

BERLIN PHILHARMONIC WIND QUINTET

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19 / 2:30 PM

BING CONCERT HALL

PROGRAM NOTES

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
FANTASY IN F MINOR FOR
CLOCKWORK ORGAN, K. 594 (1790)

Mozart's three surviving works for mechanical organ all come from the last year of his life. They were written in response to a commission from Count Josef Deym's Müllersche Kunstgalerie in Vienna. This art gallery contained a curious mixture of exhibits: plaster replicas of ancient statues, wax reliefs, paintings, copper engravings, and mechanical musical instruments. In March 1791, the count mounted a memorial exhibition for Field Marshal Baron Ernst Gideon von Laudon, an Austrian national hero, at whose funeral music was to be played hourly. For this purpose, Mozart wrote K. 594 (the last entry in his catalogue of works for December 1790) and K. 608 (dated March 3, 1791). The K. 616 *Andante*, dated May 4, 1791, was intended for performance elsewhere in the collection. Furthermore, we can conclude from Mozart's letters and fragments that he wrote additional pieces for mechanical organ, works which have regrettably not survived.

"Clockwork organ" or "organ cylinder" are terms referring to a flute-playing musical clock, in other words, a mechanical organ that is coupled to a clock mechanism in order to reproduce music at a given point in time. These flute-playing musical clocks—for which such composers as Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven also composed a number of pieces—were then very popular instruments in high society art galleries and other "curiosity chambers." They existed in a wide range of types and with differing ranges, as can be seen from Mozart's scores. We can only marvel at the way Mozart's inspiration attained such elevated heights when he was tackling a task of which, as we know from his letters, he was not especially fond. Wolfgang Hildesheimer refers to this music in his biography of Mozart as "Music of significance for a musical box, an almost tragicomical combination, at any rate a triumph of the spirit over the material."

—Michael Hasel

KALEVI AHO (B. 1949)
WIND QUINTET NO. 2 (2014)

The Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet has been enthusiastic about the music of Kalevi Aho since its first encounter with the composer's work. He was born in 1949 and studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki with Einojuhani Rautavaara and in Berlin with Boris Blacher. He is today considered one of the most important and prolific composers of Finland. He has written 16 symphonies, two dozen concerti

for various instruments, and five operas. What particularly impressed the members of the Berlin Quintet was Aho's First Quintet (2006), which had been performed only once, in Turku, Finland. Not only were the performers fascinated by the piece but their audiences around the world have been universally delighted by the work's richness of colors and the exuberant variety of styles. At the request of the Philharmonic Wind Quintet, the Stiftung Berliner Philharmoniker commissioned Aho to write a second wind quintet, and this new work was premiered in June 2015 in the Chamber Music Hall of the Berlin Philharmonie.

With this second contribution to the wind quintet genre, Kalevi Aho opened the door to a whole new and unusual sound world. "It's almost like a symphony, just for five musicians," he explains, describing the four-movement work. It is long, lively, large, and symphonic, with arcs of dynamic and emotional growth.

The first movement, headed "Quiet Beginning," introduces the warm sound of the cor anglais and the dark timbre of the A clarinet. Initially soft in texture, transparent like a fluttering veil, it is penetrated by oscillating tones and different textures. Lyrical motifs and pastoral melodies meander through the different voices, creating a homophonic structure, characterized by passages of folk-dance rhythms. The movement intensifies into a dramatic climax before ending in a peaceful, echoing reminiscence of the beginning.

In the second movement, a quick and wild "Virtuoso toccata" (Aho), the piccolo emerges with an improvisatory solo part. With pounding references to Balkan dance rhythms, the other wind instruments are often grouped in blocks against the piccolo. Elsewhere the upper voices run rapidly into and about each other, while the horn emerges solo. Spatial effects are created by dynamic contrasts. The music builds to a very boisterous dance in which Aho uses clever combinations of instruments to achieve impressive orchestral effects. After a fortissimo climax, the solo flute ends the movement alone, as if only a single bird remains on the wild dance floor.

The third, slow movement ("Quiet, flowing") begins full of contrasts: first the highest instrument dominates and then then the lowest instrument—although in its highest, particularly expressive register. A plaintive, circling bassoon melody responds to the large and dramatic sound spaces and structures. The combination of alto flute, clarinet, and "stopped" horn in their lower registers creates a mysterious new soundscape in the accompaniment. Soon, however, a large-scale

dynamic upswing culminates in an impressive unison passage by all the wind instruments, out of which the English horn triggers a memory of the original bassoon theme. Once more the alto flute creates a mysterious atmosphere, and all the instruments end pianissimo.

In the finale, lively, pulsating, staccato eighth notes run through all the voices. The dance-like movement surprises the listener with its layering of individual voices in changing coalitions: no sooner are the clarinet and oboe paired against the duo of horn and bassoon, for example, than the clarinet suddenly allies itself with the bassoon against the oboe and flute. Again and again individual performers appear solo until the work ends in a long silence in which nothing is heard except air, which the players blow through their instruments. We are reminded that it is the musician's breath which first awakens the instrument's soul.

—Heike Fricke (translation Fergus McWilliam)

GYÖRGY LIGETI (1923–2006)

SIX BAGATELLES FOR WIND QUINTET (1953)

György Ligeti taught composition at the Budapest College of Music (1950–1956); he hated the ideology-bound cultural world of the dictatorship. It is therefore unsurprising that he could not have his piano cycle *Musica ricercata* performed: the work is influenced by the style of late Bartók and Stravinsky and was therefore regarded as highly experimental. An arrangement of six pieces from this cycle for wind quintet also remained unperformed until the eve of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956—even though it was thought too risky to offer the public the dissonant final piece.

No fewer than 16 years after their completion (Ligeti had meanwhile emigrated to the West and was already regarded as a prominent composer), the Six Bagatelles for Wind Quintet were first performed by the Stockholm Wind Quintet, and since then they have remained a highlight of the repertoire of all ambitious wind quintets, attesting to the cycle's brilliant originality.

Wherein lies the attraction of these spirited bagatelles? Each movement inhabits its own world in terms of structure and hidden associations. The first movement can be seen as a parody of the divertimento style. First of all, the composer plays with the major third, then the minor third, and then both together before an ending in C major—all this in a time span of barely a minute! The second movement pays homage to the Hungarian folk song in a manner learned from Bartók—with an emotional, elegiac character. Bartók's expressive slow movements also served as a role model for the fifth movement (*Béla Bartók in memoriam*). The quick Bagatelles Nos. 3, 4, and 6 are flavored by various asymmetrical rhythms including the "Bulgarian rhythm" cultivated by Bartók.

—Dr. András Batta and Michael Hasel

ANTON REICHA (1770–1836)

WIND QUINTET IN D MAJOR, OP. 91, NO. 3 (1818–1819)

If one could make a very good case for Joseph Haydn as the father of the string quartet, there is even more certitude in naming the Bohemian-born composer Anton Reicha (1770–1836) as father of the wind quintet. In fact, today, Reicha's name is known among musicians almost entirely for his essays in this form—the ensemble of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn. Reicha composed often for the wind quintet, beginning with a piece he wrote in 1811 in Paris and continuing through the rest of his years. His pieces are at the very base of the wind quintet repertoire, just as Haydn's work forms the foundation of the string quartet literature.

There is a good deal more to Reicha than his wind quintets. He was born in 1770 in Prague, the same year that Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn. Reicha's father, Simon, was the town piper of Prague. This was a paid municipal position that required the piper to climb the town tower at various times of day to announce the hour by tootling. Perhaps exhausted by all the climbing, not to mention the tootling, Simon Reicha died when his son Anton was only one year old, and the infant's education was left in turn to his mother, then to his grandfather, and finally to his uncle, Joseph Reicha, a very gifted musician. Young Anton, who was a flute player by this time, studied with his uncle, and when Joseph Reicha accepted the position of conductor of the court orchestra in Bonn, Germany, he took along his teenage nephew. The orchestra of Bonn seems to have been a mixed affair and included a number of distinguished musicians with some youngsters filling in. It is amusing when listening to a provincial orchestra today to imagine that within its ranks might be two teenagers as gifted as the flutist of the Bonn Orchestra, Anton Reicha, and his pal back in the viola section, Ludwig van Beethoven.

Beethoven and Reicha would know each other for the rest of their lives, but the paths they followed were quite different. Beethoven increasingly turned towards Vienna and the music of Haydn and Mozart, ultimately creating his own musical universe. After much traveling, Reicha wound up in Paris after the Napoleonic Wars. He took a position teaching at the Paris Conservatoire, where the list of his pupils included practically every great composer who studied in France at that time: Liszt, von Flotow, Gounod, Thomas, Berlioz, and Franck. Some of the ideas that Reicha passed on to his students were considered extremely "modern" and experimental. He imagined writing for a number of different orchestras at once, sometimes playing in different keys simultaneously. While this is not the polytonality of the French composers of the 20th century such as Poulenc and Milhaud, Reicha's concept, for example, of a string quartet playing in G major while a wind quartet played in E minor was highly original. He also conceived of the idea of multi-orchestras, that is, various sections of the orchestra placed around the performance space in a number of different locations. This inspiration came to a spectacular fruition in the work of one of his pupils, Hector Berlioz, whose tremendous *Requiem Mass* actually employs brass choirs in the four piers of the church, with the orchestra and chorus near the front altar, while the tenor soloist stands high in a balcony, singing like an angel from above.

Reicha was one of the most original musicians of his time and held a place of great honor in French society. He was welcomed in the most important artistic and literary salons, and one can find passages in the French novelists of the time that mention listening to Reicha's wind quintets. In his memoirs, Reicha wrote of these works: "At that time, there was a dearth not only of good classic music but of any good music at all for wind instruments, simply because the composers knew little of their technique." While his first attempt to compose for these five instruments proved a disaster, which he quickly discarded, he soon found the knack and wrote a book of six quintets that were played all over Europe. Reicha goes on to say, "Encouraged by the success of these performances I wrote 18 more, bringing the number to 24. They created a sensation throughout Europe." It is plain that this was not merely a passing sensation. To the present day and into the next century, wind quintet players are and will be playing the music of Anton Joseph Reicha.

—Note courtesy of David Rowe Artists