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Kautsky Studio recital, May 2, 2017

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Kautsky Studio Recital
Harper Hall, May 2, 2017, 8:00 p.m.
Music of 1917 – One Hundred Years After

Visions Fugitives, Op. 22, No. 1 (1915-17)	Ethan Mellema	Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)
From Fairy Tales, Op. 34 (1916-17) II. Allegro cantabile e leggiero	Craig Jordan	Nikolai Medtner (1880—1951)
Prelude in D Minor (posthumous) (1917)	Aboris De Jesus	Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)
Suite, Op. 14 (1916) I. Allegretto	Maria Santos	Bela Bartok (1881-1945)
Sonata No. 3 (1916-17) III. Assai vivace: scherzando	Ming Hu	Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)
Chaconne (1916-17)	Nicholas Suminski	Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)
From Four Songs, Op. 12 (1915-1917) “Der Tag ist vergangen”	Grace Vangel, soprano Christian Vallery, piano	Anton Webern (1883-1945)
From Roman Sketches, Op. 7 (1912-1917) The Fountain of Acqua Paola	Tammy Li	Charles Griffes (1884-1920)
Les soirs illumine par l’ardeur du charbon (1917)	Christian Vallery	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
From Tombeau de Couperin (1914- 1917) Toccata	Xiaoya Gao	Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Rialto Ripples Rag (1917)	Jessica Castleberry	George Gershwin (1898-1937)
Reflection Rag: Syncopated Musings (1917) Tico-Tico no fubà (1917)	Emily Blandon-Kovar	Scott Joplin (1868-1917) Zequinha Abreu

This concert is inspired primarily by the legacy of WW I (1914-1918) and the music written in 1917, precisely a century ago. Europe was ravaged by the war, and one hears its aftermath most especially in the tortured dissonances of the Austrian composer Anton Webern, even as he writes about love and nightfall. The French composers, whose country was equally decimated in the war, are more decorous in their approach, choosing beautiful colors in the case of Debussy and virtuosic display in the case of Ravel, but nevertheless writing in homage to war dead and war heroes. Both Debussy and Ravel were personally devastated by the war, and while their music may avoid the more overt anguish of Austro/German expressionism, their lives and music during the war were no less affected.

Meanwhile, the United States, slow to enter the fray, declared war on Germany only in April, 1917, almost exactly 100 years ago today. While its entry was critical to the Allies' eventual victory, and many thousands of lives were lost, the war never infringed on American soil, and ragtime composers in the US flourished, apparently unimpeded by events across the ocean. Scott Joplin and George Gershwin, one African-American, the other Jewish, both emerged from their minority backgrounds to become stars of a new genre in music; the first where America took the lead. And Charles Griffes, more classically oriented, brought influences from Germany, France, and a burgeoning fascination with the Far East to bear on his American impressionism, again unscathed by the tragedies of war.

Other countries were not as lucky. Russia lost well over a million soldiers in fighting the Central Powers (Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria), before withdrawing from the war months before the general armistice was signed. Their losses in the war were a major factor in the Russian Revolution of 1917, and composers like Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, and Medtner were no longer comfortable in their homeland. Their yearning and nostalgia informed their music forever after. Bartok, harking from Hungary, was not himself conscripted in the nation's war-effort, but his ethnomusicological forays into the countryside to collect folk music had to cease, and he turned all his attention to his own composition, incorporating many of the elements he'd previously transcribed from peasant songs and dances. And Szymanowski, similarly exempt from military service, also used the war years to burrow deeper into his own compositions, as Poland, not a sovereign nation at the time, became victim to countless battles on the Eastern front. Nielsen, a Danish citizen, was luckier. His country remained neutral, though even it underwent significant economic hardships as a result of the war.

This was a war that left few in Russia, Europe, or America untouched. The loss of 17 million lives, with another 20 million casualties, leaves one gasping with disbelief 100 years later. Tracing the conflict as it's heard in the music written in its midst, is an exercise in keeping history alive, and no one can experience the dissonances, rhythmic dislocations, and disjointed structures of music throughout the 20th century without consideration of the conflict which threw not only that music, but much of the world, into radical disarray.

As a postscript, one might consider as well the composers *not* represented on this program – a younger generation decimated before one could even have known their names.

Der Tag ist Vergangen by Anton Webern

Der Tag ist vergangen,
Die Nacht ist schon hier.
Gute Nacht, o Maria,
Bleib ewig bei mir.

The day has passed,
Night is already here.
Good night, oh Maria,
Stay with me forever.

Der Tag ist vergangen,
Die Nacht kommt herzu.
Gib auch den verstorbnen
Die ewige Ruh.

The day has passed,
The night is coming
Give also to the dead
Everlasting peace.