

Musical Treasure Chest #57

Spring weather has been rather violently dislodged by summer weather over the past week, and while I am overjoyed by the greenery and sunshine and day length of the warmer months, a slight gentler transition would have been welcome. But, none-the-less there is much to celebrate. My season with Glimmerglass Festival is just around the corner, and I am thrilled to have a chance to play, I missed the opera terribly in 2020. Musicians of Ma'alwyck has a residency at Hyde Hall near Cooperstown this summer and will present four concerts between late June and September. I am so excited about these programs: they are varied, extremely unique and include a wonderful line-up of fabulous guest artists and special features. I will share a little about two of these programs before I go into this week's Musical Treasure Chest.

Last summer, director of Hyde Hall Jonathan Maney suggested that Musicians of Ma'alwyck fill its COVID destroyed programming with the making of a CD. We jumped at the opportunity and spent a week last July recording a program of music from the Hall's archives and related operatic transcriptions. The CD, which was released in late February, has been selling briskly and getting great reviews. In celebration of the collaboration, MofM will be performing a special concert at Hyde Hall on Thursday, June 24th. We will play some of our CD repertory, as well as talking about our work with the archives and the making of the disc. There will also be a special lighting ceremony which is not to be missed. The following night, June 25th, MofM pairs up with three former Glimmerglass Festival Young Artists for a delightful operatic evening featuring the 1817 comic one-act opera *The Ship's Captain*. Two sisters, a curious will left by their recently deceased guardian, and the arrival of a mysterious stranger set the stage for the plot of this tuneful and clever work by Carl August Blum. The libretto has been translated to English by Byron Nilsson, who is also the stage director for this production. If you cannot make the trip to Hyde Hall, we will also be performing it on Sunday, June 27th at Freedom Park in Scotia and on Monday, June 28th at the lovely historic Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls. I really hope you can join us for one or both of these programs.

I had various ideas about what piece to share with you for this installment. I seem to have been on a bit of a vocal repertory journey over the last few weeks, so I decided to return to purely instrumental music for today, with **Robert Schumann's first piano trio**. This work, which I first became acquainted with in college, performing it on my senior violin recital, is a marvelous piece: full of pathos, dramatic tension, great energy and aching lovely melodies. I am giving you a link to the Horszowski Trio that has elaborate program notes, so I won't go into much detail in that way, but I do want to share a bit of general information about Schumann and his compositional style. Schumann was, particularly in his later life, a tortured, unhappy man, suffering from what was most likely bi-polar disorder. Married to his beloved Clara Wieck, he found himself also having great difficulties supporting the family as a composer. Clara was the consistent family wage-earner, continuing her concert career even as she birthed and raised eight children. Schumann in his manic phases would compose incessantly, generally in one genre, so that certain years see a huge output of songs, or piano pieces, or chamber music. For example in 1842 he writes three string quartets, the op 44 Piano Quintet, the op 47 Piano Quartet, and the op 88 Fantasy Pieces for violin, cello and piano. His first piano trio, op 63 dates from 1847, a relatively happy time for him, as his fame as a composer was flourishing, and he seemed to be relatively stable emotionally. And this trio, while it does contain a few dark and brooding moments, seems to display a sense of triumph, particularly in the finale.

I had a chance to coach on this trio with the great cellist Leslie Parnas, who was on the faculty at Boston University. He was a tough teacher, with high expectations and little tolerance for not meeting them. But he was wonderfully musical and full of great ideas about phrase-shaping and interpretation. I learned a lot from him about the musical "guts" of this trio and to this day, I still hear Parnas' sort of gruff voice in my head, yelling over the music: "more vibrato, more passion, use your bow, go!"

Here is the link to the trio. I hope you might take a few moments to read the program notes; they are quite good and help establish a good framework for listening. <https://www.earsense.org/chamber-music/Robert-Schumann-Piano-Trio-No-1-in-d-minor-Op-63/?ri=5&v=6JKHgHfYq-M1>

