

The UB Department of Music
presents

Slee Sinfonietta

Magnus Mårtensson, conductor

David Felder, Artistic Director

with Bjorn Arnholdt-Olsson, viola and Kent Smith, baritone

Slee Sinfonietta Series • Concert I

Tuesday, September 16, 2003

8pm

Slee Concert Hall

PROGRAM

Kvasir for Strings

Magnus Mårtensson
(b. 1966)

Viola Concerto (1983)

Krzysztof Penderecki
(b. 1933)

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), Op. 4 (1899)

Arnold Schönberg
(1874–1951)

The Slee Sinfonietta gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Cameron Baird Fund, Robert E. Morris and Carol L. Morris.

Please join the UB Department of Music and the Slee Sinfonietta for a reception in the lobby of Slee Hall, hosted by Kappa Kappa Psi, immediately following tonight's concert.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

The Slee Sinfonietta was formed in 1997 by composer David Felder and conductor Magnus Mårtensson. This ensemble, the professional chamber orchestra in residence at UB, performs a series of concerts each year devoted to lesser known repertoire, particularly that of the pre-classic era and recent contemporary music. Advanced students in performance are invited to participate along with faculty artists, soloists, and regional professionals in the production of these unique concerts designed to contribute new possibilities for concertgoers within the University and the Western New York region.

Magnus Mårtensson, born in 1966, studied piano, voice, conducting and composition at Malmö Musikhögskola and conducting at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Between 1989 and 1992 he was conductor of Opera Semplice in Malmö as well as the Santa Cecilia Oratorio Society of Lund. During this time he also founded and conducted, in numerous performances, the Malmö Chamber Orchestra. From 1995 to 1996 he held the position as conductor of the Contemporary Music Ensemble at the Cleveland Institute of Music and has since 1996 served as conductor at SUNY Buffalo. Mårtensson also appears with orchestras and ensembles in Europe and South America, and has made several recordings, among others, with works by David Felder. A champion of new music, Mårtensson has premiered over 200 works.

Also active as a composer, his numerous commissions have included incidental music for theater plays, chamber music and songs. His latest work, *Before the Law*, a chamber opera in one act with libretto by Henry Sussman after Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, was premiered at UB in December of 1997.

Kent Smith, a native of Parkersburg, WV, is known for a varied musical career. Mr. Smith has appeared in a wide variety of roles in opera, operetta, musical theatre, and on the concert stage with such companies as Opera Festival of New Jersey, Lyric Opera Cleveland, Cleveland Opera, Opera at Florham, American Music Theatre Festival, Natchez Opera Festival, the National Opera Company, New York City Opera, Stamford Symphony Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and the Brooklyn Philharmonic. He was part of the acclaimed national tour of the Tony Award-winning play *Master Class*, as well as performing the same play with Theatre Works in the San Francisco Bay Area, both of which he was Musical Director as well.

Mr. Smith's vocal master classes are presented throughout the country, and he maintains his private vocal studio in New York City. As well as being part of the faculty of University at Buffalo, Mr. Smith is also adjunct faculty at Hunter College in New York City and teaches in Italy at Centro Studi Italiani.

Born in 1955, Swedish violist **Bjorn Arnholdt-Olsson** won the Malmö Symphony Orchestra's concerto competition in 1973 and became a full-time member of the ensemble three years later. He has served as its Principal Violist since 1992, and has been featured in a variety of works including the Swedish debut of Penderecki's *Viola Concerto* and concertos by Berlioz, Bloch, and Walton. With violinist Anton Kontra, he has also performed double concertos by Nordahl, Atterberg, and Mozart. Mr. Arnholdt-Olsson has performed as a frequent guest in a variety of chamber music settings, most notably as a member of the Skånekvartetten Quartet in the 1980s.

Mr. Arnholdt-Olsson received his education at the prestigious Malmö Musikhögskola, where he graduated with honors. His primary teacher as a young man was Ingvar Jonasson, with whom he studied from 1972 to 1979. Arnholdt-Olsson currently teaches at his alma mater, as well as serving as an instructor for the Nordic Youth Orchestra. He gives frequent master classes in Sweden and abroad.

Mr. Arnholdt-Olsson plays a Leandro Bisiach viola (1895), which is currently owned by the Malmö Symphony Orchestra.

PROGRAM NOTES

Kvasir for Strings ... Magnus Mårtensson

I wrote this piece in 1994 on a commission from the Wemmenhog Chamber Orchestra in Sweden, and together we premiered it that same year.

The story of Kvasir comes from the legends of Nordic mythology and tells us about how once two groups of gods gather for a peace talk. In order to make these talks more efficient, each one of the gods spat in a big bowl that was passed around, so a new god was created: Kvasir. Kvasir possessed immense wisdom and could answer any question or give brilliant advice to any problem, and was also a wonderful poet. Kvasir is later killed by two dwarfs who, by mixing his blood with honey and a few other ingredients, made mead. This mead now has magic powers, and when humans drink it, they will become poets and be able to write poetry of unsurpassed beauty.

Kvasir for String Orchestra is not program music; I simply pretended to have wet my lips with some mead before composing it. Its musical starting point is four notes that I borrowed from Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (three repeated notes and the fourth a half step up, bars 188-189 etc.) that return twice after the first introduction, and that appear in less obvious shapes throughout the piece. In the last section of the piece a violin ostinato is accompanying a free extended cello solo, with a violin added later. More instruments join to prepare for the climax before the last return of the quote.

— Magnus Mårtensson

Viola Concerto ... Krzystof Penderecki

Polish composer and conductor Krzystof Penderecki emerged around 1960 with a number of works that caught attention at festivals around Europe. Through pieces like *Strofy*, *Anklasis*, and above all, *Tren (For the victims of Hiroshima)*, his unique sense of sonority, often created through his string writing, became famous. Later in the 60s, Penderecki felt he had reached the limit of what was possible in terms of expanding the realm of sonority, and started seeking inspiration in the past. This resulted in a string of important choral works where his Catholic beliefs and Slavic church music tradition merged. This was followed by new compositions where a more modern and advanced language was used, which again would last until the next retro period came.

The *Viola Concerto*, written in 1983, can be described as a stylistic synthesis. As in other works from later Penderecki, there is an expressive, neo-romantic melody, creating the mood of the work with the viola singing in the characteristic low register. Then there are the colorful, twittering orchestral passages, as well as reminiscences of earlier pieces and some all together new elements. The *Viola Concerto* was first performed in Caracas on July 24th, 1983; the solo part was played by Joen Vasquez.

— Magnus Mårtensson

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night) ... Arnold Schoenberg

Lots of music has the reputation of being revolutionary. *Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night)* truly is a revolutionary piece. Although its surface is unprepossessing, unlike other more aggressively challenging early-20th-century pieces, it still can shock us with its musical language. Even now, after 100 years, it remains an enigma.

Verklärte Nacht is the best-known of Schoenberg's tonal works. It was originally written as a string sextet (and twice transcribed for string orchestra), in Vienna during the last months of 1899. Its lush Wagnerian harmonic vocabulary and resonant, Brahmsian motivic content denotes the arrival of Schoenberg's mature tonal style. He wrote the piece just as he was falling in love with Mathilde Zemlinsky (whom he would later marry). The storms of their relationship are mirrored in the harmonic struggles of *Verklärte Nacht*—and signaled Schoenberg's emergence into adulthood.

The lengthy work is based on an untitled poem by Richard Dehmel, from *Weib und Welt* (*Women and World*, 1896). This autobiographical work (a translation of which appears below) appeared soon after Dehmel began an affair with Ida Auerbach. The poem's racy theme led to charges of indecency and a well-publicized court appearance in Berlin for Dehmel.

Verklärte Nacht is also known for its checkered history. Despite the composer's growing reputation in Vienna, the work did not receive an immediate performance, in part because upon its submission in a Viennese competition, it was condemned for including a music-theoretical impossibility: a dominant-ninth sonority in fourth inversion. The unfair treatment Schoenberg received over this incident probably had little to do with actual musical issues; the chromatic advances of Wagner, Bruckner, and Mahler had essentially obviated such technical faults. Instead, the public's hostility may be attributed to the composer's auto-didacticism, or his Jewish heritage—despite Schoenberg's conversion to Lutheranism in 1898. The Viennese premiere on March 18, 1902, at the Kleiner Musikvereinsaal, was marked by fistfights, and the performance was never concluded. Gustav Mahler was in the audience, however, and became one of Schoenberg's strongest advocates.

The shape of *Verklärte Nacht* follows the narrative trajectory of the poem—from bleakness, through passionate strife, to reconciliation. The piece begins with two measures of bare octaves in the second viola and cello. The melody that enters above the octaves generates much of the motivic material for the piece, including the dotted rhythm that pervades the work. The body of the piece focuses on three keys: D (where it begins and ends), F-sharp, and B-flat—an equal division of the octave that is remarkable in light of Schoenberg's later preoccupation with symmetrical patterns. A slow transformation from B-flat major to D major about halfway through the 25-minute piece marks the arrival of the work's prominent melody—widely considered the 'transfiguration'—and is one of the music's most magnificent moments. A recapitulation of the opening melodic material is followed by harp-like pizzicati in the lower strings and subtle arpeggiations below the melody in the violin, bringing the piece to its close.

— Jill T. Brasky

Slee Sinfonietta

Magnus Mårtensson, conductor
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Violin I
Moses Pogossian, *Concertmaster*
Ralph Allen
Dmitry Gerikh
Cindy Lin
Yuki Numata
William Knuth
Chris Otto (Mårtensson only)

Cello
Jonathan Golove, *Principal*
Mary Artmann
Amelie Fradette
David Schmude

Bass
Edmond Gnekow, *Principal*
Michael Nigrin

Violin II
Antoine Lefebvre, *Principal*
Nadejda Nigrin
Donald McCrorey
Jenny Santiago
Agnieszka Laskus
Chris Otto

Celeste
Jacob Greenberg

Timpani
Keith Szczepanski

Viola
Janz Castelo, *Principal*
Adrienne Elisha
Justin Caulley
Kate Holzemer

Percussion
Anthony Miranda, *Principal*
Jeremiah Fox
Jonathan Hepfer