

Roseville String Ensemble

Concert Program Notes

November 9, 2025

C.P.E. Bach, Sinfonia No. 3 for Strings and Continuo

Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach wrote six string sinfonias commissioned by Baron Gottfried von Swieten in 1773, during what is known as the Sturm und Drang (“storm and stress”) period of German literary culture of the late 18th century. The Sturm und Drang movement emphasized intense emotion and individualized expression due to a form of instinct over reason, symbolizing that music and nature are meant to be felt instinctively with the heart rather than described logically with the head.

The Sinfonia No. 3 in C is a great example of this; in the third movement alone there are great swings in style from a lightly lilting dance in the violins to an interruption by furiously quick fortissimo triplets, often played by all strings at once. The preceding slow movement is no less dramatic in its loveliness while still being tragic and heartfelt in its sudden changes from soft to loud.

J.S. Bach, Passacaglia in c minor, BWV 582, arranged for strings by Jakub Kowalewski

Although Bach’s own manuscript of this passacaglia, originally composed for organ, has not been recovered and exists only as copies passed down to contemporaries, it remains one of Bach’s most popular works. Thought to be written between 1706 and 1713, it is a piece considered to be written early in Bach’s musical career and features a form of music Bach was perhaps studying at the time from other organists.

A passacaglia is a piece of music in 3/4 time that features several sections of variations on an ostinato theme. In this case the theme is eight bars long, and is said to contain two different melodies thought to have been written by Andre Raison (if you’ve read program notes from past RSE concerts, you might remember that it was common for composers to “borrow” other’s themes!). This passacaglia features the aforementioned eight-bar ostinato, but then goes on through 20 different variations, with melodies being passed back and forth between sections, with the ostinato always returning as either a force or an undercurrent in various sections of the strings.

Astor Piazzolla, Oblivion

Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla is probably most famous for his invention of the nueva tango (“new tango”), a reimagining of a traditional tango form mixed with jazz and classical

music influences. Even though “Oblivion” was composed in 1982, in a decade that saw the most productive output of Piazzolla’s nueva tango compositions, the tango heard today is more traditional. It became famous as part of a soundtrack of the Italian film Henry IV in 1984 and from there it took off in popularity, motivating the composer and others to arrange it for many different ensembles, including accordion and piano, wind ensemble, string trio, and the string orchestra version you hear today. The string orchestra version features a solo violin as the primary melody, which is alternatively played as written and improvised as the soloist deems appropriate. The piece itself is romantic, melancholy, and full of longing and is a very enjoyable listen.

Christopher Wilson, Suite for Strings

Primarily known as a composer who wrote for the stage, Christopher Wilson still has a small number of concert pieces worthy of discovering. Born into a musical family in 1874, Wilson learned to play the violin and viola and studied abroad with many different composers and musicians, including in Paris with Charles Marie Widor.

Although the score is not dated, it’s supposed that Wilson’s Suite for Strings was composed in 1899 or earlier, with some scholars feeling that Wilson’s suite is heavily influenced by Grieg’s Holberg Suite of a few years earlier. Grieg’s suite begins with the first movement entitled “Praeludium” in the key of G major; Wilson’s first movement, “Prelude”, is also in the key of G major.

We are presenting four of the six movements of the suite, with the aforementioned prelude perhaps being more deftly written for strings than Grieg’s (Grieg’s was originally written for piano and arranged for strings a year later by the composer) but still contains some light playfulness. The fourth movement, “Bouree”, and last movement, “Rigaudon”, are the composer’s own modern takes on some old dance forms, with the “Romance” providing a soft and lovely respite to the bookended boisterous dances.