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Charles W. Bolen Faculty Recital Series: Cora Swenson Lee, Cello; February 2, 2021

Cora Swenson Lee Cello

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Illinois State University
Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts
School of Music

Program

Please silence all electronics for the duration of the concert. Thank you.

Charles W. Bolen Faculty Recital Series

Cora Swenson Lee, *Cello*

2 Pieces from Op. 40 (1898) Amy Beach
(1867-1944)
Mazurka
La Captive

Cello Sonata, Op. 5 (1887) Ethel Smyth
(1858-1944)
I. Allegro moderato
II. Adagio non troppo
III. Allegro vivace e grazioso

2 pieces from Op. 24 (1882) Luise Adolpha Le Beau
(1850-1927)
Romance in E Major
Mazurka in A Minor

Echoes in Life (2015) Elizabeth J. Start

Two Pieces for Viola and Cello (1918) Rebecca Clarke
(1886-1979)
Lullaby
Grotesque

Cora Swenson Lee, *cello*
Claire-Chung Lim, *piano*
Ruben Balboa, *viola*

Kemp Recital Hall
February 2, 2021
Monday Evening
8:00 p.m.

This is the thirty-ninth program of the 2020-2021 season.

Program Notes

This program presents works of immensely talented women whose lives and careers spanned the late 19th Century into the 21st Century. Amy Beach, an American composer and pianist, found widespread international success without ever receiving European compositional training. Her marriage, though apparently a happy one, limited both her performing and her studies, forcing Beach to pursue her compositional passions independently. While she focused primarily on large-scale works, Beach's chamber pieces and songs remain some of her most popular compositions. The selections from Op. 40, originally written for violin and piano, are representative of Beach's compositional interests, featuring elements of folk cultures, romantic characterizations, and sweeping melodies.

Ethel Smyth, a British composer and activist, was the first composer to be honored with a Damehood. Unlike Beach, Smyth struggled for recognition, alternately criticized for writing music that was "too masculine" for a woman composer, or "too delicate" to stand alongside her male colleagues. As a queer woman often excluded from the center of British musical life, Smyth became passionate about women's rights and was active in the Suffrage movement in the early 20th Century, even writing its anthem: "The March for Women" in 1911. Her cello sonata op. 5 is an early work, showing influences of both Mendelssohn and Brahms, whom she met while studying in Leipzig. The sonata is by turns powerful and subtle, muscular and gentle, and seems to reflect the contradictions and conflicts found within her own life and personality.

The career of German pianist and composer Luise Le Beau intersected with that of many prominent musicians of her time, including Liszt, Brahms, Joseph Joachim, and Clara Schumann. Her musical activities were primarily centered in Germany, since a tour to the Netherlands at a young age convinced her that her health was not strong enough to withstand extensive touring. In addition to her composing and performing, Le Beau worked at times as a piano teacher and a music critic. Le Beau was nominated to a teaching position at the Royal Academy of Arts in Berlin but was denied the post because she was a woman. Le Beau's compositions span a wide range of genres, from chamber music to opera, but she seems to have had an affinity for writing for the cello. In 1882, the same year that she her op. 24 pieces for cello and piano, her Cello Sonata op. 17 won first prize in an international competition. The selections from Op. 24 reveal a composer of rich imagination, combining elements of romance, charm, and virtuosity.

Elizabeth Start holds bachelor's degrees in mathematics and cello performance from Oberlin College and Conservatory, master's degrees in cello and theory/composition from Northern Illinois University, and a PH. D in composition from the University of Chicago. She is a section cellist with the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra and Executive Director of the Michigan Festival of Sacred Music. She is an active member of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Philharmonic, and the Chicago Composers' Consortium.

Notes on "Echoes in Life" from the composer:

This piece was the result of the first Elgin Symphony fund-raising auction, of three thus far, where I offered a "custom" solo cello piece composed for the highest bidder. It was written for Ramona "Monie" Burns, who told me she wanted a "theme song" for her life and is greatly influenced by what I know of her life and the bi-cultural world in which she lives. It begins and ends with misty, sometimes throbbing harmonics, giving a sense of a formative void, or a fantastic landscape, where wisps of melody can be heard. The initial wisps of melody, which also come back as reminiscences at the end, are inspired by Native American melodies of the Paiute. Their occurrence at beginning and end refer to ancestors, as well as creating a sense of return, a round dance, perhaps even referencing a Ghost Dance.

The melodic fragments grow into longer lines, often accompanied by throbbing beats of left hand pizzicato—a drum or heartbeat. The music transitions from one mood to another, until arriving at a more active and complex section, which combines the Native American influenced melodic elements with a more Western European development and figuration, reflecting Monie's growing up in and being shaped by a Western European/American household. After this integration establishes itself, the music drifts off again, remembering the opening melodies and evaporating in harmonic glissandi: a reverie of things felt, perhaps, more than remembered—and acknowledgment of Monie's re-connection with her heritage.

British-American composer Rebecca Clarke was internationally renowned as a viola virtuoso and was one of the first women to become a professional orchestral player. After studies at the Royal Academy and Royal College in London, Clarke settled permanently in America after WWII. Much of Clarke's compositional output features the viola, and many works were written for herself and the various all-female chamber ensembles with which she performed throughout her career. Clarke's compositions are often compared to Ravel or Debussy for their use of pentatonic and modal scales, impressionist textures, and dry wit, all features which are present in her Two Pieces for Viola and Cello.

Tonight's program, a selection of character pieces with a centerpiece sonata, is inspired by the format of 19th Century salon concerts. These salons, hosted and attended by intellectual society as well as prominent artists and musicians, often featured premiers of small chamber works, though it is unlikely that any would have exclusively debuted works written by women. It is a privilege to showcase these brilliant composers through their works written for the cello.