



Emily D'Angelo & Sophia Muñoz in Recital

Thursday, August 1, 2024 7:00 PM

In the Artist's Own Words

"All the blues that I've written are either historic or folklore or folk song." –W. C. Handy

At the end of the 19th century, a commonly held assumption was that folk songs could rarely be attributed to well-known composers and were, in their apparent simplicity, musically inferior. Yet, as Hungarian composer and pianist Béla Bartók put it, "To handle folk tunes is one of the most difficult tasks; equally difficult if not more so than to write a major original composition." Many of the artists represented on tonight's program were deeply connected to the folk tradition and had great interest in the collection and arrangement of folk song and folklore; this reflection informed what was, at the time, some of the most avant-garde composition, literature, and prose. They understood how the past moves us forward.

Zoltán Kodály and Bartók traveled through the countryside of Hungary gathering and painstakingly transcribing the folk music they heard.

W. C. Handy made similar treks across the rural towns of Alabama and Mississippi, besotted by the cultural riches he discovered, as did Ralph Vaughan Williams in England. Inspired by the oral traditions of folk music, Jeanine Tesori encourages her students to embrace and develop their innate musical gifts. Gustav Mahler, Benjamin Britten, Walter MacNutt, and Rebecca Clarke were broadly shaped by folk music, which became a cornerstone of their compositional styles. Building upon these and other influences, the styles of Alexander Zemlinsky, Erich Korngold, Viktor Ullmann, Samuel Barber, and Alma Mahler reflected modern compositions still rooted in tradition. The unrest in the first half of the 20th century made the collection and preservation of folk traditions even more timely, and it is through this lens that we appreciate the importance and value of this work on an even greater scale.

The logo for Ottawa Chamberfest features a stylized red '3C' symbol to the left of the word 'OTTAWA' in a vertical, sans-serif font. To the right of 'OTTAWA' is the word 'CHAMBERFEST' in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font.

OTTAWA CHAMBERFEST

Arguably the greatest moment of upheaval in the 20th century, the Second World War made a huge impact on the lives of many of the artists featured on this program. The Anschluss of 1938 forced Alma Mahler and Zemlinsky to flee to New York City, and Korngold to Los Angeles; while Alma was married to a Jewish man, Zemlinsky and Korngold were themselves Jewish and at great risk of persecution from the growing Nazi regime. Bartók's political views sent him into exile as well, and he took refuge in New York in 1940. Clarke and Britten left their homes in England for New York; Vito Levi, who had lost his job as a professor in 1938 after racial laws were enacted, was forced to take refuge in Venice in 1943 to avoid arrest and deportation to Germany. On September 8, 1942, Viktor Ullmann was deported to Terezín; he perished at Auschwitz on October 18, 1944.

**“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free ...”
—Emma Lazarus**

Many of this evening's composers and poets are also deeply connected to New York City, the quintessential melting pot and refuge for so many artists fleeing war and persecution. While some were born in New York, others moved here and subsequently performed and worked here extensively. The Metropolitan Opera commissioned New York City-born composer Tesori for her new work *Grounded*, which is represented here as a contemporary commentary on the inescapable price of warfare. Coupled with the works of Tesori's predecessors, this program celebrates the connections shared by these composers in a fresh amalgam—acknowledging the past, while simultaneously drawing on it for inspiration.

The program features some of the most individual and impactful compositional voices found in the canon. Artists of such breadth and capacity are connected in too many ways to list here, whether personal, professional, or cultural. I invite the audience, however, to consider tonight's program through three themes: the appreciation, collection, and reimagining of folk music; the cataclysmic impact of the Second World War; and the great city of New York and all it represents. Tonight's concert is an acknowledgement of the artists within those themes. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

—Emily D'Angelo