Junior Recital Program Notes

Karl Pilss (1902–1979): Sonata for Trumpet and Piano (1935)

Karl Pilss (1902–1979) was an Austrian composer, conductor and pianist from Vienna. He studied composition with Franz Schmidt at the Vienna Academy of Music, and worked for years as a choir director and répétiteur, which helps explain why his music is so vocal. His Sonata for Trumpet and Piano, written in 1935, is one of his most performed works.

The Sonata is written in a warm, late-Romantic style, with long melodies and rich harmony that come from Schmidt's influence. It is one of the earliest major sonatas for trumpet and piano, appearing four years before Hindemith's. Outside Vienna the composer is not well known, but the Sonata has become an important piece for advanced trumpet players.

Listen for the trumpet singing long, lyrical lines, as if it were a voice rather than a brass instrument. The piano is a full partner, often playing thick, almost orchestral textures, then stepping back so the trumpet's melody can be heard alone. The piece asks for stamina and a steady, singing tone, since the music stays high and the phrases are long.

Aaron Copland (1900–1990): Quiet City (1939–41)

Aaron Copland (1900–1990) wrote Quiet City in 1939 as theater music for a play by Irwin Shaw, performed by the Group Theatre in New York. The play follows a man who gives up his heritage and his artistic dreams to chase success, and who is haunted by the sound of his brother's trumpet playing. Copland's original score was for trumpet, saxophone, clarinet and piano.

The play closed after only a couple of performances, but Copland did not want the music to be lost. He reworked it into a ten-minute piece for trumpet, English horn and string orchestra, first performed in New York in 1941. Copland said the music was an attempt to mirror the play's troubled main character, but that it had become a work that could stand on its own. Today it is often heard as a picture of New York at night.

Listen for the trumpet and the English horn as two separate voices. The trumpet plays short, restless calls, often soft and far away, like a passing thought. The English horn answers with slower, sadder melodies, while the strings hold a quiet, spacious background beneath them. Near the end the music builds to a tense, high climax and then fades back into silence. Tonight the piano takes the place of the strings and English horn, so the trumpet carries the quiet urgency of the opening and closing calls.