time and a folk dance that features an instrument akin to an oboe and a bagpipe. The third movement, “Finale (Scherzo)”, is a whirlwind of notes and motifs that slows back into beautiful and peaceful pastoral themes, drawing us back to the countryside.