Program 4

Suite from *King Arthur, or The British Worthy*
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Composed in 1691.
Premiered in May 1691 in London.

Henry Purcell was the foremost composer of Restoration England and one of the 17th-century's greatest musical masters. The exact date of his birth is unknown, and until recently it was thought that his father was Henry Purcell, Gentleman of the Chapel Royal and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey, but recent evidence shows that he was actually the son of Henry's brother, Thomas, who also held a post in the Chapel Royal. Young Henry was a chorister in the Chapel from 1669, and he was appointed Assistant Keeper of the Instruments when his voice broke three years later. He early showed an exceptional talent for music — he was named composer to the King's Band in 1677, and two years later became organist at Westminster Abbey. He wrote compositions in many genres, including works for keyboard, chamber ensembles and voices (sacred and secular), but he was most famed for his stage music, which was the main focus of his creative activity in the five years before his death, in 1795. Purcell contributed music to over fifty theatrical productions, but his only true opera (i.e., sung throughout) is the one-act *Dido and Aeneas*, written in 1689 for a London girls' school. His other stage ventures were Restoration outgrowths of the early-17th-century masque, the distinctive English theatrical hybrid that larded generous helpings of music, dance and spectacle into spoken plays based on historical, mythological, amorous or comic subjects. A half-dozen of those pieces — *Dioclesian*, *King Arthur*, *The Fairy Queen*, *The Indian Queen*, *The Tempest* and *Timon of Athens* — contained enough music integral to the plot, in the form of overtures, interludes, songs, choruses, dances and extended divertissements, to be classed as "semi-operas"; to the other productions he contributed "incidental music," numbers extraneous to the story. Purcell was peerless in this highly specialized musical arena, and much of his finest work is contained in his theater scores. John Dryden, the day's leading English dramatist, said that Purcell was "the equal of the best [composers] abroad," and Roger North, writing around 1700, observed that Purcell "raised up operas and musick in the theatres to a credit, spreading his fame as far as Italy." England had to wait for over two centuries before it produced another composer of equal genius in the person of Edward Elgar.

John Dryden attempted to create a heroic national epic in his play *King Arthur* in 1684, and he looked upon reworking it for the musical stage seven years later with the utmost seriousness of purpose. His choice of Purcell to compose the music for the production at the Dorset Garden Theatre in May 1691 was one of the most significant honors the composer ever received. The spectacular staging, elaborate dances and superb music made *King Arthur* an outstanding success, and it was revived frequently well into the 18th century. The story takes place early in the life of Arthur, before he married Guinevere and founded the Round Table. The play, forged from legend, history and patriotism, is filled with incident and complication, and Curtis A. Price, whose *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (1984) is the definitive reference on the subject, sifted the following précis from its action: "In a series of battles with the Saxons, King Arthur and the Britons have regained all the kingdom except Kent. After a heathen sacrifice, Oswald and the Saxons launch a final assault but are defeated. Urged on by the evil spirit Grimbald, the Saxons resort to treachery, first by trying to lead the Britons onto quicksand and then by kidnapping King Arthur's betrothed, Emmeline, the blind daughter of the Duke of Cornwall. Aided by Merlin and Philadel, a good spirit, Arthur attempts to rescue Emmeline from the snares and illusions of an enchanted forest. Meanwhile, the heroine is nearly raped by her jailer, the Saxon magician Osmond. After breaking the magic spell, Arthur defeats Oswald in single combat, is reunited with Emmeline (now restored to sight), and magnanimously forgives the Saxons. The opera concludes with a masque in praise of Britain — its people, natural resources and institutions." This suite contains some of the score's finest instrumental music.

Concerto for Two Cellos in G minor, R. 531
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Vivaldi obtained his first official post in September 1703 at the *Pio Ospedale della Pietà*, one of four institutions in Venice devoted to the care of orphaned, abandoned and poor girls. As part of its training, the school devoted much effort to the musical education of its wards, and there was an elaborate organization of administrators, teachers and associates who oversaw the activities of the students. Part of his duties as violin teacher required Vivaldi to compose at least two new concertos as well as other instrumental pieces each month for the regular public concerts given by the *Ospedale*. The featured performers in these works were occasionally members of the faculty, but usually they were the more advanced students — the difficulty of Vivaldi's music is ample testimony to their skill. These programs offered some of the best music in Italy, and they attracted visitors from all over Europe. One French traveler, Président Charles de Brosses, described the conservatory concerts in a letter of August 1739: "The most marvelous music is that of the *Ospedali*. There are four of them, all composed of orphan girls or of girls whose parents cannot afford the expense of bringing them up. They are reared at the expense of the State and trained only to excel in music. And indeed they sing like angels and play the violin, the flute, the organ, the oboe, the violoncello, the bassoon, the lute; in short, there is no instrument big enough to scare them. They are cloistered like nuns. They are the only executants, and at each concert about forty of them perform. I swear to you that there is nothing so pleasant as to see a young and

pretty girl robed in white, with a garland of pomegranate flowers in her hair, conducting the orchestra and beating time with all imaginable grace and precision." These young ladies drew much attention in Venice, and the most gifted were the regular recipients of proposals of marriage. Vivaldi's music undoubtedly played no little part in the success of the graduates of the *Ospedali*.

For his students and colleagues and on commission, Vivaldi wrote some three dozen concertos for cello: 27 for solo cello, one for two cellos, three for violin and cello, two for two violins and cello, one for violin and two cellos, and two for pairs of violins and cellos. The G minor Concerto for Two Cellos follows the three-movement structure (fast–slow–fast) characteristic of the late Baroque version of the form: an opening *ritornello* movement in which solo passages for the tandem cellos alternate with tutti sections for the full ensemble; a melodious *Largo* in a plaintive mood; and a vigorous finale that here takes on an almost tempestuous quality.

Trumpet Concerto in E-flat major
Johann Baptist Georg Neruda (ca. 1711-1776)

Among the many gifted composers and performers from the Czech lands who enriched the musical life of the late 18th century was Johann Baptist Georg Neruda, born around 1711 in Rosice, Moravia, near Brno, about thirty miles north of the border with Austria. Neruda was from a musical family — his brother, Jan Chryzostomus, was a violinist and later choirmaster of Prague's Strahov Monastery — and he was trained as a violinist and cellist in Prague, where he spent several years performing in theater orchestras before entering the service of Count Rutowski in Dresden in 1741 or 1742. He became concertmaster of the Dresden court orchestra in 1750 and remained in that post until his retirement in 1772; he died in Dresden four years later. Neruda composed nearly a hundred works, including an opera, church music, some three-dozen pieces in the gestating form of the symphony, numerous trio sonatas and fourteen concertos that were widely disseminated throughout northern Europe in both manuscripts and printed editions. He was also active as a teacher, and two of his sons became violinists at the Dresden court.

The Concerto in E-flat major, Neruda's best-known work, was originally written for the valveless horn of the late eighteenth century (then known as *corno di caccia* — "*hunting horn*" — to denote its sylvan associations) but it is most commonly performed today on trumpet. It was written during the years of transition from the Baroque to the Classical era, and shows traits of both the old and new styles: its harmonic and melodic components are largely of the modern type, while certain formal characteristics and modes of expression look back to the models of preceding generations. Each of the Concerto's three movements is rooted in the old *ritornello* form, in which an orchestral refrain returns (*ritorno* in Italian) to separate the soloist's intervening episodes. There are three such formal alternations in both the opening *Allegro* and the closing *Vivace*, with the last solo episode in each culminating in a cadenza. The slow tempo of the central *Largo* allows for only two solo episodes, with the second rounded out by a cadenza.

Chacony (Chaconne) for Strings in G minor, Z. 730
Henry Purcell
Edited by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Composed around 1680; edited in 1964.

The "chaconne" (or "chacony," to use Purcell's word), one of the most popular and durable forms of Baroque music, is a set of continuous variations unfolding around a short, repeated melody. It may have had its surprising origin in a wild and sensuous Mexican dance in triple meter that was imported into Europe through Spain during the 16th century. The dance soon lost its original character, however, and by the middle of the following century had became a sedate concert and dramatic genre often used to express tragic emotions. Purcell included a number of such pieces in the stage works written during the last half-dozen years of his life (the lament from *Dido and Aeneas* is the most famous example), but among his early realizations of the form is the Chaconne in G minor. The work is included in a manuscript now in the British Museum containing a dozen fantasias for viol consort that were apparently written at Windsor during the summer of 1680, the year after Purcell was appointed organist at Westminster Abbey. Since the viol, one of the staples of Elizabethan music, was largely out of fashion by the reign of Charles II, it is unclear why Purcell undertook such works at that time. Indeed, these are the last known examples of the viol fantasia ever written. In the manuscript, the Chaconne is scored for four viols and paired with a Pavan in the same key. The piece is built on an eight-measure theme first presented in the bass as support for the chordal accompaniment of the upper strings, and then becomes the subject for eighteen variations. The mood throughout is somber, almost tragic, though it is unlikely that the music was associated with any dramatic production, since Purcell did little composing for the stage until 1689. In 1964, Benjamin Britten, a long-time admirer and editor of Purcell's music, arranged the Chaconne for string orchestra, keeping the musical text intact but adding dynamic shadings, equalizing the distribution of parts and securing a consistent treatment of dotted rhythms.

Symphony No. 103 in E-flat major, "Drumroll"
Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Composed in 1794-1795.
Premiered on March 3, 1795 in London, directed by the composer.

For three decades, Haydn toiled for the Esterházy family in Eisenstadt and at their new palace, Esterháza, just across the Hungarian border from Austria. He managed the extensive musical establishment of the house, composed music continuously, and oversaw the famed resident opera company. (After her visit in 1773, Empress Maria Theresa let it be known that whenever she wanted to see a good opera, she invited herself to the Esterházy palace.) With his many responsibilities, Haydn was grossly overworked for most of his life. It is understandable, therefore, that, though his dedication and love of his job never wavered, it was with some relief that he viewed the death of the music-loving Prince Nicolaus

in 1790. Nicolaus' son, Anton, did not inherit his father's love of music, and he dispersed the entire musical establishment except for a brass band for ceremonial functions, thereby releasing Haydn from all but titular duties. A comfortable pension was settled upon Haydn as reward for his many years of service, and he moved to Vienna so quickly that he left most of his personal belongings behind.

Johann Peter Salomon, a German violinist and impresario, had initiated a series of concerts in London in 1786, and he was always searching for new attractions to present. He was in Bonn when word came of Prince Nicolaus' death, and he set off for Vienna immediately to entice Haydn to Britain. He was successful, and Haydn made his first visit to London from January 1791 to June 1792, composing there six symphonies for Salomon's concerts and leading their premieres. The venture was a triumph. Haydn went home to Vienna, but it was not difficult for Salomon to convince him to return to London. His second visit began in February 1794 and again lasted for a year and a half. The success of the first was repeated, and Haydn received an acclaim from the British public such as he had never known in the close confines of his service to the Esterházy family.

Haydn wrote three symphonies (Nos. 99-101) for Salomon's concerts of spring 1794. He spent the summer months touring through the British countryside, and returned to London in the early autumn to make preparations for the next season. Salomon, however, was having difficulties arranging for the performers necessary to ensure the high quality of his concerts because the Reign of Terror then sweeping France made travel and financial dealings risky, and he was forced to cancel his performances. However, a rival operation, the so-called "Opera Concerts," was not about to let pass the opportunity of displaying England's most distinguished musical visitor. The Italian violinist and composer Giovan Battista Viotti, director of the Opera Concerts, arranged for Haydn to compose and direct three symphonies for his programs. The second of these, the penultimate one in the series of 107 with which Haydn brought the genre to its formal and expressive maturity [two symphonies are missing from the standard numbering, done over a century ago], was the Symphony No. 103 in E-flat major, the "Drumroll."

By the 1770s, Haydn had developed a stylistic idiom that could satisfy a variety of tastes by balancing the popular and the learned, the emotional and the intellectual, the rustic and the sophisticated to create a musical equilibrium mirroring the good taste so highly valued in that late-18th-century age of reason. Mozart expressed this viewpoint in a letter to his father concerning the first three piano concertos that he wrote after moving to Vienna in 1781: "These concertos are a happy medium between what is too easy and too difficult; they are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without being vapid. There are passages here and there from which connoisseurs alone can derive satisfaction; but these passages are written in such a way that the less learned cannot fail to be pleased, though without knowing why." In his Symphony No. 103, Haydn sought to capture the attention of his listeners not just with the extraordinary solo timpani roll that opens the work, but also with thematic material derived from Croatian (movement I) and Hungarian folksongs (movement II) and an Alpine yodel (movement III). The working-out of these easily assimilated bits, however — from note to note, from phrase to phrase, from movement to movement — is done with masterful craftsmanship and meticulous care. It is little wonder that the *Morning Chronicle* gave the following report on the day after the Symphony's premiere, at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket on March 3, 1795: "Another new Overture [the contemporary English term for a symphony] by the fertile and enchanting HAYDN was performed, which, as usual, had continual strokes of genius, both in air [i.e., melody] and harmony. The *Introduction* [to the first movement] excited the deepest attention, the *Allegro* charmed, the *Andante* was encored, the *Minuet*, especially the *Trio*, was playful and sweet, and the last movement was equal, if not superior to the preceding."

Following the distinctive opening gesture that earned the E-flat Symphony its sobriquet, a somber introduction seems to promise something dramatic, perhaps even tragic. What follows in the sonata-form main part of the movement, however, is a delightful and witty essay built largely upon the chipper tune first entrusted to the violins. The music is worked into a climax that includes an up-tempo reference to the introduction's motive before a lilting waltz-like melody is brought in for thematic contrast. The development section, which draws upon both the main and introduction themes, suggests the encroaching Romantic sensibility in its daring harmony and depth of expression. The recapitulation of the earlier thematic materials appears to be running its expected course when it suddenly pauses on an unresolved harmony to allow for a reminiscence of the somber music of the introduction. According to the need for formal closure and the taste of Haydn's era, however, this *Allegro* could not end with such music, so the quick tempo and the chipper theme return to round out the movement.

The *Andante* is a dual set of variations on two Hungarian folksongs, one in a minor key, the other major. The variations, one of which is an elaborate solo originally written for Viotti, principal violinist (and impresario) of the Opera Concerts, alternate between the contrasting themes and keys until they are concluded by a harmonically adventurous coda. The *Menuetto* is one of Haydn's broad country versions of the old dance, here enfolding a central trio that features the clarinet, an instrument still new to the standard orchestral ensemble in 1795. "The finale," according to Haydn authority H.C. Robbins Landon, "is without doubt one of the great *tours-de-force*, formally speaking, of the composer's career: the creation of a long movement on a single theme in which our interest never flags; on the contrary, it is a finale of unusual tension and strength." The movement's theme, a lively, four-measure phrase presented by the violins after an opening hunting call from the horns, is constantly in evidence until the joyous closing measures of the Symphony.

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