## *Incredible Decades* (2019) Disc 6.

**1–4** **Sonata for Violin and Cello** (1920–1922)
**MAURICE RAVEL** (1875–1937)
*Allegro*
*Très vif*
*Lent*
*Vif, avec entrain*

CHAD HOOPES, *violin*; DAVID REQUIRO, *cello*

**5–9** **Five Melodies for Violin and Piano, op. 35bis** (1925)
**SERGEI PROKOFIEV** (1891–1953)
*Andante*
*Lento, ma non troppo*
*Animato, ma non allegro*
*Allegretto leggero e scherzando*
*Andante non troppo*

CHAD HOOPES, *violin*; STEPHEN PRUTSMAN, *piano*

**10–12** **Piano Quintet in E Major, op. 15** (1921)
**ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD** (1897–1957)
*Mässiges Zeitmass, mit schwungvoll blühendem Ausdruck*
*Adagio: Mit grösster Ruhe, stets äusserst gebunden und ausdrucksvoll*
*Finale: Gemessen, beinahe pathetisch – Allegro giocoso*

GLORIA CHIEN, *piano*; KRISTIN LEE, ARNAUD SUSSMANN, *violins*; RICHARD O'NEILL, *viola*; KEITH ROBINSON, *cello*

In 1921, Russian influence expanded in the east, the Miss America pageant was born, and, for the first time, baseball was heard on the radio. *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's immortal documentation of the hedonistic Jazz Age, was published in 1925. Four years later, Wall Street crashed, bringing a decade of prosperity to an end. These years likewise saw Romanticism's cinematic legacy come to life in the music of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, while nationalist fervor found voice in Ravel's Basque rhythms and Prokofiev's lyric melodies. The sixth volume of Music@Menlo *LIVE* 2019 joyfully celebrates the dynamism, grandeur, and exuberance of the Roaring Twenties.

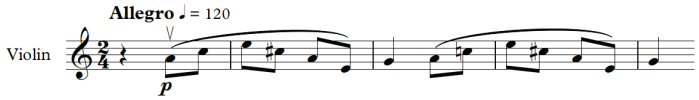
**Liner notes by Patrick Castillo © 2019**

**MAURICE RAVEL** (1875–1937)
**Sonata for Violin and Cello** (1920–1922)

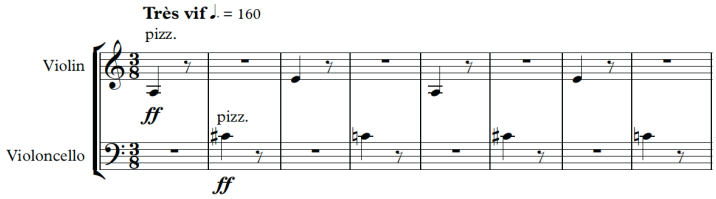
The early 1920s saw Maurice Ravel freshly recovered from a steady assault of physically and emotionally traumatic events: dysentery, the psychic strain of the Second World War, and the death of his mother, with whom he was especially close. This period also marked an important development in Ravel's professional life: with the passing in 1918 of Claude Debussy (with whom Ravel had tired of being so often compared), Ravel was now uniformly recognized as France's preeminent composer.

Ravel thus completed the Sonata for Violin and Cello against a backdrop of personal crisis and transition; the Sonata accordingly reflects a turning point in his musical language. It most explicitly acknowledges this critical period with its dedication "*à la mèmoire de Claude Debussy*." Musically, the Sonata foreshadows a direction that Ravel would increasingly pursue until his death in 1937: it exemplifies the principle of *dépouillement*—"economy of means"—that Debussy advocated, and which had characterized his own final works. Ravel noted that "the music is stripped down to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and increasingly there is a return of emphasis on melody."

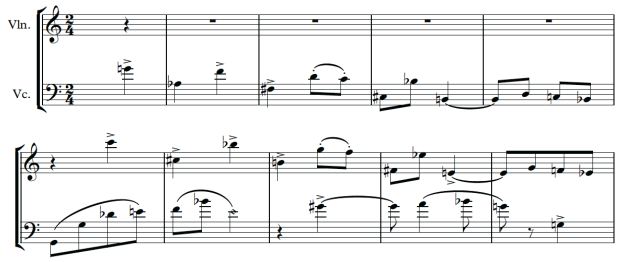
The Sonata's *dépouillement* is immediately evident in the austere sound world created by its instrumental forces, pared down to two melodic instruments without the benefit of a piano to provide a harmonic foundation. The work's cyclic form—that is, the recurrence of thematic material from the first movement in each of the subsequent three movements—further demonstrates an economy of means. Two germinal motives, presented in the opening *Allegro*, provide the basis for much of the Sonata. The first of these is the alternation between major and minor chords, outlined by the violin in the work's opening measures:




This major-minor seesaw provides a harmonic underpinning in the absence of a piano and reappears throughout the work, most audibly as the propulsive engine of the scherzo (*Très vif*):



Moments after the Sonata's lyrical opening, the cello introduces the angular secondary theme, a series of wide leaps (spanning the interval of a seventh, for example, G descending to A-flat). This gesture likewise recurs throughout the work, most notably at the climax of the final movement.




The Sonata is rife with sonic ingenuities and ambiguities, created by Ravel's imaginative treatment of the two instruments: the cello often plays above the violin, resulting in mesmerizing aural illusions, during which the listener is unsure of who is playing what. Composite lines, constructed from fragments played by each instrument, are likewise highly original. Witness the short but magical coda to the first movement.

While the Sonata's thematic material coheres organically, each of the work's four movements presents a unique expressive character. The lyricism of the first movement is challenged by the fierce, polyrhythmic scherzo. A rustic, folk-like melody in the second movement furthermore betrays Ravel's fascination with gypsy music (and, perhaps, nods to the Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály, who had composed his own Duo for Violin and Cello in 1914).

The long, sustained melodic lines of the contemplative slow movement highlight the vocal expressivity of the violin and cello. Even as it accelerates to an energized frenzy (with the dialogue between instruments expanding to seventh leaps, derived from the first movement's secondary theme), the music retains an essential lyricism until returning to the movement's opening material and subsiding to a muted conclusion.

The final movement, marked *Vif, avec entrain* (lively, with spirit), offers a generous stream of complementary melodic ideas, including the aforementioned climactic reappearance of the secondary theme of the *Allegro*. A spritely, dance-like rhythm pervades the finale, again reflecting Ravel's penchant for the folk music of Eastern Europe.

**SERGEI PROKOFIEV** (1891–1953)
**Five Melodies for Violin and Piano, op. 35bis** (1925)

Sergei Prokofiev's Five Melodies for Violin and Piano are a transcription of his *Five Songs Without Words*, op. 35, originally composed in 1920 for the mezzo-soprano Nina Koshetz. Certain hallmarks of Prokofiev's language—namely, the impish and at times caustic wit that characterizes so much of his chamber and symphonic output—defer in these five miniatures to an unabashed lyricism. The composer was touring California while at work on the *Songs Without Words,* and that state's natural beauty may have had something to do with the character of these pieces; in his diary, the composer recorded his impression of "the ocean, which at sunset shimmered with the most beautiful colors."

Their concentration of lyricism does not, however, preclude the Five Melodies' expressive range. The dreamy wistfulness of the first leads naturally into the tender second movement, which for a brief moment shows its teeth; the third, in turn, marked *Animato*, launches a nervous frenzy. The fourth tune, equal parts sly delicacy and winsome charm, seems tailored for a Woody Allen film. The set concludes with the most enigmatic of the five: a dream-like reverie, redolent of the first movement, momentarily off- set by an angular middle section.

The Five Melodies honor three violinists who impelled their conception. Prokofiev first had the idea to compose a set of *Songs Without Words* for violin and piano upon hearing the Hungarian virtuoso Joseph Szigeti in recital. A personal acquaintance, the violinist Cecilia Hansen, insisted that the second of the Opus 35 songs would idiomatically fit the violin. Thus encouraged, Prokofiev consulted Paul Kochanski, the muse for his First Violin Concerto, and produced transcriptions of the entire set in just two hours. The first, third, and fourth of the Five Melodies are dedicated to Kochanski, the second to Hansen, and the fifth to Szigeti.

**ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD** (1897–1957)
**Piano Quintet in E Major, op. 15** (1921)

The music critic Julius Korngold's decision to honor Mozart, Western music's most notorious wunderkind, when naming his second son turned out to be prescient indeed. Erich Wolfgang Korngold was, in his own right, a child prodigy on the order of the "miracle," quoth Leopold Mozart, "which God allowed to be born in Salzburg." In 1906, Korngold composed a cantata and played it for Gustav Mahler, who declared the nine-year-old a genius. Two years later, he completed an opera, *Der Schneemann*, which premiered to great acclaim in

Vienna. Encountering the young Korngold's work, Richard Strauss observed, "One's first reaction that these compositions are by a child are those of awe and concern that so precocious a genius should follow its normal development...This assurance of style, this mastery of form, this characteristic expressiveness, this bold harmony, are truly astonishing!"

The height of Korngold's early fame came in 1920 with the opera *Die tote Stadt*. He thereafter remained active in the composition of instrumental chamber and orchestral music, but, at twenty-three, he had firmly established dramatic music as an essential component of his musical identity.

In 1934, the director Max Reinhardt invited Korngold to Hollywood to score his film adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This launched one of the greatest musical careers in cinematic history. Korngold pioneered the symphonic film score, giving the golden age of Hollywood its signature sound. He created much of his finest music for film and garnered Academy Awards for his scores to *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938).

Though composed more than a decade before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Piano Quintet in E Major, op. 15, completed in 1921, embodies the dramatic sweep, instinct for impassioned melody, and ear for lush instrumental textures that ensured his success in Hollywood. Audibly placing Korngold in the post-Romantic tradition of Strauss and Liszt, the Quintet transposes the large-scale orchestral sensibility of those composers' tone poems to the plane of chamber music. Its very sound, from the bright opening theme of the first movement (marked *Mässiges Zeit- mass, mit schwungvoll blühendem Ausdruck*—"Moderato, with flourishing expression"), is rich, decadent, cinematic. Demanding instrumental writing, featuring double- and triple-stops in the strings and densely voiced chords in the piano, gives the illusion of a much larger ensemble. The movement likewise displays textural variety, as in the second theme: the hefty chords of the opening yield to a suave melody in the cello, *zart, sehr ausdrucksvoll* (delicate, very expressive), accompanied by a twinkling piano accompaniment. This quickly blooms into a contrapuntally rich dialogue among all voices. A moment later, the tempo slows as piano and cello, in their lowest registers, introduce a new, ominous idea. A broad sonic palette supports a range of musical characters throughout, but the optimism of the movement's opening measures ultimately prevails.

In the deeply felt *Adagio* second movement, Korngold composes a set of variations on the song "*Mond, so gehst du wieder auf*" ("Moon, Thou Risest Thus Again") from his *Abschiedslieder*, op. 14, composed around the same time as the Quintet. The song expresses the composer's romantic yearning for the young actress Luzi von Sonnenthal, whose disapproving parents insisted on one year's separation before the couple's courtship could proceed. (The two eventually married in 1924.) The song sets to music a poem by Ernst Lothar: "Moon, thou risest thus again / over the dark valley of unwept tears!... Ah! I feel in the depths of my being: / The heart that has suffered separation / Will burn eternally." Korngold's treatment of this text—in both the Opus 14 song setting and in the Piano Quintet—is tender and beguiling. It displays a melodic gift in line with such American popular songwriters as Harold Arlen and Jerome Kern. Rife with sly, heady harmonic turns, it betrays Korngold, the Hollywood composer, as a product of post-Romantic European expressionism.

A dramatic prologue launches the exuberant final movement: strings in unison state a proud *fortissimo* gesture, answered by *pesante* chords in the piano; first violin spins a recitative-like cadenza, pointing the ensemble toward the movement's main *Allegro giocoso* material. As throughout the previous movements, Korngold's dramatic gifts are on display in this boisterous finale, and the Quintet concludes on a lively note.

Recorded July 31, 2019, The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton. Recording producer and engineer: Da-Hong Seetoo. Steinway grand pianos provided courtesy of ProPiano. Photos by Anna Kariel. Booklet design by Nick Stone. CD production: Jerome Bunke, Digital Force, New York. Production manager: Libby Seidner. Music@Menlo 2019 was made possible by a leadership grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Additional support provided by the Koret Foundation, Bank of America Private Bank, and the many individuals and organizations that share the festival's vision. American Public Media was the official radio and new-media broadcast partner of Music@Menlo 2019.