



PA Sinfonia Program Notes
February 27, 2010

The program:

- Trio for oboe, bassoon and Piano by Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
Nobuo Kitagawa, oboe; Susan Shaw, bassoon; and Michael Gurt, piano
 - Introduction: Presto; Lento
 - Andante
 - Rondo

- Two Rhapsodies for oboe, viola and piano by Charles Martin Loeffler
Nobuo Kitagawa, oboe; Agnès Maurer, viola; Michael Gurt, piano

- Brahms piano quintet in f minor:
Michael Gurt, piano with string quartet comprised of Rebecca Brown and Simon Maurer, violins; Agnès Maurer, viola; Deborah Davis, cello
 - Movements: I. Allegro non troppo
 - II Andante, un poco adagio
 - III. Scherzo: Allegro
 - IV. Finale: Poco sostenuto-Allegro non troppo- Presto non troppo

Michael Gurt is the Paula Garvey Manship Distinguished Professor of Piano at Louisiana State University. Professor Gurt serves as Piano Mentor at the Hot Springs Music Festival, and is also the head of the piano department at the Sewanee Summer Music Center. He has served as Piano Chair of the Louisiana Music Teachers Association, and he has taught at two summer music seminars held at Tunghai University in Taichung, Taiwan. Professor Gurt holds degrees from the University of Michigan and the Juilliard School. In 1982 he won First Prize in the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition, and he was also a prize winner in international competitions held in Pretoria, South Africa, and Sydney, Australia.

Gurt has performed as soloist with the Chicago Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Utah Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, the Memphis Symphony, the Capetown Symphony, the China National Symphony Orchestra, and the Natal Philharmonic Orchestra in Durban, South Africa. He has made solo appearances in Alice Tully Hall in New York, Ambassador Auditorium in Los Angeles, Orchestra Hall in Detroit, City Hall in Hong Kong, the Victorian Arts

Center in Melbourne, Australia, Baxter Hall in Capetown, South Africa, and the Attaturk Cultural Center in Istanbul, Turkey.

Gurt has collaborated with the Takacs String Quartet, and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville, Queensland. He has served on the juries of both the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition and the New Orleans International Piano Competition, and he has recorded on the Naxos, Centaur and Redwood labels.

Since Allan Birney first invited this new soloist to appear with the Pennsylvania Sinfonia Orchestra 13 years ago, Sinfonia audiences have been charmed by Michael's charismatic piano performances and signature encores. The Sinfonia is pleased to welcome Michael back to the Lehigh Valley.

Francis Poulenc is a French composer born in Paris in 1899. He was a member of the group of young avant garde composers known as Les Six (The Six). He admired and borrowed from the music of Mozart and Saint-Saëns as well as the popular music of his time. His early music has light, urbane, and satirical characters of the dadaist era. Later in his career, after the loss of close friends and his rediscovery of Roman Catholic faith, he produced sombre sacred work. A prolific composer of ballet, opera, orchestral, piano, and a great number of vocal works, he was fond of wind instruments and left much important chamber music for the genre. The first movement, Presto, is modeled after Haydn's Allegro movements. The wry, dry main theme is contrasted with the slow middle section which has almost the syrupy sentimentality of cabaret music. The second movement opens with the Mozart-like theme but it turns quickly to the chromatically colored versions of the Parisian popular music. The Saint-Saëns-like third movement has a strong sense of humor and parody. After brief lyrical passages, the movement accelerates to end in a final dry, march-like statement.

Nobuo Kitagawa, oboist, has written the following program notes on “La Cornemuse” from Two Rhapsodies by Charles Martin Loeffler.

Charles Martin Loeffler is a German/American composer born in Berlin in 1862. He studied violin with Joseph Joachim and studied composition with Earnest Guiraud in Paris, where he worked as a violinist in the Padeloup Orchestra. He emigrated to the United States in 1881 and served as the assistant concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra for twenty one years. After retirement from the BSO, he settled in Medfield, Massachusetts to devote himself to composition. Although he was a born German steeped in German romantic musical tradition, after his father's imprisonment by the Prussian government, he fabricated his identity as a Frenchman and deepened his appreciation for anything French. Just like his contemporary Debussy, he was fascinated by the

poetry of symbolists and he set many French symbolist poems to his vocal work. "La Cornemuse" (The Bagpipe) was inspired by a poem by Maurice Rollinat of the same title. In Loellfer's Rhapsody, we can hear the influences of Brahms's chamber music, Listz's piano work, and Debussy's impressionistic harmony.

Notes from Michael Gurt regarding the Brahms:

As with some other Brahms works, the quintet went through several revisions and re-scorings before assuming its present form. Brahms originally wrote it (in 1862) as a string quintet; he then rewrote it as a sonata for two pianos, in which form it is occasionally played today. In 1864 the work finally became a piano quintet. The work is very serious in character and complex in content, and the complexities are greatly clarified by the contrast in sound between the piano and the strings, whereas, in the 2-piano version, the music can sound dense and overly complex because of the lack of instrumental contrast. The challenges of presenting this work are endless: they involve questions of clarity and balance, issues of phrasing on which agreement must be reached, problems of pacing and tempo relation, intonation problems in the string parts (fortunately the piano is spared this problem!), and many other problems both technical and musical. I hasten to add that confronting these problems is a joy for all concerned!