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# The Merling Trio

April 14, 2002, 3 p.m.



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# The Merling Trio

Renata Artman Knific, violin  
Bruce Uchimura, cello  
Susan Wiersma Uchimura, piano

## PROGRAM

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|--|--------------------|
| <i>Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 35</i><br>Prelude et Fugue<br>Theme et Variations<br>Sonate                                 | Joaquin Turina     |
| <i>Piano Trio in G Major, Hob. XV: 25 (The Gypsy)</i><br>Andante<br>Poco Adagio<br>Finale Rondo all'Ongarese: Presto | Franz Joseph Haydn |

## INTERMISSION

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| <i>Three Nocturnes</i><br>Andante<br>Andante quieto<br>Tempestoso  | Ernest Bloch    |
| <i>De Las Cuatro Estaciones Portenas</i><br>Verano porteno<br>Otono porteno<br>Invierno porteno<br>Primavera porteno | Astor Piazzolla |

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Turina: Piano Trio No. 1, Op. 35

Born in Seville in 1882, Joaquin Turina became one of Spain's most popular musicians, and since his death in 1949 has been among the most highly regarded and influential figures in Spanish music. His major music study was in Paris with Vincent d'Indy, but he was influenced even more by compatriots Manuel de Falla and Isaac Albéniz, who encouraged him to use more elements of the music of his native Andalusia. Most of Turina's works are descriptive of some aspect of provincial life, and are characterized by inventive uses of Spanish rhythms, along with a subtle grace, charm and humor. Certainly this is true of his first piano trio. While obviously "Spanish," it is also a personal and intimate work, requiring both brilliance and sensitivity from the players. The titles of the movements are usual enough, but the style is uniquely Turina's--where, in the words of writer Richard Freed, "the mercurial Iberian temperament is reflected throughout, particularly in the final movement, which calls for no fewer than eleven changes of tempo within its relatively short span."

### Haydn: Trio in G Major, Hob.XV:25 (The Gypsy)

This trio is one of a series of brilliant piano trios Haydn composed during his residence in London (1791-95). At first primarily a vehicle for amateur music-making, the piano trio had evolved, in Haydn's hands, into a genre of substantial musical content, with longer movements, a richer harmonic vocabulary, and a texture of more even partnership between the traditionally dominant piano and the stringed instruments. The G Major trio, which probably dates from 1794, quickly became a favorite with the public. It differs from Haydn's other late trios in several respects, most significantly in the form of the movements. Instead of the usual sonata form for the first movement, variation for the second, and rondo for the third, Haydn uses variation in the first and rondo form in both second and third movements. The violin has several important solos, and the cello part, which historically just lent left to the weak bass of the early piano, has some independence. The opening Andante features a song-like theme; two of the variations are notable for brilliant violin solos. The second movement is rich in expressive melodic ideas, and contains another violin solo in its middle section. The closing Rondo all'Ongarese, which gives the trio its nickname, is based on Hungarian dance melodies played by Gypsy bands. Such tunes were very familiar to Haydn, who liked to use them in his own music, and never to better effect than in this rondo. Its cheerful brilliance is such that the rest of the trio seems to have been written just to showcase it.

### **Bloch: Three Nocturnes**

Born in Geneva in 1880, Ernest Bloch studied in Belgium and Germany. In 1916 he came to the United States, where he became director of the Cleveland Institute of Music in 1920. He returned to Europe in the 1930s, but the approaching war brought him back to the States, where he died in 1959. His music is known mainly, but not exclusively, for its racial identity, rooted deeply in Hebraic tradition and thought. *Three Nocturnes* dates from 1924, during Bloch's tenure at Cleveland, where he produced a number of works for performance there. In her book *Ernest Bloch: Creative Spirit*, the composer's daughter Suzanne writes: "The Nocturnes consist of a first Andante, with echoes of Alpine strains, hazy, heard as if in the distance. The second, Andante quieto, is also pastoral in mood. Both these pieces are in simple three-part form. The last, Tempestoso, more rhythmical and using thematic material from the second movement, gives the feeling of a passing storm which loses itself in the distance, leaving behind a quiet and a serenity."

### **Piazzolla: De Las Cuatro Estaciones Portenas**

An Argentinean of Italian descent, Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) was a bandleader and expert player of the bandoneon (a type of accordion) as well as a composer. He was born and died in Buenos Aires, and lived also in New York and Paris. He studied classical music with Alberto Ginastera and Nadia Boulanger.

Piazzolla is best known for his "nuevo tango," or "new tango," a style based upon tango and using such musical devices as fugue, chromaticism, dissonance, and elements of jazz. This distinctive style first found acceptance in the U.S. and France, but by the 1980s was popular even in Argentina, where it initially met resistance. Most recently, classical performers, particularly the Kronos Quartet and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, have performed many of Piazzolla's works, of which there are some 750 in all.

*Las Cuatro Estaciones Portenas* ("The Four Porteno Seasons" or "The Buenos Aires Seasons") originated in 1965 when Piazzolla wrote "Verano porteno" ("Summer") for a play. Piazzolla completed the work in 1970. As the title implies, his inspiration was Vivaldi's famous "Four Seasons"--hardly surprising given that all four of Piazzolla's grandparents were Italian immigrants. There are passages that sound much like Vivaldi or are borrowed from him, but overall the style and spirit is that of Piazzolla's "nuevo tango."

*Program notes by Gregory Fitzgerald, Western Michigan University*

## **THE MERLING TRIO**

The Merling Trio was founded in 1988, and quickly established itself as a premiere ensemble. A truly international trio, it brings together musicians from Polish, Japanese, and Dutch backgrounds. The Merling Trio has been hailed as a brilliantly distinguished group endowed with remarkable gifts of communication, magnificent precision, and an impeccable blend of sound. The trio made its New York debut in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in 1993, and was named a finalist for the Naumburg Foundation Chamber Music Award in 1994. They have coached with Bonnie Hampton, Ruth Laredo, Martin Canin, Joyce Robbins, Joel Krosnik, and Anne Epperson.

The Merling Trio has given numerous recitals throughout Canada and the United States. Members of the Trio have performed with orchestras such as the English Chamber Orchestra, the Honolulu Symphony, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, and the South Carolina Philharmonic, under the baton of such notable conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Simon Rattle, and Christoph Eschenbach. Recent trio performances include concerts at New York's Merkin Hall and at Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art, as well as three performances of the Beethoven Triple Concerto with the Grand Rapids (MI) Symphony.

Several contemporary composers have written works for the Merling Trio, and in 1993, they commissioned and premiered C. Curtis-Smith's Second Piano Trio. In February 1998, the trio returned to Carnegie Hall for a sold-out performance of a new work by New York composer Terry Winter-Owens, commissioned by the Merling Trio with a Commissioning Grant from the American Composers Forum. During the current season, the Trio will commission a new work from jazz great Frank Proto for piano trio with jazz bass. Performances by the Merling Trio have been broadcast widely on television and radio, including WNYC and Peachstate Public Radio. Their first CD, entitled *The Merling Trio performs works of C. Curtis-Smith*, was released in 1995 by Albany Records, in collaboration with conductor Dennis Russell Davies. About the CD, Fanfare wrote, "The composer could not ask for better interpreters." The trio's latest CD, including works by Haydn, Mozart, Brahms, Schumann, and Liszt, was released by Pamplin Records in 2001.

In residence at the School of Music at Western Michigan University, members of the trio are also faculty members at the prestigious ENCORE School for Strings, and at the Lancut Festival in Poland. Festival appearances include the Banff Centre for the Arts, the Pensacola Summer Music Festival, the Skaneateles Festival, the Saugatuck Chamber Music Festival, and the Fontana Festival of Art and Music. Recent educational activities include performances and master classes for the California Music Teachers Association and the Music Teachers National Association.

The Cleveland Plain Dealer said, "The players shaped a grand interpretation, fluent in rhythm and rich in romantic feeling." The Grand Rapids Press has said, "The trio...delivered a standard of playing that is on par with some of the best known violin-cello-piano teams, captivating the audience through the immediacy and extraordinary sensitivity of its playing."

A native of Warsaw, Poland, violinist RENATA ARTMAN KNIFIC received undergraduate academic and violin diplomas with honors from the K. Szymanowski Liceum in Warsaw, a post-graduate diploma in violin performance from the Royal College of Music in London, England, and an Artist Diploma in Violin from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Her major teachers have been David Cerone and Tessa Robbins. She also has studied chamber music with Josef Gingold, Mischa Schneider, and the Guarneri Quartet. Ms. Knific has performed in Great Britain with the English Chamber Orchestra and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Her tenure with the former includes extensive tours throughout Europe and the United States, South America, and Asia, as well as recordings on EMI, Decca, and CBS labels, and performances with Herman Bauman, Barry Tuckwell, Jean-Pierre Rampal, Maurice Andre, Pinchas Zukerman, Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Shlomo Mintz, Salvatore Accardo, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Vladimir Spivakov, Richard Stoltzman, and George Malcolm. She has worked under such notable conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Simon Rattle, Edo de Waart, and Christoph Eschenbach. In this country she has performed with the Concerto Soloists of Philadelphia, the Santa Fe Opera Orchestra, the Ohio Chamber Orchestra, the Cleveland Opera Orchestra, and the Cleveland Ballet Orchestra. She has served as concertmaster of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and of the Northwood Festival Orchestra. She is a Professor of Music at Western Michigan University, where she performs with the Merling Trio, teaches violin, and coaches chamber ensembles. Formerly she taught at the Interlochen Arts Academy, the ENCORE School for Strings, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the Lancut Festival in Poland. Ms. Knific has also performed extensively as a soloist and chamber musician. Her U.S. recitals include the premier performance of *Fantasy Pieces* by C. Curtis-Smith at Town Hall in New York City, as well as appearances in Ann Arbor, Iowa City, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland. Her recitals abroad have been featured in England, in Scotland at the Edinburgh Festival, and on BBC Scotland Radio and Hong Kong Radio. As a chamber musician, she has been first violinist of the Interlochen String Quartet and the Merling String Quartet, and has appeared on the Severance Hall Chamber Music Concerts with members of the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Cleveland Institute of Music Concert Series.

BRUCE UCHIMURA received the Bachelor of Music degree from the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied cello with Leonard Rose and Channing Robbins, and chamber music with Felix Galimir and the Juilliard String Quartet. He received the Master of Music degree with an Artist Diploma in Cello from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied cello with Alan Harris and chamber music with Koichiro Harada and Bernhard Goldschmidt. He also has studied at the Aspen Music Festival, the Meadowmount School of Music, and the Banff School of Fine Arts, and has held an orchestral fellowship at the Spoleto Festival in Italy. Mr. Uchimura has performed with the Charleston Symphony, the Honolulu Symphony, the Grand Rapids Symphony, the South Carolina Philharmonic, and the Macon (Georgia) Symphony. He served as Principal Cellist of the Augusta (Georgia) Symphony, and was the first person ever to be named Associate Conductor of that ensemble. In that capacity he created and developed a highly successful Symphonic Pops and Youth Concert Series. He also has been Principal Cellist of the Greater Lansing Symphony, the Kalamazoo Symphony, the Battle Creek Symphony,

and the Spoleto Festival Orchestra. His activities as a chamber musician include membership in the Augusta Symphony String Quartet and appearances in numerous recitals throughout the U.S. with the Seraphin String Quartet. Mr. Uchimura is Professor of Music at Western Michigan University, where he performs with the Merling Trio, conducts the University Symphony Orchestra, teaches cello, and coaches chamber ensembles. He taught previously at the Augusta College Center for Creative Arts, the Augusta Country Day School, Michigan State University, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and Calvin College. He is also a faculty member at the renowned ENCORE School for Strings in Cleveland, where he serves as coordinator of chamber music and instructor of cello. Mr. Uchimura has served on the Georgia Council for the Arts Advisory Panel for artist-initiated grants. In addition, he has adjudicated major string competitions throughout the U.S., including the Illinois Young Artist Competition and the Michigan ASTA Concerto Competition. He is president of the Michiana Cello Society, is affiliated with ASTA and MTNA, and is a member of Pi Kappa Lambda, the national music honor society.

Pianist SUSAN WIERSMA UCHIMURA received Bachelor of Music degrees in theory and piano from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she studied piano with Jack Radunsky and Eunice Podis, and chamber music with Alan Harris and Anne Epperson. She received the Master of Music degree in pedagogy from the University of South Carolina, where she studied with Max Camp and Charles Fugo. She also has studied at the Banff Centre School of Fine Arts, at the Aspen Music School with Edith Oppens, and in New York with Dorothy Taubman and Edna Golandsky. She has performed with the CIM Symphony, the Augusta Symphony, the Western String Chamber Orchestra, the Capriccio Chamber Orchestra, the Grand Rapids Youth Symphony, the Kalamazoo Symphony, and the Battle Creek Symphony. Ms. Wiersma Uchimura is currently Resident Artist with the Merling Trio at Western Michigan University's School of Music, where she is also staff accompanist. Previously she served on the piano faculties of the Cleveland Institute of Music Preparatory Division and the Augusta College Music Center in Georgia, and the accompanying faculties of the Meadowmount School of Music and the Aspen Music School. Ms. Wiersma Uchimura performs regularly with major young artists around the world. She has been resident collaborative pianist for the Julius Stulberg Young Artist Auditions, the Music Teachers National Association Wurlitzer-Collegiate Artist Competition, the ENCORE School for Strings, and the Pensacola Summer Music Festival. She recently collaborated with virtuoso double bassist Mark Bernat, cellist Tony Ross, violist Catherine Basrak, and violinists Soovin Kim, Leila Josefowicz, Tamaki Kawakubo, Jennifer Koh, and Robert Chen. Ms. Wiersma Uchimura has been a member of the board of directors of the Michigan Music Teachers Association. She has adjudicated many major competitions, including the Illinois Young Artist Competition and the Midland Music Society Annual Music Contest, and has given numerous master classes throughout the country.