Programme

Aaron Copland (1900-1990), Waltz and Celebration from “Billy the Kid.” Arranged for Cello and Piano by the composer

Samuel Barber (1910-1981), Sonata for Cello and Piano Op. 6

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), Three Meditations from “Mass.” Arranged for Cello and Piano by the composer

George Gershwin (1898-1937), Three Preludes. Transcriptions by Jascha Heifitz and Wolfgang Birtel arranged by Katy Bell

Copland, Waltz and Celebration from “Billy the Kid”

Billy the Kid was inspired by tales of William Bonney, a famous outlaw. Copland, throughout his composing life, was striving to find a musical language accessible to the many, a popular, simple and natural style. Billy the Kid is an exemplar of his success in achieving this goal and has remained popular in concert halls since its first production. Here we have a “Waltz” danced by Billy and his sweetheart and a “Celebration” that follows Billy’s capture.

Barber, Sonata Op.6

Allegro ma non troppo
Adagio
Allegro appassionato

This beautiful work for cello and piano was, for many years, the only Sonata for these instruments by an eminent American composer and as such, fielded criticism for its old fashioned, European-leaning aesthetic. However, it is a genuinely heartfelt work that charms listeners and critics alike, winning them over. Barber dedicated the Sonata to his teacher Rosario Scalero who influenced Barber, passing on her deep love for Brahms. There is a simplicity and unadulterated passion here that Copland acknowledged, saying of his friend, “He chose to write in a fairly conventional romantic idiom, but if his music is unadventurous, it is always beautifully made, is often affecting and sometimes dashing.”

Bernstein, Three Meditations from “Mass”

Alex Ross, writing in the New Yorker describes Leonard Bernstein thus:
The story of Bernstein plays out like a modern fable. A prodigious boy from Lawrence, Massachusetts, the son of Ukrainian shetl immigrants, one day sits down at his aunt’s upright and begins plinking out notes. Within months, he is outplaying his first piano teacher; within a couple of years he has mastered Rhapsody in Blue........wins a lifelong friend in Aaron Copland.... He moves to
New York and in a little more than two years pulls off an extraordinary triple feat: he wins national notice as a conductor at the New York Philharmonic; he establishes himself as a concert hall composer and he knocks out a hit musical.

By the time *Mass: a theatre piece for singers, players and dancers* was written for the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. in 1971, Bernstein was a living legend and worked constantly with super human energy, desiring to hit the heady heights of writing “Great Works” of American music. “Mass” caused an uproar with its controversial commentary on the Catholic liturgy. The sacred Latin ritual is interrupted by episodes in English with dance and popular styles. The piece also contains “Meditations”, reflective moments when the Celebrant invites the congregation to pray. These are the material for the work you will hear today. The First Meditation was originally scored for strings and organ, the second uses variations from Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and the Third, originally played on wind instruments has folk dance elements.

**Gershwin, Three Preludes**

George Gershwin, another 20th Century giant was not Harvard trained like Bernstein but plugged popular tunes for a living. He straddled popular and classical styles in such a way that the popularity of his music has never waned. Writing in The Atlantic, David Schiff suggests, *Gershwin will remain unique not because he mixed classical and popular- many other composers have done that- but because of the way he combined the two. His classical pieces could have been written only by a composer whose primary form of expression was the thirty-two-bar song; his songs owe their distinctive character to his early study of and abiding love for the classics. All his classical pieces contain tunes that could have appeared in shows, but they also helped him to enrich the harmonic sophistication and expressive warmth of his popular tunes.*

His own words echo Copland’s sentiments, “True music must reflect the thought and aspirations of the people and time. My people are Americans. My time is today”. 