Београдска филхармонија
Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra

Season 2016/2017

Friday, 12 May 2017
Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation, 8pm

Series: *For Connoisseurs*

Conductor: **Vladimir Kulenović**
Soloist: **Itamar Zorman**, violin

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The concert of Vladimir Kulenović and the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra is supported by the US Embassy in Belgrade, aiming to draw attention to the significance of individuals in building the bridges between the two distant countries through the language of art.

Programme:

A. Webern: *Passacaglia*, Op. 1

Duration: approx. 10 minutes

A. Berg: Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

Andante – Allegretto
Allegro – Andante

Duration: approx. 30 minutes

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J. Brahms: Symphony No. 4, Op. 98 in E-minor

Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

Duration: approx. 45 minutes

Concert master: **Tijana Milošević**

Anton Webern (1883–1945) is one of the most notable students of Arnold Schönberg (1874–1951). Along with his mentor Schönberg and his colleague Alban Berg (1885–1935), Webern comprised the core of the group of authors known in the history of the Western European music as the Second Viennese School. As most musicians born towards the end of the 19th century, Webern was introduced into the world of music firstly by his family, since his mother was a pianist and singer. In this period, he started developing the keenness for vocal lyricism, but he also started learning the violin and the violoncello. When he became a student of composition with Arnold Schönberg, he focused on classicistic, diatonic musical patterns, while Schönberg insisted on developing his instrumental musical expression (owing to Webern's affinity for vocal lyricism). Webern fulfilled Schönberg's request during his studies, and even went beyond what his mentor requested, only to venture into composing atonal and twelve-tone music after completing the studies, seeking to achieve an aphoristic, succinct musical expression.

Webern's early music, however, stems from the tradition of late Romanticism. The *Passacaglia* in D minor, Op. 1, a piece of markedly late-romantic sensibility, was created as Webern's final work as a student in 1908. While preparing to compose his graduation thesis, Webern wrote three studies on a bass ostinato the year before. He gave a dynamic pattern to the strict form of the passacaglia, which consists of repeated themes usually in the lowest voice, by grouping the variations into sets contrasted among themselves in terms of tone, pace and facture, thus composing thematic plateaus of sort. Moreover, this piece also shows numerous indications of later composition and technical procedures (such as, for instance, the fabric of the theme that avoids the repeating of the tones) which Webern would use and develop in his later works, as well as the exceptionally bold and innovative orchestration, with which the strict Baroque form of the day, highly archaic by that time, approached the 20th century.

Another important representative of the Second Viennese School, also a student of Arnold Schönberg, **Alban Berg** completed his last piece, **the Concerto for violin and orchestra,** immediately before his death in 1935, while leaving the opera *Lulu* unfinished. Much like Webern's, Berg's early music also evolved from the pool of late Romanticism, before he switched to composing atonal music, often using tone sets of five, six or seven tones, as well as twelve-tone music. In his late period, this evolved into a distinctive synthesis of twelve-tone, or serialistic and tonal thinking. The Concerto for violin and orchestra is one of those pieces. It is written in two movements, each divided in two sections. In his letter to Arnold Schönberg, he called them *Prelude*, *Scherzo*, *Cadenza* and *Chorale Variations*, which reflects their nature or formal construction. Thus, the *Prelude* and *Cadenza* (the first and third sections) are written in sonata form and they represent the introductory part of the concerto, and an exceptionally virtuosic cadenza, respectively. *Scherzo* takes the form of a complex song with two trios, while the last segment is a theme with variations. Interestingly, in this piece Berg quoted the folk song *A Bird on a Plum Tree*, which speaks of the joy of a young girl. He also quoted Barch's chorale titled *It is enough, if it pleases Thee, o Lord*, from his cantata No. 60, which turns into the theme for variations in the last segment. Both quotations are a reference to the background in which the concerto was written, commissioned by violinist Louis Krasner. It was dedicated to Manon Gropius, the daughter of architect Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler Gropious, who had just died from polio. The concert is symbolically subtitled *To the memory of an angel*.

Schönberg's predecessor, **Johannes Brahms** (1833–1897) was an important role model and influence to all composers of the Second Viennese School. His last, **Symphony No 4** was written around 1885 and published for the first time in 1886. In his music, Brahms nurtured the tradition of the Western European music, while at the same time searching for new means of expression. Despite being often labelled as an old-fashioned and conservative composer by contemporary critics, Brahms implemented his innovations on the internal structural plan by retaining the most important elements of the tradition, such as, for example, the sonata-symphony cycle. It is a principle that Arnold Schönberg called the developmental variation, a composing technique used by him and his students in order to attain the new musical expression. In that sense, Symphony No 4 is the pinnacle of Brahms' symphonic music in that it blends old and new composing practices. The composer uses medieval church modes, late romantic musical language and archaic forms (classical sonata form or a passacaglia for the final movement), as well as contemporary principles of building the structure, which gives it dynamic nature and brings it alive.

Miloš Bralović*