



# *The Musical Leipzig*

Sookkyung Cho, Artistic Director

## **Program #2**

Sunday, November 5th | 3:00 PM

Alger Park Church

(2:15 Pre-Concert Conversation)

Monday, November 6th | 7:30 PM

Sherman Van Solkema Recital Hall,

Grand Valley State University



# Program

Zenas Hsu, violin  
Francesca McNeeley, cello  
Sookkyung Cho, piano

Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 24      Heinrich von Herzogenberg  
IV. Lento - Allegro      (1843-1900)

Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 7      Ethel Smyth  
I. Allegro moderato      (1858-1944)  
II. Scherzo: Allegro grazioso  
III. Romanze: Andante grazioso  
IV. Finale: Allegro vivace

Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 49      Felix Mendelssohn  
I. Molto allegro agitato      (1809-1847)  
II. Andante con molto tranquillo  
III. Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace  
IV. Finale: Allegro assai appassionato

## Program Notes

### Piano Trio in C minor, Op. 24

This program introduces two composers who were linked to Leipzig in the second half of the nineteenth century. Heinrich von Herzogenberg was originally from the city of Graz in Austria. He was a member of the minor nobility and studied both law and composition in Vienna. His composition teacher, Felix Otto Dessoff (who was from Leipzig himself), was friendly with Brahms and introduced his student to the illustrious composer. Herzogenberg moved to Leipzig in 1872, and in 1875 he was one of the founders of the Bach-Verein there. As George B. Stauffer explains, this choral society "was set up in 1875 at the urging of Bach biographer Philipp Spitta to perform Bach's cantatas in complete and unarranged form." Herzogenberg served as its conductor from 1876 to 1885 and thus took an important role in Leipzig's ongoing engagement with its Bach heritage. He also taught composition privately in Leipzig (see the notes below on Ethel Smyth). Upon leaving Leipzig, Herzogenberg began to teach composition at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin and remained there until 1889. (Interestingly, his successor in Berlin, Woldemar Bargiel, was Clara Schumann's half-brother from her mother's second marriage.) Herzogenberg's wife, Elisabeth, was also a close friend and correspondent with Brahms.

Herzogenberg was a prolific composer who emphasized song and chamber music. His published works include fifteen chamber works. Among these, his Piano Trio No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 24, is one of the earliest, dating from 1877. At that time he was living in Leipzig and conducting the Bach-Verein, and just a year later he would become Ethel Smyth's composition teacher.

Today we will hear movement 4 of this trio. It opens with a slow section that begins with a fugal theme first heard in the first movement and then moves into an Allegro. The Allegro is very similar to Brahms's "Hungarian" style, which was actually a stylized imitation of the music played by wandering Roma ("gypsy") musicians. Some characteristics of this style include chromatic melodies, syncopated rhythms, and quick energetic dancelike passages. Herzogenberg also varies the themes when they recur, adding quicker passages in the piano

and interesting cross-rhythms. This exciting movement demonstrates his compositional skill and may entice listeners to seek out more of his works.

### **Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 7**

Ethel Smyth was a woman of strong character who rose to an important position in the British musical world. Growing up in a military family, she displayed musical talent and had some support from her parents. Though they did not support her making a career in music, they allowed her to study music in Leipzig, whose conservatory was attracting many foreign students. She wrote music in many genres, particularly devoting herself to opera. For quite a while she struggled for acceptance in England because of her unconventional political views and the strong Germanic roots of her music. Beginning in 1910, she was actively involved in the struggle for women's suffrage. Smyth was an unabashed lesbian who had close ties to many women from the artistic world, including operetta star Marie Geistinger, French patron Princesse Pauline de Polignac, and feminist author Virginia Woolf. Her "first serious love," according to Sophie Fuller and Elisa Rolle, was Elisabeth ("Lisl") von Herzogenberg, the wife of Heinrich von Herzogenberg, while Smyth was his composition student.

Smyth's ties to Leipzig began when she traveled there in 1877 to study at the Leipzig Conservatory, where her teachers included Carl Reinecke, whose music will be included in Program 3 of this series. She was not happy at the conservatory, so the following year she decided to remain in Leipzig and pursue music on her own. She studied privately with Herzogenberg and, as described by Sophie Fuller, "receiv[ed] encouragement for her musical ambitions through involvement in musical circles which included Brahms, Grieg, Joachim and Clara Schumann." She remained in Europe for about ten years before returning to England.

Her Violin Sonata in A minor, Op. 7, dates from 1887. The first movement is sorrowful, with sections that are quite tumultuous. The uneasy first theme is followed by a more tranquil second theme, and the development features a more dramatic piano part with some intense dissonance. The second

theme, a whimsical scherzo, features frequent swift changes of key. The third movement, titled "Romanze," is in song form (ABA'). The opening section, in a mournful E minor, is marked *Andante grazioso*, and the 6/8 meter gives it a rocking quality. The B section, mostly in the parallel major key, moves to an *Allegro tempo* and to 2/4. When the *Andante* returns, Smyth makes full use of the violin's upper register to create a haunting ending. The sprightly *Finale*, in A minor, is in rondo form. New themes heard between recurrences of the A theme bring cross rhythms and several meter changes.

### **Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47**

Felix Mendelssohn came from a strong Jewish intellectual tradition. His grandfather, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), was a major Enlightenment thinker. Moses lived in Berlin, where he worked for a silk manufacturer while somehow managing to write extensively on many philosophical and theological issues. He advocated for religious tolerance and Jewish assimilation into German society. Felix's aunt, Brendel (Dorothea) Mendelssohn, after an unhappy arranged marriage to a Jewish banker, married Friedrich Schlegel, a leader of German Romantic thought; eventually, her two sons from her first marriage joined the Nazarene movement of German painters in Italy. While some of Moses' children remained Jewish, others converted to Christianity: for example, Dorothea became a Protestant to marry Friedrich Schlegel, and later that couple chose to become Catholic. Felix's father, Abraham, remained Jewish but had his children secretly baptized; he himself converted to Protestantism only in 1822.

Felix had three siblings; his sister Fanny, four years older, was also a highly gifted musician, though their musical activities took different paths due to gender expectations at the time. Raised in Berlin, they grew up in a stimulating intellectual environment, with private tutors and many connections to important artists and thinkers. They were tutored in music by professionals, including the composers Ludwig Berger and Carl Friedrich Zelter, a close friend of the poet Goethe. When the boy was twelve, Zelter brought Felix on a trip to Weimar, where he

had daily conversations with the famous poet and played for the ducal court.

As his family was independently wealthy, Mendelssohn was able to choose his musical path based on what he found most important rather than being concerned about salary. After some years combining travel with professional activity in Berlin—including a momentous revival performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, the work's centennial—he worked as city musical director in the west German city of Düsseldorf, where he remained from 1833 to 1835. After that, he accepted a position as director of the Gewandhaus orchestra and Thomasschule in Leipzig, where he went on to make a particularly strong mark as a musical leader. He worked in Leipzig from 1835 to 1840. King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia and King Friedrich August II of Saxony vied for his services, each desiring Mendelssohn to work in his realm. Mendelssohn left Leipzig to accept a job in Berlin, but he eventually worked out an arrangement so that he could divide his time between Berlin and Leipzig, where he was declared an honorary citizen in 1843.

As scholar R. Larry Todd puts it, Mendelssohn's work in Leipzig involved "presiding over the brilliant concert life of the city." He chose interesting repertoire: on the one hand, he led premieres of new works, including Robert Schumann's Symphony No. 1 and Schubert's newly discovered Symphony No. 9. By contrast, he also designed series of historical concerts that revived works by Bach and Handel at a time when it was not common to perform music from previous centuries. In 1843, after consultations with the Saxon king, Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatory, which later became a magnet for aspiring musicians from Europe and North America.

As a composer, Mendelssohn was highly productive and composed in most important genres of the period. His catalog of works includes piano music, songs, symphonies, incidental music for theatrical works, oratorios and other sacred choral works, and chamber music. He composed his Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 49, in 1839; his friend Ferdinand Hiller encouraged him to revise it, and he "rewrote the piano part entirely in order to 'modernize' its passage-work."

Mendelssohn was trained more in the Classical than Romantic style, and this is reflected in his extremely clear approach to form. The first movement is in textbook sonata form except for some unexpected keys: after a dramatic and fateful first theme in D minor, he places the second theme in A major (not the expected F major) and brings the first theme back in A minor to finish the exposition. The return of the original theme in A minor also introduces a beautiful countermelody. The movement ends with a display of piano virtuosity featuring quick triplet rhythms.

The second movement, in B-flat major, opens with a piano solo reminiscent of Mendelssohn's piano pieces that he called "Songs without Words." After this introduction, the two strings join the piano for a varied repeat; there is a second section that also begins with piano and is repeated with all three instruments. The middle section moves to D-flat major, and the A theme then returns in even more ornamented form, and the two string players share a cadenza-like passage shortly before the end. Mendelssohn uses dissonance in subtle, poignant ways to color this movement and make it deeply expressive.

The playful D major scherzo, in 6/8 time, is a quick dance that recalls Mendelssohn's portrayal of skittering fairies in his *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture* thirteen years earlier. The final movement opens with a theme that is dainty and slightly spooky, like a film score for a cute Halloween sequence. While other more lyrical themes are heard in F major and B-flat major, the busy rhythms of this opening theme are perhaps the defining element of this energetic finale.

## **Trade Fairs in Leipzig**

For each program of the series, these notes explore one aspect of Leipzig and its culture: this time, the trade fairs that helped to define Leipzig's identity. Goethe, the great German writer, summed up the significance of these fairs when he said that "such a fair is really the world in a nutshell." Because so many people came to the city from faraway places, Leipzig citizens were familiar with diverse lives, cultures, and outlooks. In some ways, this makes the city comparable to Vienna, the center of a vast empire that linked Eastern and Western regions.

In a book on Vienna, Nicholas Parsons mentions a building that housed traveling merchants, which a fifteenth-century chronicler "liken[ed] to the Tower of Babel, so many languages did he hear being spoken there (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German, French, Turkish, Spanish, Czech, Slovene, Italian, Hungarian, Dutch, Syrian, Croat, Serb, Polish and Chaldean)." Historian Robert Beachy quotes a description of Leipzig from a 1737 encyclopedia: "An indescribable wealth of goods is on offer at the fairs. With the foreign merchants and royal personages, the throngs of visitors are so great that it is usually difficult to find lodging in the city."

The history of the trade fairs goes back to the eleventh century CE, when the town was granted the right to hold a market. Two silver merchants from Leipzig, Godefrid and Ripert, were mentioned by name in a document from 1218. In 1268, Margrave Dietrich von Landsberg granted free travel and protection to merchants traveling to Leipzig. Various guilds of craftsmen were founded, including one of clothmakers and weavers, who built their guild house, the first Gewandhaus (clothing house), in 1341. (The orchestra in Leipzig would eventually perform in a later Gewandhaus.) As these examples demonstrate, the importance of trade helped to define the laws and institutions of the city.

For the first few centuries, there were two fairs each year, a spring fair linked to Easter and a fall fair connected with the Michaelmas festival. In 1458, Elector Friedrich II of Saxony issued permission for a New Year's market as well, so there were three annual fairs, which led to the increased importance of the city and to the founding of new industries. Book printing in Leipzig began in 1481, quite early in the history of European printing. Publishing was to become one of the city's most important industries.

In the following centuries, Leipzig became the model of how economies moved from the feudal system, based on aristocracy and privileges, to a more rational arrangement based on economics and market forces. The city's ability to adapt and adjust to new conditions gave Leipzig a significant advantage.

These changes came about because of difficulties during the seventeenth century. The Thirty Years' War (1618-48) caused



major disruptions, and in 1680 there was an outbreak of plague. As Robert Beachy explains, these adversities shifted the balance of power in Leipzig from the traditional guilds to wholesale merchants, who formed their own association. Despite their lower status, Elector Johann Georg III listened to their ideas. He modernized certain financial practices and instituted a court to consider disputes. The new system protected merchants from fraud, which could otherwise tie up their money for years, and gave them confidence that in Leipzig they would be treated fairly and honestly. Beachy writes that "Merchants who brought wares to Leipzig counted on a quick sale in the well-attended fairs, and a broad choice of opportunities to reinvest the proceeds. [They could also] reexport or store their goods until the next fair and then borrow money on the security of their warehouse receipts." These changes brought more trade to the fairs and thus created many benefits for everyone. "The success of the Leipzig Wholesalers' Association helped to establish the Leipzig fairs as the preeminent entrepôt in Central Europe for a period lasting into the late nineteenth century."

This account of how the city modernized its economic and judicial system connects with an ongoing theme of these historical notes on Leipzig. Despite conservative forces at work in the city (in this case, the privileged guilds), the more progressive ideas usually won out. This reminds us of the city's embrace of Lutheran ideas in the sixteenth century, its function as a meeting place for capitalist and Communist regimes after World War II, and its activity in opposing East German Communism in 1989.

### **For Further Reading:**

<http://www.elisarolle.com/queerplaces/ch-d->

[e/Elisabeth%20von%20Herzogenberg.html](http://www.elisarolle.com/queerplaces/ch-d-e/Elisabeth%20von%20Herzogenberg.html)

<https://www.leipziger-messe.de/en/company/portrait/chronic>

Robert Beachy, "Reforming Interregional Commerce: The Leipzig Trade Fairs and Saxony's Recovery from the Thirty Years' War," in *Central European History* 32:4 (1999), pp. 431-52.

Daniel Dahlstrom, "Moses Mendelssohn," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition)

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/mendelssohn/>.

Sophie Fuller, "Smyth, Dame Ethel (Mary)," in *Oxford Music Online*.

Nicholas Parsons, *Vienna: A Cultural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 15.

George B. Stauffer, "Leipzig" in *Oxford Music Online*.

R. Larry Todd, "Mendelssohn(-Bartholdy), (Jacob Ludwig) Felix," in *Oxford Music Online*.

Othmar Wessely, rev'd Bernd Wiechert, "Herzogenberg, (Leopold) Heinrich (Picot de Peccaduc), Freiherr von," in *Oxford Music Online*.

*Program notes by Lisa Feurzeig*

## **Artist Bios**

With a sound palette ranging from a ‘commanding tone’ to ‘delicate sentiment’ (Calgary Herald), Taiwanese-American violinist **Zenas Hsu** leads a vibrant career filled with chamber music, orchestral leadership, and education. He is a member of the Grammy-nominated ensemble A Far Cry and serves as Principal Second Violin with the Boston Ballet. Zenas has led the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra as Guest Concertmaster, and as a section violinist in the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has led chamber music coachings at the Rivers Conservatory and Portland Summer Ensembles, been a sectional coach at the New England Conservatory of Music, and was a founding member of Chamber Music by the Bay.

A native of California, Zenas received his early training in the preparatory division of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He was accepted at age sixteen to the Curtis Institute of Music for his Bachelor of Music degree, and received his Master of Music and Graduate Diploma degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music.

Haitian-American cellist **Francesca McNeeley** has received critical acclaim as a collaborator and soloist, her playing described as “virtuosic”, “impressive” and “a remarkable display” by the Boston Musical Intelligencer. She enjoys an eclectic career in the Boston area as a chamber musician, orchestral player, and modern music advocate. In 2022 she became a core member of the Grammy-nominated A Far Cry chamber orchestra, and has performed and toured with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops Orchestras. She is also a performer with Castle of Our Skins, and can be heard on the group's debut album entitled *Homage: Chamber Music from the African Continent & Diaspora*. Dedicated to community engagement through teaching and mentoring, in addition to her private teaching studio Francesca serves on the faculties for the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra’s Intensive Community Program, Project STEP, as well as the Charles Ives Music Festival at the Western Connecticut Youth Orchestras.

Director of the GV Piano Chamber Series, **Sookkyung Cho** is Associate Professor of Piano at Grand Valley State University. As a soloist and chamber musician, she has appeared in venues such as Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, Sarasota Opera House, Conservatoire d’art dramatique de Montréal in Canada, Château de Fontainebleau in France, Bilkent Piano Festival in Turkey, and Xi’an Conservatory in China. Dr. Cho received a bachelor’s degree from Juilliard, where she was honored with the John Erskine Graduation Prize, and earned a master’s degree at Peabody and a doctorate at Juilliard as a C.V. Starr fellow. Her debut CD, Schubert’s 1817 Sonatas, was released on Centaur to critical acclaim in April 2021. She is proud to be an adopted Michigander!

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