Programnotes

*By: Tobias van der Pals (Oct. 10th 2022)*

Carnegie Hall, Weill Recital Hall

November 10th, 2022, 8 pm

Tobias van der Pals, cello

Pål Eide, piano

**In the winter of 1911, Leopold van der Pals' two symphonic poems "Frühling und Herbst" premiered here, in Carnegie Hall, performed by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and conducted by Josef Stránský.**

**Tonight, Leopold van der Pals’ music returns to Carnegie Hall in the hands of Tobias van der Pals and Pål Eide with another world premiere, a cello sonata composed in the same period as his debut over 100 years ago. A work Leopold van der Pals probably intended to play by himself but was never able to perform.**

**The sonata was composed in 1905-06, at a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland where the 21-year-old composer was fighting to survive his tuberculosis and to find the right path for his music.**

**The remainder of the recital is dedicated to the composers who helped and inspired him to follow his musical path: Gliére, Glazunow, Tchaikovsky, and Rachmaninoff.**

About 22 years ago, Tobias van der Pals, found the musical legacy of his great-great uncle, the composer Leopold van der Pals (1884-1966) in an archive in Switzerland. Tens of thousands handwritten pages of music, a life´s worth of music creation. No recordings existed of his music, and very few works were still actively played. Along with the music, he also found 32 journals, concert programs from performances with the world’s leading orchestras, and countless reviews.

The archives formed a testament to the life of Leopold van der Pals that spanned through wars, revolutions, concerts, art, friendships, love, and tragedy.

At the time, Tobias van der Pals had just started his own musical journey at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, and to him, the discovery felt likea revelation. He was standing before the oeuvre of a composer from a previous generation in his family who had taken the same musical path as he was about to embark on himself. Since the discovery, Tobias van der Pals has devoted his time and efforts in two directions: as a cellist, and to study Leopold van der Pals’ life and music.

Tonight, these efforts combine as Tobias van der Pals, together with pianist Pål Eide (Norway) performs the world premiere of Leopold van der Pals’ cello sonata No. 1.

Leopold van der Pals was born in St. Petersburg 1884 to dutch/danish parents. His upbringing was filled with art and music. Leopold’s father was a successful industrialist and art collector with ties to the very top of society, and his grandfather, Julius E. W. Johannsen, was principal of the Music Conservatory in St. Petersburg, professor of counterpoint, and head of the composition department. In his youth, Leopold witnessed musical meetings and private concerts with prominent composers and musicians in the family living room with artists like Anton Arensky, Modest Tchaikovsky, Pablo Casals, Alexander Glazunov, and Alexander Siloti.

It was Alexander Glazunov, who persuaded Leopold´s father to allow the expressive young boy to continue his musical studies after hearing Leopold’s cantata for choir, piano, and soloists, written in memory of his late mother. (Glazunov also composed music for the wedding of Leopold’s younger sister, Lusie).

Leopold was sent to *Haute École de Musique de Lausanne,* Switzerland in 1904, and there he studied cello, piano, and composition. Before he left home, he was given a new instrument, a cello by Carlo Bergonzi from 1733.

During his second year of study in Lausanne, the young man contracted tuberculosis and was obliged to go to a sanatorium in Davos to recover from the illness. To Leopold's dismay, musical instruments were not allowed in the sanatorium. The thought of living without his instrument was unbearable for the young artist; he feared that after his stay at the sanatorium, he would have lost the skill and stamina required of a cellist and wondered whether he should set his sights on a future career as a composer instead.

Deprived of his instruments, unsure of his lung’s recovery, and yearning for the sound of his cello, he decided to combine his three musical capacities into one musical creation, a sonata for two equal voices: cello and piano.

By the end of his year long stay in Davos, his cello sonata was almost complete, his lungs had recovered and he was convinced of his future as a composer.

The time that followed Leopold van der Pals’ period in Davos was filled with life- changing events. Only weeks after returning home, he married the love of his life, Maria von Behse, and the couple left for a honeymoon in Italy lasting several months.

As he had abandoned his dream of becoming a cellist, his sonata was now left without a player, and thus, never received its premiere in concert.

During their honeymoon, the couple received a telegram from Leopold’s father saying "Come to Paris immediately. I have organized a festival *'Grand Saison Historique Russe'* together with Sergei Diaghilev.”

In Paris, the couple stayed in the same hotel as the participating artists: Sergei Rachmaninov, Nikolaj Rimsky-Korsakov, singer Feodor Chaliapin, and conductor Arthur Nikisch.

One day, Leopold mustered up his courage and went to Rachmaninoff’s suite, equipped with a few of his compositions under his arm, and with a beating heart, knocked on the door. A long-standing friendship developed between the two composers, and when Leopold asked Rachmaninoff for advice about developing further as a composer, Rachmaninoff suggested turning to Reinhold Glière.

May 14th 1907, Paris, Leopold van der Pals journal:

*”Tomorrow I want to make all the necessary inquiries about Glière. If anything, I want to get to work right away so that I don't lose a moment. - In the afternoon we went to a matinee given by Saint-Saens, where the "Socite d´Instruments anciens" performed; I saw them for the first time and enjoyed very much the performance of these beautiful old things by Bruni, Rameau, etc. on the old instruments. In the evening we have dinner with Rachmaninoff. The more I spend time with him, the more I like him. He is a very special person.”*

In Berlin, Glière´s class consisted of only two students: Leopold van der Pals and Sergei Koussevitzky.

Under Glière´s expert guidance, both students made their debut in the following years with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Leopold van der Pals with the premiere of his Symphony No. 1, and Sergei Koussevitsky as a conductor.

July 4th, 1907, Biarritz, Leopold van der Pals journal:

*“Our schedule is pretty much set. I have lessons 3 times a week - composition and instrumentation, in between also counterpoint. As a teacher, Glière seems no more and no less than many good teachers. For me it is hard to find someone I would like after the great clarity and interesting lessons of Alex (Alexander Dénéréaz, Lausanne). But I can learn a lot with Glière as well.<...>*

*Tomorrow is my birthday (23). Another year is over! And what a strange year! I began it with Marussja in Stockholm; we were on the journey from Davos to Petersburg. Then came those beautiful days in Paloniemi (Lohja, Finland), unfortunately too short for us. It was so wonderful there!... Then came the wedding, with all its excitement and the beautiful wedding day as a conclusion. Then we traveled; it was a journey as beautiful as rarely a trip can be. Together with Marussja I visited the most beautiful places and fully enjoyed art and nature and saw and experienced so many interesting things.*

*And then... months of seclusion in Davos, happy about our togetherness, but surrounded by the terrible atmosphere of illness and death. There were also beautiful moments, our Christmas, and other joyfull days, in between, our loved ones visited us. But the place, Oh, this place of sorrow! A happiness that we are no longer there. And the desire to leave it quickly, to go where the sun shines, was fulfilled. We made our wonderful Italian trip, which made such powerful impressions on us. And there I could create. I also composed my sonata in Davos, but it was difficult. In Palermo, the quartet came all the easier. Then suddenly this unexpected trip to Paris, being together with everyone, artistic pleasures that constantly alternated - it was like a dream. Then our establishment in Berlin and the trip to Biarritz, decided from one day to the next. And now we are here, happy as ever to be together.*

*I am often overcome by longing for the dear Northern lands. Oh, how I am drawn there sometimes!”*

During his time in Berlin, Leopold started giving his works opus numbers. All previous compositions were considered to be youth-works - except for one piece: his cello sonata.

After the premiere of his Symphony No. 1, opus 4, Leopold briefly returned to his cello sonata and included it in his official list of works as opus 5a. Only a year later, in 1911, his two symphonic poems ”Autumn and Spring” opus 14, were premiered by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in Carnegie Hall.

In the year 2000, Tobias van der Pals found two manuscripts which contained almost the full piece.

Last year, in 2021, Tobias van der Pals found the third and final original manuscript, and the sonata could be completed. But the work was not prepared for performance, and thus was missing every part of playing suggestions (dynamics, slurs, articulations, etc.). The analysis and reconstruction of the piece is done by Tobias van der Pals and the work is now available in print from Edition Wilhelm Hansen (Wise Music Group).