

PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 1

Tuesday, August 5, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Benjamin Pasternack, Piano

FESTIVAL OPENING

SMITH *The Star-Spangled Banner*

TICHELI *Blue Shades*

GERSHWIN Piano Concerto in F

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro agitato

— INTERMISSION —

FRANCK Symphony in D minor

Lento — Allegro non troppo

Allegretto

Allegro non troppo

This concert is sponsored by the Egan Foundation and the Egan Family in memory of Peg Egan.

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory of Alice Spooner.

Mr. Pasternack is performing on the Esther Browning Piano.

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements. Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited. Please, no cell phones during the concert.



FESTIVAL PREVIEW WEEK 1

The 2008 Peninsula Music Festival opens with music from both sides of the Atlantic. Frank Ticheli, in his *Blue Shades*, continues the American tradition of concert works that incorporate vernacular idioms which was pioneered in the 1920s by George Gershwin with such jazz-inspired pieces as the Piano Concerto in F; celebrated American pianist Benjamin Pasternack is the soloist. After intermission, Victor Yampolsky, celebrating his 23rd year as PMF Music Director, leads the Symphony in D minor by French master César Franck.

The season's traversal of all four symphonies of Johannes Brahms begins on the Thursday concert with the Symphony No. 1 in C minor, perhaps the greatest first symphony ever composed. Two other works from the heart of the German repertory round out the concert: Richard Wagner's dramatic Overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, and Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2, with Korean-born pianist Soojin Ahn as soloist.

Week 1 concludes with a program of "Northern Lights" that features three little-known works by the great Finnish composer Jean Sibelius — *Spring Song* for orchestra and *Two Humoresques* for violin — to complement the beloved Violin Concerto, whose finale was once called "a polonaise for polar bears." Acclaimed Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud is featured. Dmitri Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony of 1939 started out as a tribute to Lenin but became a work that Ray Blokker wrote provides "sheer musical enjoyment for both musicians and audiences."

Program notes by
Dr. Richard E. Rodda
Cleveland, Ohio

FIFTY-SIXTH ANNUAL SEASON
Door Community Auditorium
Gibraltar School
Fish Creek, Wisconsin



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 2

Thursday, August 7, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor
Soojin Ahn, Piano

BRAHMS FEST I

WAGNER Overture to *The Flying Dutchman*

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19
 Allegro con brio
 Adagio
 Rondo: Molto allegro

— INTERMISSION —

BRAHMS Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68
 Un poco sostenuto — Allegro
 Andante sostenuto
 Un poco allegretto e grazioso
 Adagio — Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

This concert is sponsored by OC & Pat Boldt.

Ms. Ahn is performing on the Esther Browning Piano.

Ms. Ahn appears by arrangement with Michael Larco.

Pre-concert talk — 6:30-7:15

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 3

Saturday, August 9, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Henning Kraggerud, Violin

NORTHERN LIGHTS

SIBELIUS *Spring Song*, Op. 16

SIBELIUS Two Humoresques for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 87

SIBELIUS Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

Allegro moderato

Adagio di molto

Allegro ma non tanto

— INTERMISSION —

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54

Largo

Allegro

Presto

This concert is sponsored by the Board of Directors
in memory of John Browning.

Mr. Kraggerud appears by arrangement with IMG Artists, LLC, New York, NY.

Pre-concert talk — 6:30-7:15

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.

Program 1

Blue Shades

Frank Ticheli (born in 1958)

Composed for winds and percussion in 1996; arranged for orchestra in 1999.
Orchestral version premiered in December 1999 in Costa Mesa, California, conducted by Carl St. Clair.

Frank Ticheli, born on January 21, 1958 in Monroe, Louisiana, joined the faculty of the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California in 1991; he is now Professor of Composition at the school. Ticheli (ti-KEL-ee) received his bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University, where his principal teacher was Donald Erb, and his doctoral and master's degrees from the University of Michigan, where he studied with William Albright, Leslie Bassett, William Bolcom and George Wilson. From 1991 to 1998, Ticheli was Composer-in-Residence with the Pacific Symphony Orchestra in Orange County, California. His compositions, mostly instrumental, include works for orchestra, concert band and chamber ensembles. He has received commissions and grants from the American Music Center, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Chorale, Prince George's Philharmonic Orchestra, Adrian Symphony, City of San Antonio, Austin State University, University of Michigan, Trinity University, Revelli Foundation, Indiana Bandmasters Association, Worldwide Concurrent Premieres, Inc., Chamber Music America and other ensembles and organizations. His distinctions include the Charles Ives Scholarship and the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship (both from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters), First Prize in the Texas Sesquicentennial Orchestral Composition Competition, Frances and William Schuman Fellowship from the MacDowell Colony, Walter Beeler Prize, First Prize in the Eleventh Annual Symposium for New Music, Ross Lee Finney Award, Britten-on-the-Bay Choral Composition Contest and Virginia CBDNA Symposium for New Band Music, and frequent summer residencies at the MacDowell Colony and Yaddo; in 2006, he won the William D. Revelli Memorial Band Composition Award from the National Band Association. The recording on the Koch label featuring his *Radiant Voices* and *Postcard* received an Honorable Mention in 1994 from the National Association of Independent Record Distributors (NAIRD). In July 2008, he conducted a new work for massed bands at the Sydney Opera House in Australia; in 2009, he premieres another new work and leads festivals in Beijing and Shanghai. In addition to composing, Frank Ticheli appears frequently as guest conductor of his works at universities and music festivals in this country and abroad.

The composer writes, "In 1992, I composed a concerto for traditional jazz band and orchestra, *Playing With Fire*, for the Jim Cullum Jazz Band and the San Antonio Symphony. That work was composed as a celebration of the traditional jazz music I heard so often while growing up near New Orleans. I experienced tremendous joy

during the creation of *Playing With Fire*, and my love for early jazz is expressed in every bar of the concerto. However, after completing it I knew that the traditional jazz influences dominated the work, leaving little room for my own musical voice to come through. I felt a strong need to compose another work, one that would combine my love of early jazz with my own musical style.

"Four years and several compositions later, I finally took the opportunity to realize that need by composing *Blue Shades*. As its title suggests, the work alludes to the blues, and a jazz feeling is prevalent — however, it is not literally a blues piece. There is not a single twelve-bar blues progression to be found, and, except for a few isolated sections, the eighth-note is not played in swinging style.

"The work, however, is heavily influenced by the blues: 'blue notes' (flatted 3rds, 5ths and 7ths of the scale) are used constantly; blues harmonies, rhythms and melodic idioms pervade the work; and many 'shades of blue' are depicted, from bright blue to dark, to dirty, to hot blue.

"At times, *Blue Shades* burlesques some of the clichés from the Big Band era, not as a mockery of those conventions, but as a tribute. A slow and quiet middle section recalls the atmosphere of a dark, smoky blues haunt. An extended clarinet solo played near the end recalls Benny Goodman's hot playing style, and ushers in a series of 'wailing' brass chords recalling the train whistle effects commonly used during that era."

Piano Concerto in F

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Composed in 1925.
Premiered on December 3, 1925 in New York, conducted by Walter Damrosch with the composer as soloist.

Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony and one of this country's most prominent musical figures for the half-century before World War II, was among the Aeolian Hall audience when George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* exploded above the musical world on February 12, 1924. He recognized Gershwin's genius (and, no doubt, the opportunity for wide publicity), and approached him a short time later with a proposal for another large-scale work. A concerto for piano was agreed upon, and Gershwin was awarded a commission from the New York Symphony to compose the piece, and also to be the soloist at its premiere and a half-dozen subsequent concerts. The story that Gershwin then rushed out and bought a reference book explaining what a concerto is is probably apocryphal. He did, however, study the scores of some of the concertos of earlier masters to discover how they had handled the problems of structure and instrumental balance. He made the first extensive sketches for the work while in London during May 1925. By July, back home, he was able to play for his friends large fragments of the evolving work, tentatively entitled "New York Concerto." The first movement was completed by the end of that month,

the second and third by September, and the orchestration carried out in October and November, by which time the title had become simply Concerto in F.

Gershwin provided a short analysis of the Concerto for the *New York Tribune*: "The first movement employs a Charleston rhythm. It is quick and pulsating, representing the young, enthusiastic spirit of American life. It begins with a rhythmic motif given out by the kettledrums, supported by other percussion instruments and with a Charleston motif introduced by bassoon, horns, clarinets and violas. The principal theme is announced by the bassoon. Later, a second theme is introduced by the piano. The second movement has a poetic, nocturnal atmosphere which has come to be referred to as the American blues, but in a purer form than that in which they are usually treated. The final movement is an orgy of rhythms, starting violently and keeping the same pace throughout."

Though Gershwin based his Concerto loosely on classical formal models, its structure is episodic in nature. His words above do not mention several other melodies that appear in the first and second movements, nor the return of some of those themes in the finale as a means of unifying the work's overall structure. He was learning as he went, and this Concerto is nothing short of astonishing when it is realized that it was only his second concert work, written when he was just 27 years old. Few other composers could boast of such a successful beginning. Noting the brilliant natural talent displayed in the Concerto, Milton Cross wrote, "[The flaws in Gershwin's large works] become insignificant when placed beside the many strong points: the amazing melodic inventiveness; the never-failing freshness of ideas; the basic feeling for rhythm; the extraordinary instincts which dictated the proper effect and the precise means; the unfailing inspiration in getting the idea required by the big moment. His talent, in short, was a conservatory in itself."

Symphony in D minor

César Franck (1822-1890)

Composed in 1886-1888.

Premiered on February 17, 1889 in Paris, conducted by Jules Garcin.

César Franck was a private man, self-effacing and apparently contented. During César's youth, his zealous father tried to push him into the life of a piano virtuoso, even going so far as to move the entire family from Belgium to Paris so that he could take French citizenship and make his son eligible for admission to the prestigious Paris Conservatoire. Much to his father's chagrin, however, César was fit neither constitutionally nor musically to follow this course, and soon after his marriage in 1848, he left *chez Papa* when the rest of the family was out for a walk one afternoon, never giving another thought to the rigorous life of the traveling virtuoso.

The remaining forty years of Franck's life were spent in the relatively quiet world of teaching, organ playing and composition. His teaching was done in a number of colleges in Paris and was mostly devoted to the

organ, though after his appointment as professor at the Conservatoire he did cause some consternation among the regular composition faculty by guiding the creative work of many of his pupils. He was among the greatest church organists of his time, occupying the important post at Sainte-Clothilde in Paris, and he helped to spark a renewed interest in the musical virtues of that great instrument through both his improvisations and his compositions. His playing and teaching left little time for composition, so that activity was relegated to the two hours before he left the house each morning at 7:30. Franck seems to have delighted in his regular work schedule, in his generally halcyon domestic life (though his wife and son offered an occasional barb designed to spur him to greater financial success, to no avail), and in the daily musical practice of his faith. He did not actively seek public recognition for his works, and his first general acclaim as a composer came only four years before his death, with his Sonata for Violin and Piano. His self-possessed attitude and apparent lack of ambition for fame were reflected at the premiere of his Symphony, generally decried by critics, the public and many fellow musicians. Though the evening must have been a disappointment to him, he simply said, "It sounded well, just as I thought it would." It was through his proselytizing students, especially Vincent d'Indy, that the music of this calm, kind man was brought into the limelight, a celebrity Franck never sought for himself.

Franck's compositions show a growing mastery of his art throughout his life, with his greatest and best-known works appearing during his last decade. The Symphony in D minor of 1888 dates from only two years before his death, and is the last of his orchestral compositions. This work, among the earliest of the symphonies produced in France at the end of the 19th century, was a rallying point for those French musicians who desired their country to have a serious concert repertory characterized by profound, sober emotional statement. Franck's Symphony is in three movements, though the second has characteristics of both an *adagio* and a *scherzo*, thereby combining the two traditional symphonic middle movements into a single structure, a technique Franck used in other works. The opening movement, in sonata form, begins with a somber introduction based on a three-note motive heard immediately in the strings. This motive is carried over into the following section in faster tempo and becomes part of the main theme. The second theme, in a contrasting major tonality, is a sweet melody that circles around a single pitch. The second movement opens with an atmospheric accompaniment of harp and plucked strings over which the English horn sings its doleful theme. The middle of this movement is given over to a delicate, *scherzando* scurrying in the strings which, in a masterly combination of two different musical moods, continues as accompaniment when the English horn theme returns. The festive D major finale, another sonata-form design, uses an arpeggiated main theme and a scalar secondary theme among which are woven reminiscences of the two earlier movements. The work ends with a triumphant affirmation of the finale's main theme by the full orchestra.

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 2

Overture to *The Flying Dutchman* Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

*Composed in 1841.
Premiered on January 2, 1843 in Dresden, conducted by the composer.*

“A Dutch sea captain attempts to round the Cape of Good Hope, vowing to succeed if it takes eternity. Taken at his word by the devil, he is condemned to sail the seas forever, but an angel intervenes with the possibility of redemption. The Dutchman is allowed one day every seven years on land; if he can find a woman who will follow him to death, he will be released.” Thus Richard Wagner described the old legend from which sprang his first masterpiece, *The Flying Dutchman*. Wagner gave this précis of his opera: “[Act I] As the opera opens two ships take refuge in a cove on the coast of Norway, one commanded by Daland, the other by the Dutchman. Impressed by the Dutchman’s wealth, Daland offers hospitality and promises the hand of his daughter Senta to the Dutchman. [Act II] Senta is waiting with the other maidens for the return of her father’s ship. She reveals that she is strangely moved by the story of the Flying Dutchman’s suffering and has a strong desire to save him. Erik, her lover, tries to persuade her to abandon her wild dreams. Daland and the Dutchman arrive together, and Senta agrees to marry the Dutchman. [Act III] Outside Daland’s house, the ships lie at anchor. The Dutchman hears Erik accusing Senta of breaking a past promise to him. Assuming her incapable of fidelity, the Dutchman puts out to sea. Senta calls that she is faithful to death and throws herself from the rocky cliff into the sea. At once the Dutchman’s ship sinks beneath the waves, and Senta and the Dutchman are seen rising toward heaven.”

The Overture, more than simply setting the stage for the drama to follow, is a highly effective summary of the opera’s musical and emotional progression. Three essential thematic elements of the tale comprise the Overture — the tempestuous music depicting the accursed Dutchman and his ceaseless quest for salvation; the beneficent strains of Senta, representing redemption through love; and the lively dance of the Norwegian sailors, which characterizes the world of mortal reality, simultaneously hated and envied by the Dutchman. The Dutchman’s enraged theme, hurled forth immediately at the outset and occupying much of the Overture, is perhaps the most evocative depiction of the ocean in seething tempest ever created by any musician. Senta’s music, sweet, comforting and given in a lilting meter almost suggestive of a lullaby, is initiated by the English horn. The spirited hornpipe of the Norwegian sailors is entrusted to the woodwinds. These melodies interact as the Overture unfolds, with the climax provided by a transformation of the Dutchman’s theme intertwined with Senta’s motive to achieve a triumphant apotheosis which depicts, in the composer’s words, the title charac-

ter “redeemed and whole, led by his redemptress’ hand to the dawn of an exalted love.”

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

*Composed in 1794-1795; revised in 1798.
Premiered on March 29, 1795 in Vienna, with the composer as soloist.*

In November 1792, the 22-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven, full of talent and promise, arrived in Vienna. So undeniable was the genius he had already demonstrated in a sizeable amount of piano music, numerous chamber works, cantatas on the death of Emperor Joseph II and the accession of Leopold II, and the score for a ballet, that the Elector of Bonn, his hometown, underwrote the trip to the Habsburg Imperial city, then the musical capital of Europe, to help further the young musician’s career (and the Elector’s prestige). Despite the Elector’s patronage, however, Beethoven’s professional ambitions consumed any thoughts of returning to the provincial city of his birth, and, when his alcoholic father died in December, he severed for good his ties with Bonn in favor of the stimulating artistic atmosphere of Vienna.

During his first years in Vienna, Beethoven was busy on several fronts. Initial encouragement for the Viennese junket came from the venerable Joseph Haydn, who had heard one of Beethoven’s cantatas on a visit to Bonn earlier in the year and promised to take the young composer as a student if he came to see him. Beethoven, therefore, became a counterpoint pupil of Haydn immediately after his arrival late in 1792, but the two had difficulty getting along, and their association soon broke off. Several other teachers followed in short order — Schenk, Albrechtsberger, Förster, Salieri. While he was busy completing fugal exercises and practicing setting Italian texts for his tutors, he continued to compose, producing works for solo piano, chamber ensembles and wind groups. It was as a pianist, however, that he gained his first fame among the Viennese. The untamed, passionate, original quality of his playing and his personality first intrigued and then captivated those who heard him. When he bested in competition Daniel Steibelt and Joseph Wölffl, two of the town’s noted keyboard luminaries, he became all the rage among the gentry, who exhibited him in performance at the *soirées* in their elegant city palaces. In catering to the aristocratic audience, Beethoven took on the air of a dandy for a while, dressing in smart clothes, learning to dance (badly), buying a horse and even sporting a powdered wig. This phase of his life did not outlast the 1790s, but in his biography of the composer Peter Latham described Beethoven at the time as “a young giant exulting in his strength and his success, and youthful confidence gave him a buoyancy that was both attractive and infectious.” It was with understandable anticipation that Vienna looked forward to the public debut of this young lion.

The occasion of Beethoven’s first Viennese public

appearance was a pair of concerts — “A Grand Musical Academy, with more than 150 participants,” trumpeted the program in Italian and German — on March 29/30, 1795, at the Burgtheater whose proceeds were to benefit the Widows’ Fund of the Artists’ Society. It is likely that Antonio Salieri, Beethoven’s teacher at the time, had a hand in arranging the affair, since the music of one Antonio Cordellieri, another of his pupils, also shared the bill. Beethoven chose for the occasion a piano concerto in B-flat major he had been working on for several months, but which was still incomplete only days before the concert. In his reminiscences of the composer, Franz Wegeler recalled, “Not until the afternoon of the second day before the concert did he write the rondo, and then while suffering from a pretty severe colic which frequently afflicted him. I relieved him with simple remedies so far as I could. In the anteroom sat copyists to whom he handed sheet after sheet as soon as they were finished being written.” The work was completed just in time for the performance. It proved to be a fine success (“he gained the unanimous applause of the audience,” reported the *Wiener Zeitung*), and did much to further Beethoven’s dual reputation as performer and composer. For a concert in Prague three years later, the Concerto was extensively revised, and it is this version which is known today. The original one has vanished.

The B-flat Concerto now seems a most classical and untroubled work, yet it caused considerable consternation when it was new. So moved and shaken was the Bohemian composer Johann Wenzel Tomaschek by Beethoven’s performance of the Concerto in Prague in 1798 that he was unable to bring himself to touch the piano for several days. Tomaschek’s thoughts are typical of the criticisms that followed Beethoven throughout his life, accusing him of too freely blending genius and near-irrationality. “I admire his forceful and brilliant playing,” wrote the Bohemian composer, “but his frequent bold leaps from one motive to another, interrupting the organic connection and the gradual development of ideas, did not escape me. Evils of this kind frequently weaken his greatest compositions, those which spring from too exuberant a conception.... The odd and the novel seem to be his chief aims in composition.” For his part, Beethoven apparently placed little stock in this Concerto that drew such a deep response from Tomaschek. Beethoven’s letter of December 15, 1800, offering the piece for publication to Franz Hoffmeister noted, “I do not claim it to be my best work ... but it will not disgrace you to print it.” When prices were discussed a month later, Beethoven asked only ten ducats for the Concerto, half the amount he demanded for the Septet.

Though the B-flat Concerto is known as “No. 2,” it was composed before the “First” but published later. Actually, the B-flat was Beethoven’s third attempt at the form. When he was a lad of fourteen in Bonn, he wrote a Concerto in E-flat of which only the solo part and a piano transcription of the orchestral preludes and interludes exist. Guido Adler reconstructed the work for piano and small orchestra, and published it in 1888 as a supple-

ment to the complete Beethoven Edition. In that same year, Adler discovered the first movement of another early Beethoven concerto, this one in D major, in the possession of Joseph Bezeczny, head of education for an institute for the blind in Prague. Adler determined that the work was written between 1788 and 1793 (“probably before rather than after 1790,” he added), and that Beethoven apparently attached little importance to it and simply laid it aside, unfinished. The B-flat Concerto (No. 2, published as Op. 19) was completed in 1795 (though revised in 1798 and again in 1800); the C major (No. 1, Op. 15) dates from 1798. Both were published in 1801, and ordered according to the opus numbers assigned to them by the composer.

Beethoven’s Second Piano Concerto is a product of the Classical age, not just in date but also in technique, expression and attitude. Still to come were the heaven-storming sublimities of his later works, but he could no more know what form those still-to-be-written works would take than tell the future in any other way. “Beethoven is present in the Concerto’s notes, but concealed — and to listen for him is probably to miss the classical charm and 18th-century polish that mark it so definitely with the manners of Haydn and Mozart,” advised Herbert Weinstock. Such a traditional device — one greatly favored by Mozart — is used to open the Concerto: a forceful fanfare motive immediately balanced by a suave lyrical phrase. These two melodic fragments are spun out at length to produce the orchestral introduction. The piano joins in for a brief transition to the re-presentation of the principal thematic motives, applying brilliant decorative filigree as the movement unfolds. The sweetly simple second theme is sung by the orchestra alone, but the soloist quickly resumes playing to supply commentary on this new melody. An orchestral interlude leads to the development section, based largely on transformations of the principal theme’s lyrical motive. The recapitulation proceeds apace, and includes an extended cadenza. (Beethoven composed cadenzas for his first four concertos between 1804 and 1809.) A brief orchestral thought ends the movement.

The touching second movement is less an exercise in rigorous, abstract form than a lengthy song of rich texture and operatic sentiment. The wonderfully inventive piano figurations surrounding the melody are ample reminder that Beethoven was one of the finest keyboard improvisors of his day, a master of embellishment and piano style. The finale is a rondo based on a bounding theme announced immediately by the soloist. Even at this early stage in his career, it is amazing how he was able to extend and manipulate this simple, folk-like tune with seemingly limitless creativity. Though Beethoven’s music was soon to explore unprecedented areas of expression and technique, this Concerto stands at the end of an era, paying its debt to the composer’s great forebears and announcing in conventional terms the arrival of a musician who was soon to change forever the art of music.

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Composed in 1855-1876.
Premiered on November 4, 1876 in Karlsruhe, conducted by Felix Otto Dessoff.

Brahms, while not as breathtakingly precocious as Mozart, Mendelssohn or Schubert, got a reasonably early start on his musical career: he had produced several piano works (including two large sonatas) and a goodly number of songs by the age of nineteen. In 1853, when Brahms was only twenty, Robert Schumann wrote the famous article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, his first contribution to that journal in a decade, hailing Brahms as the savior of German music, the rightful heir to the mantle of Beethoven. Brahms was extremely proud of Schumann's advocacy and he displayed the journal with great joy to his friends and family when he returned to his humble Hamburg neighborhood after visiting Schumann in Düsseldorf, but there was the other side of Schumann's assessment as well, that which placed an immense burden on Brahms' shoulders.

Brahms was acutely aware of the deeply rooted traditions of German music extending back not just to Beethoven, but even beyond him to Bach and Schütz and Lassus. His knowledge of Bach was so thorough, for example, that he was asked to join the editorial board of the first complete edition of the works of that Baroque master. He knew that, having been heralded by Schumann, his compositions, especially a symphony, would have to measure up to the standards set by his forebears. At first he doubted that he was even able to write a symphony, feeling that Beethoven had nearly expended all the potential of that form, leaving nothing for future generations. "You have no idea," Brahms lamented, "how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven."

Encouraged by Schumann to undertake a symphony ("If one only makes the beginning, then the end comes of itself," he cajoled), Brahms made some attempts in 1854, but was unsatisfied with the symphonic potential of the sketches, and diverted them into the First Piano Concerto and the *German Requiem*. He began again a year later, perhaps influenced by a performance of Schumann's *Manfred*, and set down a first movement, but this music he kept to himself, and even his closest friends knew of no more than the existence of the manuscript. Seven years passed before he sent this movement to Clara, Schumann's widow, to seek her opinion. With only a few reservations, she was pleased with this C minor sketch, and encouraged Brahms to hurry on and finish the rest so that it could be performed. Brahms, however, was not to be rushed. Eager inquiries from conductors in 1863, 1864 and 1866 went unanswered. It was not until 1870 that he hinted about any progress at all beyond the first movement.

The success of the superb *Haydn Variations* for orchestra of 1873 seemed to convince Brahms that he could complete his initial symphony, and in the summer of 1874 he began two years of labor — revising, correcting, perfecting — before he signed and dated the score of the First Symphony in September 1876. He was at

work right up to the premiere, making alterations after each rehearsal. The C minor Symphony met with a good but not overwhelming reception. It was considered by some to be stern and ascetic, lacking in melody (!). One critic suggested posting signs in concert halls warning: "Exit in case of Brahms." But Brahms' vision was greater than that of his audiences, and some time was needed by listeners to absorb the manifold beauties of this work. It is a serious and important essay ("Composing a symphony is no laughing matter," according to Brahms), one that revitalized the symphonic sonata form of Beethoven and combined it with the full contrapuntal resources of Bach, a worthy successor to the traditions Brahms revered. It has become the most performed of Brahms' symphonies and one of the most cherished pieces in the orchestral literature.

The success and popularity of the First Symphony are richly deserved. It is a work of supreme technical accomplishment and profound emotion, of elaborate counterpoint and beautiful melody. Even to those who know its progress intimately, it reveals new marvels upon each hearing. The first movement begins with a slow introduction in 6/8 meter energized by the heart-beats of the timpani supporting the full orchestra. The violins announce the upward-bounding main theme in the faster tempo that launches a magnificent, seamless sonata form. The second movement starts with a placid, melancholy song led by the violins. After a mildly syncopated middle section, the bittersweet melody returns in a splendid scoring for oboe, horn and solo violin. The brief third movement, with its prevailing woodwind colors, is reminiscent of the pastoral serenity of Brahms' earlier Serenades.

The finale begins with an extended slow introduction based on several pregnant thematic ideas. The first, high in the violins, is a minor-mode transformation of what will become the main theme of the finale, but here broken off by an agitated pizzicato passage. A tense section of rushing scales is halted by a timpani roll leading to the call of the solo horn, a melody originally for Alphorn that Brahms collected while on vacation in Switzerland. The introduction concludes with a noble chorale intoned by trombones and bassoons, the former having been held in reserve throughout the entire Symphony just for this moment. The finale proper begins with a new tempo and one of the most famous themes in the repertory, a stirring hymn-like melody that resembles the finale of Beethoven's "Choral" Symphony. (When a friend pointed out this affinity to Brahms he shot back, "Any fool can see that!") The movement progresses in sonata form, but without a development section. The work closes with a majestic coda in the brilliant key of C major featuring the trombone chorale of the introduction in its full splendor.

Of Brahms' symphonies, and this one in particular, Lawrence Gilman wrote, "The essential fact to remember and to celebrate about Brahms is that he possessed not only the mechanisms of the grand style, but that he was able to exert it as a vehicle for ideas of authentic greatness, and he achieved this miracle with a continence, a sense of balance and proportion, an instinct for the larger contours as well as the finer adjustments of musical design, that were almost unerring."

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 3

Spring Song, Op. 16**Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)**

Composed in 1894, revised in 1895 and 1903.
Premiered on June 21, 1894 in Vaasa, Finland, conducted by Axel Stenius.

In 1880, the town council of Vaasa, on the Gulf of Bothnia that separates Finland from Sweden to the west, established a society to promote the city's musical life; the following year Axel Stenius, director of the local military band, was appointed conductor of the Vaasa orchestra. In 1886, a choir was founded in Vaasa and the following year Stenius instituted an annual festival in observance of the late-spring church feast of Ascension Day that featured masterpieces of the choral repertory as well as complementary orchestral music; the five-day festival continues as an important annual gathering of international choirs. In 1894, Stenius invited the 29-year-old Jean Sibelius, appointed two years before to the composition faculty of the University of Helsinki and already a significant figure in Finnish music following the successful premieres of his *Kullervo Symphony*, *En Saga* and the music for a historical pageant titled *Karelia*, to write an orchestral tone poem for that year's festival. Sibelius, then busy with a new cantata for the graduation ceremonies at the University of Helsinki, composed the piece for Vaasa quickly that spring. It was given at an open-air performance as *Improvisation for Orchestra* under Stenius' direction on June 21, 1894, but gained little notice among not only that year's towering choral works (Haydn's *The Creation*, a Requiem by Luigi Cherubini, Schumann's *Paradise and the Peri*, Mendelssohn's incidental music for Racine's *Athalie*) but also a new tone poem by Sibelius' brother-in-law (and musical rival) Armas Järnefelt that took the nearby medieval castle of Korsholm as its subject. Sibelius revised the work for a performance in Helsinki in April 1895, transposing it from the original key of D major to the more pastoral F major, excising an outdoorsy passage with Spanish dance rhythms (and tambourines) at the end, and re-titling it *Vårsång* — "Spring Song."

Spring Song, based on one of the longest melodies Sibelius ever conceived and hymnal and lyrical in character throughout, is not specifically programmatic, but it does seem to suggest what Eric Tawaststjerna, in his definitive biography of Sibelius, called "qualities of Nordic spring and in particular its quality of light." The architect Sigurd Frosterus, the composer's friend and fellow Finnish nationalist, wrote poetically of *Spring Song*, "The northern soil from which his music has sprung has never brought forth a purer, lovelier flower than this dew-sprinkled hymn to the promises of life looming in the future."

Two Humoresques for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 87
Jean Sibelius

Composed in 1917.
Premiered on November 24, 1919 in Helsinki, conducted by the composer with Paul Cherkassky as soloist.

"As I approached the age of fifteen," Sibelius told his biographer Karl Ekman in the 1930s, "music took hold of me with a power that soon set aside my other interests. I then began to take violin lessons in earnest from the best musician that my native town [Hämeenlinna, sixty miles north of Helsinki] could produce, Gustav Levander, the conductor of the military band. The violin carried me away entirely; the wish to become a great violinist was my greatest desire, my proudest ambition, for the next ten years." He formed a piano trio with his brother as cellist and his sister as pianist to play works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven as well as some of his own early compositions, and also appeared as a soloist at school functions and local festivals, but his late start and his inherent stage fright limited his potential as a concert virtuoso. His early knowledge and love of the violin, however, remained important catalysts in his creativity, which yielded not only the splendid Violin Concerto of 1903 but also a large number of chamber pieces for violin and piano as well as two Serenades (1912-1913), the *Cantique* (1914) and *Devotion* (1915), and six *Humoresques* (1917) for violin and orchestra.

The *Humoresques*, issued as Op. 87 (Nos. 1-2) and Op. 89 (Nos. 3-6), seem to have been spawned among the sketches for a second violin concerto that Sibelius planned in 1915 but never completed. Though he described them, perhaps with tongue in cheek, as "on a grand scale" (they require only a modest orchestral complement) and exhibiting "the anguish of existence ... fitfully lit up by the sun," they are really succinct and beautifully crafted showpieces for the soloist that Finnish musicologist Eric Tawaststjerna wrote "captured the lyrical, dancing soul of the violin." The first *Humoresque* of Op. 87 is a gently melancholy waltz of subtly fluctuating sentiments; the second has a brilliant Gypsy flair. "What is so striking about these *Humoresques* is their totally unforced charm and spontaneity," wrote Robert Layton in his study of Sibelius. "They have a lightness of touch and a freshness and sparkle that make one wonder why they are not in the repertory of every violinist of standing."

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47**Jean Sibelius**

Composed in 1903; revised in 1905.
Premiered on February 8, 1904 in Helsinki, with Viktor Nováček as soloist and the composer conducting.

The most famous image of Sibelius is the one seen in the photographic portraits of him in his old age — a stern, determined face unsoftened by a single lock of hair; a thick, strong body conditioned by years of healthy

living in the bracing Finnish air; the aura of a man occupied by the highest level of contemplation, hardly disturbed by the vicissitudes of daily life. This picture of Sibelius may be partly correct for his last years — he produced no new music for the thirty years before his death and withdrew into the solitude of the Finnish forests, so reports were few — but it is very misleading for the time in which the Violin Concerto was produced.

By 1903, when he was engaged on the Concerto, Sibelius had already composed *Finlandia*, *Kullervo*, *En Saga*, the *Karelia Suite*, the four *Lemminkäinen Legends* (including *The Swan of Tuonela*) and the first two symphonies, the works that established his international reputation. He was composing so easily at that time that his wife, Aino, wrote to a friend that he would stay up far into the night to record the flood of excellent ideas that had come to him during the day. There were, however, some disturbing personal worries threatening his musical fecundity.

Just after the premiere of the Second Symphony in March 1902, Sibelius developed a painful ear infection that did not respond easily to treatment. Thoughts of the deafness of Beethoven and Smetana plagued him, and he feared that he might be losing his hearing. (He was 37 at the time.) In June, he began having trouble with his throat, and he jumped to the conclusion that his health was about to give way, even wondering how much time he might have left to work. Though filled with fatalistic thoughts, he put much energy into the Violin Concerto, and even, when he was dissatisfied with it after the first performance, continued work on it for another year, until he felt it to be perfected. The ear and throat ailment continued to plague him until 1908, when a benign tumor was discovered. It took a dozen operations until it was successfully removed, and the anxiety about its return stayed with him for years, but he enjoyed sterling health for the rest of his days and lived to the ripe age of 91.

Aggravating Sibelius' worries about his health in 1903 was the constant financial distress in which he was mired. His family was growing, and his works did not bring in enough to support them in the life style that he desired. He was always in debt and wrote frequently to his brother, a physician in Germany, about the difficulty of making a decent living as a serious composer. For relaxation, Sibelius liked to frequent the local drinking establishments in Helsinki, and his generous and uncomplaining wife often found him unaccounted for after a day or two. Only once did she go to find him. That was when the finale of this Concerto had to be finished so the parts could be copied in time for the first performance. She set out with Robert Kajanus, conductor, staunch advocate of Sibelius' music and friend of the family, and found Jean in one of his numerous haunts. The move to the country house at Järvenpää, more than twenty miles north of Helsinki, was prompted in large part by the need to provide Sibelius with a quiet place free from the distractions of city life. During those years of intense creative activity, Sibelius was a long way from that granitic old man of later years.

The Violin Concerto stems from the Romantic tradition of the virtuoso compositions of Mendelssohn, Bruch and Tchaikovsky, though Sibelius endeavored to balance

the soloistic display with the symphonic integration of violin and orchestra. (This was the main purpose of the 1905 revision.) He was himself a highly skilled violinist who abandoned thoughts of a soloist's career only with the greatest reluctance, and the Concerto's characteristic if difficult writing for the solo instrument shows his experience as a performer. Of the spirit of this work, Eric Tawaststjerna, the composer's biographer, wrote, "The Concerto is distinctly Nordic in its overwhelming sense of nostalgia. The orchestra does not wallow in rich colors but in the sonorous half-lights of autumn and winter; only on rare occasions does the horizon brighten and glow."

The opening movement employs sonata form, modified in that a succinct cadenza for the soloist replaces the usual development section. The exposition consists of three theme groups — a doleful melody announced by the soloist over murmuring strings, a yearning theme initiated by bassoons and cellos with rich accompaniment, and a bold, propulsive strophe in march rhythm. The development-cadenza is built on the opening motive and leads directly into the recapitulation of the exposition themes, here considerably altered from their initial appearances. A coda, filled with flashing figurations for the soloist, closes the movement.

The second movement could well be called a "Romanza," a descendant of the long-limbed lyricism of the *Andantes* of the violin concertos of Mozart. It is among the most avowedly Romantic music in any of Sibelius' works for orchestra. The finale launches into a robust dance whose theme the eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey thought might be "a polonaise for polar bears." A bumptious energy fills the movement, giving it an air reminiscent of the Gypsy finales of many 19th-century violin concertos. The form is sonatina, a sonata without development, here employing two large theme groups. The soloist's part accumulates difficulties as it goes, leading to an abrupt but resounding close.

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 54 Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Composed in 1939.

Premiered on December 3, 1939 in Moscow, conducted by Yevgeny Mravinsky.

Shostakovich was a boy of ten, and already composing, when the Russian Revolution erupted in 1917. As early as 1924, he considered writing a musical tribute to the great hero of that uprising, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and made several starts on such a work during the 1930s. In 1936, however, came the scathing condemnation of his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, a punishing attack upon his modernist tendencies which he sought to redress with the Fifth Symphony. The success of the Symphony brought him letters of congratulations and advice from across the Soviet Union, most of which encouraged him to continue writing in the affirmative spirit of the new work. In the Moscow journal *Soviet Art* of November 11, 1938, Shostakovich announced that he was undertaking a monumental choral symphony to express "through the medium of sound the immortal image of Lenin as a great son of the Russian people and a great leader and

teacher of the masses;" he proposed to draw the texts from the verses of Caucasian folk and peasant poets, as well as from Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Ode to Lenin*.

Interest in Shostakovich's new piece ran high, and he must have felt some reluctance in giving notice that he had to put off the "Lenin" symphony because "embodying in art the gigantic figure of this leader is an incredibly difficult task." (It was not until the Twelfth Symphony of 1961, titled "The Year 1917," that Shostakovich finally completed his musical tribute to the memory of Lenin.) The work that instead appeared in 1939 was a disappointment to the critics and listeners who were expecting from Shostakovich a panoramic composition for chorus and orchestra, since the new Symphony No. 6 was modest in dimensions, lacking in extra-musical associations and, by turns, stern and satiric in mood. The Symphony was paid little attention when it was premiered during the two-month "Festival of Soviet Music" in Moscow, being overshadowed at that event by the success of patriotic cantatas by Prokofiev (*Alexander Nevsky*), Shaporin (*On Kulikov Field*) and Koval (*Emelian Pugatchov*). The Sixth Symphony, however, has since come to be regarded as one of Shostakovich's greatest achievements in the genre.

The Symphony's unusual structure — the customary fast opening movement is omitted, so that the work consists of only a vast slow first movement, a scherzo and a whirling finale — caused some consternation to those looking for programmatic "meaning" behind the notes. The critic Ivan Martinov felt that the first movement represented the "dreary life of the people in Czarist times" and the later movements "their joy under the Soviet regime." In his study of Shostakovich's symphonies, Hugh Ottaway found the *Largo* expressive not of patriotic pictures, however, but of the composer's "capacity for tragic emotion, and for inner aspiration, rather than anything more concrete." Shostakovich himself said when the Symphony was new that it was "an effort to convey the mood of spring, joy and life," but this statement has little to do with the spirit of the music, and was seemingly just a sop that he tossed to the operators of the Soviet propaganda mills. Even in his purported memoirs (*Testimony*, 1979), he had almost nothing to say about the Sixth Symphony, other than remarking upon its general connection with Stalin's numbing brutality, which hung like a pall over the period of the composer's life when the work was conceived. Ray Blokker offered perhaps the most sensible approach to this composition when he wrote that it was not meant to convey any "program" or to provide the grandeur and affirmation of the Fifth Symphony. "Instead," Blokker concluded, "it aims at a more modest target: that of providing sheer musical enjoyment for both musicians and audiences."

The influence of Mahler on Shostakovich is plainly evident in the Sixth Symphony in its often sparse, chamber-like textures, the profound nature of its emotional

expression, and its juxtaposition of music of widely different characters. The Symphony begins with a slow movement in two-part form to which is added a brief concluding section that returns the opening themes. The two motives that dominate the first section are presented in close order. One theme, played immediately by low woodwinds and low strings in unison, is characterized by its triplet rhythms and octave leaps. The other theme, appearing in the seventh measure in the violins and flutes, has a fall of the interval of a diminished seventh (a progression reserved by Bach and other Baroque composers for their most deeply felt melodies) and a snarling trill. These two themes are masterfully combined, juxtaposed and intertwined in the following pages without losing either their emotional intensity or their broad lyricism. The movement's second section largely comprises a series of passages for instruments in soloistic combinations. The English horn is the first to give the theme, a dirge-like strain that fluctuates between minor and major modes. The flutes, clarinets, oboe and violins are entrusted with the sad, fragmented melody as the section unfolds. A mournful, almost motionless plaint from the solo horn serves as the transition to the closing pages, less a true recapitulation of the opening themes than a *résumé* of their melodic essentials and emotional natures. Edward Downes wrote that this *Largo* "is some of the finest music Shostakovich has given us; one of his most thoughtful, least self-conscious, least rhetorical and most spontaneous symphonic movements."

The second movement is a scherzo anointed with Shostakovich's most biting humor. The central portion of the movement is distinguished by awkward rhythmic syncopations and a single-pitch ostinato that hammers away incessantly in various instruments until the return of the scherzo. The finale bursts with a bristling wit reminiscent of the more caustic strains of Prokofiev. A number of themes are presented and discussed before the beginning of the second section, a heavy dance in pounding triple meter. The solo violin initiates the recall of the opening themes, which are complemented by a boisterous tune that sounds like a Slavic refugee from a feverish Broadway show. The Symphony ends with the full orchestra hurling forth this brash melody.

Wrote Leopold Stokowski, conductor of the American premiere of the Sixth Symphony in Philadelphia in 1940, "In each symphony Shostakovich shows himself to be more of a master, to be ever growing, ever expanding in his imagination and musical consciousness. In his Sixth Symphony, he has reached new depths, especially in the first part. Here are harmonic sequences, and several melodies sounding at the same time, making modern counterpoint, which are of great originality and intensity of expression. At first they sound strange and even obscure, as if the meaning was concealed and hidden. But after hearing this music ... it becomes clear, and has great depth of expression."

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 4

Tuesday, August 12, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Kenneth Slowik, Conductor
Paul Ledwon, Cello
Anna Burden, Cello
Terry Everson, trumpet

BAROQUE NIGHT

PURCELL Suite from *King Arthur, or The British Worthy*
First Music — Aire — Overture —
Prelude and Dance — Hornpipe — Passacaglia

VIVALDI Concerto for Two Cellos in G Minor, R. 531
Allegro
Largo
Allegro

NERUDA Trumpet Concerto in E-flat major
Allegro
Largo
Vivace

PURCELL Chacony (Chaconne) in G minor for Strings
Edited by Benjamin Britten

— INTERMISSION —

HAYDN Symphony No. 103 in E-flat major, “Drumroll”
Adagio — Allegro con spirito
Andante più tosto Allegretto
Menuetto
Finale: Allegro con spirito

This concert is sponsored by the
Horween Foundation
in memory of Marion Horween Chase.

Mr. Slowik appears by arrangement with
Lois Howard & Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.

Post-concert encore — a ten-minute discussion with the artists

*Photography and audio recordings of this concert are
strictly prohibited. Please, no cell phones during the concert.*



FESTIVAL PREVIEW WEEK 2

The Peninsula Music Festival's annual “Baroque Night,” this year under the direction of early music specialist Kenneth Slowik, draws music from across Europe. Henry Purcell, the preeminent musical master of Restoration England, is represented by a suite from an elaborate entertainment based on John Dryden's epic patriotic drama *King Arthur* as well as the somber Chacony in G minor, which was arranged for modern string instruments by Benjamin Britten. The concert is rounded out with concertos by the Venetian master Antonio Vivaldi, featuring PMF cellists Paul Ledwon and Anna Burden, and the Czech violinist and composer Johann Baptist Georg Neruda, with trumpeter Terry Everson, and one of the greatest of Joseph Haydn's symphonies composed for London, the No. 103 in E-flat, known as the “Drumroll” for its distinctive opening gesture.

The 2008 season's Brahms Fest continues on the Thursday concert with the pastoral Symphony No. 2 in D major. The program opens with Sousa's rousing *Washington Post March* conducted by the Battle of the Baton All-Stars winner and Hector Berlioz's musical gloss on Shakespeare's *King Lear*. PMF musicians Stephen Alltop, Judy Jackson and Marcia LaBella are the soloists in Swiss composer Frank Martin's colorful *Petite Symphonie Concertante*.

The music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart has always figured prominently in the Peninsula Music Festival's programming, but this year brings a complete version of the sublimely melodic *Così fan tutte* to the PMF stage, conducted by Stephen Alltop and directed by Noel Koran, Director of Opera at the University of Washington. The cast features some of the brightest young stars of American opera.



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 5

Thursday, August 14, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Stephen Alltop, Harpsichord

Judith Jackson, Piano

Marcia LaBella, Harp

BRAHMS FEST II

SOUSA *The Washington Post*
 Battle of the Baton All-Stars Winner

BERLIOZ *Le Roi Lear, Op. 4*

MARTIN *Petite Symphonie Concertante* for Harpsichord, Piano,
 Harp and Double String Orchestra

— INTERMISSION —

BRAHMS Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73
 Allegro non troppo
 Adagio non troppo
 Allegretto grazioso (Quasi Andantino) — Presto ma non assai —
 Tempo I — Presto ma non assai — Tempo I
 Allegro con spirito

This concert is sponsored by Richard J. Kozak in memory of Marian R. Polito.

Ms. Jackson is performing on the Esther Browning Piano.

Pre-concert talk — 6:30-7:15

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 6

Saturday, August 16, 2008, **7:30 p.m.**

Stephen Alltop, Conductor

Noel Koran, Director

COSÌ FAN TUTTE

Così fan tutte, K. 588

Opera in Two Acts

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte

Fiordiligi..... Sarah Lawrence

Dorabella..... C. Lindsey Pohling

Guglielmo..... Tamaron Conseur

Ferrando..... J. Eric Rutherford

Despina..... April Lancaster Feinberg

Don Alfonso..... Keven Keys

There will be one intermission, following Act I.

Post-concert encore — a ten-minute discussion with the artists

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.

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 become 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.

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 5

The Washington Post

John Philip Sousa (1854-1932)

Sousa composed the *Washington Post March* in 1889 to promote an essay contest sponsored by that newspaper. The work created a sensation when it was premiered on June 15th, and was directly responsible for inspiring the composer's famous nickname — "The March King."

Le Roi Lear, Op. 4

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

*Composed in 1831.
Premiered on December 22, 1833 in Paris, conducted by Narcisse Girard.*

After three unsuccessful attempts, Berlioz finally won the Prix de Rome at the end of 1830, but he then pried himself away from Paris only with the greatest reluctance. His reputation as a leader of the city's musical avant garde was just beginning to blossom (the *Symphonie Fantastique* was premiered on December 5th), and a recent passion conceived for the pianist Camille Moke had resulted in their betrothal. Upon his arrival in Rome, Berlioz installed himself in the French Academy at the Villa Medici, and proceeded to worry more about the lack of correspondence from Camille than about his creative work. He passed his time poking about the ancient ruins, touching up the score of the *Symphonie Fantastique*, and immersing himself in Byron's poem *The Corsair*, reading much of it in, of all places, St. Peter's Basilica. By April, waiting for word from Paris had proven intolerable to him, and he broke the terms of his Prix appointment by bolting north from Rome.

Berlioz's journey was halted for several days in Florence by fever and a sore throat, and he speeded his recovery by reading Shakespeare's *King Lear* on the banks of the Arno. He was overwhelmed by the drama: "I uttered a cry of admiration in the face of this work of genius; I thought I would burst from enthusiasm, I rolled around (in the grass, honestly), I rolled convulsively to appease my utter rapture." Immediately upon the heels of this literary revelation, however, came a letter from Camille's mother, who reported to Berlioz that her daughter had married the noted piano maker Ignaz Pleyel. Revenge, the jilted composer vowed, must be done upon his faithless fiancée. He purchased two revolvers and a measure of laudanum and strychnine, as well as some serving maid's clothes (!) that he planned to use as a disguise to sneak into the Pleyel-Moke abode. He got as far as Nice, where his reason apparently snapped, and threw himself into the ocean in an attempted suicide. After being "yanked out like a fish," as he put it in his memoirs, his rage completely drowned, and he spent the next three weeks recovering ("the happiest twenty days of my existence"). He sketched out some ideas later used in his *Corsaire Overture*, but worked mainly on a concert overture inspired by *King*

Lear. He returned to Rome, made amends with Horace Vernet, the French historical painter then heading the Academy, and finished *King Lear* by May 10th. The work had to await its premiere until December 22, 1833, when Narcisse Girard led it (Berlioz did not debut as a conductor until 1835) on a program that also featured the *Symphonie Fantastique* and the composer's friend Franz Liszt playing Weber's *Konzertstück*. It was following that concert that Niccolò Paganini approached Berlioz with the commission for *Harold in Italy*. Berlioz valued his early *King Lear* highly, and conducted it many times after its publication in 1839. At one concert in Germany a few years before his death, he was again amazed by his own inspiration: "Why, it is overwhelming. Did I really write that? ... Perhaps Father Shakespeare would not curse me for having made his old British King and his sweet Cordelia speak in such strains."

Though Berlioz left no specific program for *King Lear* relating the score's progress to the characters and events of the drama (the eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey claimed that this work was not programmatic at all, but simply "a magnificent piece of orchestral rhetoric in tragic style"), he did give a hint that the music has some pictorial qualities. In responding to a letter from the Baron von Donop in 1858 asking how the work was to be interpreted, Berlioz noted, "It used to be the custom at the court of Charles X, as late as 1830, to announce the King's entrance into his chambers (after Mass on Sundays) to the sound of an enormous drum. From this, I had the idea of accompanying Lear into his council chamber for the scene of the division of the kingdom by a similar effect on the timpani. I did not intend his madness to be represented until the middle of the *Allegro*, when the basses bring in the theme of the introduction in the middle of the storm." Lear himself seems to be evoked by the commanding unison string figure that begins the extended slow introduction. Cordelia enters with the plaintive melody in the oboe above pizzicato strings. The return of Lear's theme at the end of the introduction is heightened by thundering rolls on the timpani. The main body of the work, in fast tempo, largely follows traditional sonata form, with a violent main theme placated by two gentle strains unfolded by oboe and bassoon. There is much contention between the contrasting emotional states of the principal thematic material in the development and recapitulation sections until Lear's motto from the introduction reappears as a menacing recitative for basses that leads to the work's stormy closing pages.

Petite Symphonie Concertante for Harpsichord, Piano, Harp and Double String Orchestra

Frank Martin (1890-1974)

*Composed in 1944-1945.
Premiered on May 27, 1946 in Zurich, conducted by Paul Sacher.*

Frank Martin (mar-TAN, as in French) was one of Switzerland's greatest composers. The tenth child of

a Calvinist minister whose ancestors fled from France to Geneva with the Huguenots in the 18th century, he began composing when he was only eight. He studied piano, composition and harmony privately with Joseph Lauber, but never attended a formal conservatory music course. From 1918 to 1923, he lived in Zurich and Rome, then moved to Paris, where he was strongly influenced by the trends in modern French music. He returned to an active professional life in Geneva in 1926 that included criticism, performance as a pianist and harpsichordist, administering the Association of Swiss Musicians, directing the Dalcroze Institute and composing. His earliest works were indebted to the German tradition, but after his stay in Paris, he turned increasingly to experimenting with new styles and techniques, including those of ancient, Indian, Bulgarian and folk music. By 1932, those explorations had led Martin to the serial technique of Arnold Schoenberg, which he handled with an individuality that did not eschew traditional tonal elements. *Le Vin Herbé* (“*The Doctored Wine*”), his retelling of the old Tristan legend in the form of a “secular oratorio,” won him international prominence despite the difficult conditions at the time of its premiere in Zurich in 1942. After the war, he settled in Naarden, near his wife’s home city of Amsterdam, remaining active as a composer, conductor and teacher until his death in 1974. Of the style of Martin’s later compositions, Jacques de Menasce wrote, “[They] are characterized by broad melodic lines of a chromatic nature, subtle harmonic and rhythmic patterns, and a sustained contrapuntal texture. The common denominator can be described as an organic blend of several methods, which as a composite make for an idiom that is clearly personal.”

The *Petite Symphonie Concertante* of 1944-1945 is one of Martin’s best-known compositions, the work that first brought him international acclaim. Its orchestration for harp, harpsichord and piano with double string orchestra is unusual, and Martin made an alternate version for full orchestra on the assumption that the original scoring would be considered merely a curiosity, thereby limiting the number of its performances. He was wrong, and the work is always heard in its original form. The organization of the performing forces suggests the old Baroque *concerto grosso*, and there is a large amount of concerted writing in which the various instruments, not excluding the principals of the two string orchestras, are called upon to participate as soloist or part of a smaller group. The forms, however, are more closely related to Classical than Baroque models, and this *Petite Symphonie* is a fine example of the wide-ranging influences which Martin brought to bear in his best works.

The work comprises two large sections each divided into a pair of smaller component parts, all played without pause. The opening, for strings alone, is a broad introduction in slow tempo. The first section continues with the entry of the keyboards and harp in a faster tempo. This *Allegro* resembles sonata form, with two main themes — one jagged and rhythmically active, the other more stately and with smoother contours. The second section commences with solemn, arpeggiated chords from the piano accompanying a stark melody in octaves played by the harp. The music continues in this mood,

acquiring some elaborate rhythmic embroidery as it goes, until a sudden martial spirit takes hold to bring the work to a close.

In his preface to the score, the composer wrote about the structure of his *Petite Symphonie Concertante*, “I was led by this instrumental arrangement to choose the Classical form for the *Allegro*, not with the specific intention of molding my musical ideas into a pre-established pattern, but to see whether such musical material could thrive and develop in this form with two themes. Thus came into being the first part of the symphony with its *Introduction* and its *Allegro*. In the *Allegro*, the second theme and the further development again take up the essential elements of the *Introduction*. This *Allegro* resembles a concerto, with its solo parts (and two always accompanying the other), and the continually recurring orchestral part.

“In the second part of the work I have been carried forward by the spontaneous movement of the music. The melodious main theme, introduced in a slow movement by the harp and taken up by the piano, develops into a lively march. In contrast to the first part, and despite numerous episodic elements, there is only one main theme. It rises to a climax, and then subsides with a short cadence.”

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73 Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Composed in 1877.

Premiered on December 30, 1877 in Vienna, conducted by Hans Richter.

“The new symphony is merely a ‘sinfonia,’ and I shall not need to play it for you beforehand. You have only to sit down at the piano, put your little feet on the two pedals in turn, and strike the chord of F minor several times in succession, first in the treble, then in the bass, *fortissimo* and *pianissimo*, and you will gradually gain a vivid impression of my latest work.” With the premiere of his pastoral Second Symphony only a month away, Brahms served up this red herring in early November to his friend, correspondent and supporter Elisabeth von Herzogenberg to playfully mislead her about the character of this lovely work. He tossed another false clue to Clara Schumann when he told her that the halcyon first movement was “quite elegiac in character,” and, again to Elisabeth, that so sad a piece would require the orchestra to play with crepe bands on their sleeves and the printed score would have to be bordered in black. “The new Symphony is so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it,” he told his publisher, Fritz Simrock. Such statements are characteristic of Brahms both in their eccentric, sometimes cranky humor, and their reticence to divulge any information about a work that had not been publicly displayed. He was always reluctant to discuss or even mention new pieces to anyone, even to such trusted friends as Clara Schumann. (Clara begged him for years to complete his First Symphony without knowing that the project was almost constantly on his mind and on his desk during the time.) He usually destroyed all his drafts and tentative sketches for a finished composition so that his preliminary thoughts

and working procedures remain a mystery. He refused to be disturbed while composing. Once, a youthful admirer, unable to gain an audience with Brahms, set up a ladder to climb to the composer's second-story window to deliver his encomium. Brahms, deep in work and detesting any distraction, angrily threw the ladder from the sill, causing the young man no little harm. It is because of such secretiveness that little is known about the actual composition of the Second Symphony.

In the summer of 1877, Brahms repaired to the village of Pörschach in the Carinthian hills of southern Austria. He wrote to a Viennese friend, "Pörschach is an exquisite spot, and I have found a lovely and apparently pleasant abode in the Castle! You may tell everybody this; it will impress them.... The place is replete with Austrian coziness and kindheartedness." The lovely country surroundings inspired Brahms' creativity to such a degree that he wrote to the critic Eduard Hanslick, "So many melodies fly about, one must be careful not to tread on them." Brahms plucked from the gentle Pörschach breezes a surfeit of beautiful music for his Second Symphony, which was apparently written quickly during that summer — a great contrast to the fifteen-year gestation of the preceding symphony. He brought the manuscript with him when he returned to Vienna at the end of the summer, and played it at an informal gathering in a four-hand piano version with Ignaz Brüll in September. Brahms kept the true nature of the piece from the friends who were not at that gathering, and he was delighted by their surprised response at the public premiere late in December.

Brahms' misleading statements depicting the Second Symphony as a tragic work were plausible in view of the stony grandeur of its predecessor. The premiere audience had every expectation of hearing a grand, portentous statement similar in tone to the First Symphony, but was treated instead to the composer's most gentle and sun-dappled music. After their initial befuddlement had passed, they warmed to the occasion as the performance progressed, and such was their enthusiasm at the end that they demanded an encore of the third movement. Brahms himself allowed, "[The work] sounded so merry and tender, as though it were especially written for a newly wedded couple." Early listeners heard in it "a glimpse of Nature, a spring day amid soft mosses, springing woods, birds' notes, and the bloom of flowers." Richard Specht, the composer's biographer, found it "suffused with the sunshine and warm winds playing on the waters." Comparisons with Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony were inevitable, though Brahms never revealed any specific programmatic intention rippling among these notes.

Its effortless technique, rich orchestral writing and surety of emotional effect make this composition a splendid sequel to Brahms' First Symphony. The earlier work, probably the best first symphony anyone ever composed, is filled with a sense of struggle and hard-won victory, an accurate mirror of Brahms' monumental efforts over many years to shape a worthy successor to Beethoven's symphonies. ("You have no idea how it feels

to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven," Brahms lamented.) The Second Symphony, while at least the equal of the First in technical mastery, differs markedly in its mood, which, in Eduard Hanslick's words, is "cheerful and likable ... [and] may be described in short as peaceful, tender, but not effeminate." So taken aback by the work's pastoral quality was the Leipzig critic Dörffel that he wrote of the performance conducted by the composer in his city only two weeks after the Viennese premiere, "We require from him music that is something more than simply pretty ... when he comes before us as a symphonist." Though this Symphony is more "simply pretty" than any other by Brahms, there is also a rich emotional vein and inevitable structural logic that motivates the music.

The Symphony opens with a three-note motive, presented softly by the low strings, which is the germ seed from which much of the thematic material of the movement grows. The horns sing the principal theme, which includes, in its third measure, the three-note motive. The sweet second theme is given in duet by the cellos and violas. The development begins with the horn's main theme, but is mostly concerned with permutations of the three-note motive around which some stormy emotional sentences accumulate. The placid mood of the opening returns with the recapitulation, and remains largely undisturbed until the end of the movement.

The second movement plumbs the deepest emotions in the Symphony. Many of its early listeners found it difficult to understand because they failed to perceive that, in constructing the four broad paragraphs that comprise the Second Symphony, Brahms deemed it necessary to balance the radiant first movement with music of thoughtfulness and introspection in the second. This movement actually covers a wide range of sentiments, shifting, as it does, between light and shade — major and minor. Its form is sonata, whose second theme is a gently syncopated strain intoned by the woodwinds above the cellos' pizzicato notes.

The following *Allegretto* is a delightful musical sleight-of-hand. The oboe presents a naive, folk-like tune in moderate triple meter as the movement's principal theme. The strings take over the melody in the first Trio, but play it in an energetic duple-meter transformation. The return of the sedate original theme is again interrupted by another quick-tempo variation, this one a further development of motives from Trio I. A final traversal of the main theme closes this delectable movement.

The finale bubbles with the rhythmic energy and high spirits of a Haydn symphony. The main theme starts with a unison gesture in the strings, but soon becomes harmonically active and spreads through the orchestra. The second theme is a broad, hymnal melody initiated by the strings. The development section, like that of many of Haydn's finales, begins with a statement of the main theme in the tonic before branching into discussion of the movement's motives. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes, and leads with an inexorable drive through the triumphant coda (based on the hymnal melody) to the brazen glow of the final trombone chord.

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 6

***Così fan tutte*, K. 588**

**Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838)**

Composed in 1789-1790.

Premiered on January 26, 1790 in Vienna.

In June 1789, soon after he returned to Vienna from a trip to Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin to drum up some business among the local nobles, including King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, Mozart learned that Emperor Joseph II wanted to hear again *The Marriage of Figaro*, first given in Vienna two years before with only limited success, and had instructed that a revival of the opera take place at the end of the summer. The date of the production was set for August 29th; Mozart helped with the preparations and composed a few replacement pieces. It was a success, and was seen at ten additional performances before the end of the year, and another fifteen in 1790. The Emperor allowed that more of the same might not be a bad thing, and he commissioned Mozart to write another *opera buffa* with Lorenzo da Ponte, the librettist of both *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*. The story has it that da Ponte was called into the imperial chambers and told that the plot of the new opera should deal with a delicious wife-swapping scandal that had recently amused the Viennese. The poet mentions nothing of the incident in his memoirs, however, and it may be that he in fact adapted his libretto from that for *La grotto di Trofonio* by Giovanni Battista Casti, for which Antonio Salieri had supplied the music in 1785. Mozart was at work on the music of the new opera by September, and he completed the score by the end of the year. He invited his friends Joseph Haydn and Michael Puchberg (a fellow Mason from whom Mozart regularly begged money at that time) to an informal run-through of the piece at his apartment on New Year's Eve; it is thought that they accepted. Rehearsals began soon thereafter at the Burgtheater (one report had Mozart and Haydn walking arm-in-arm to the first orchestral rehearsal on January 21st), and *Così fan tutte* was successfully premiered on January 26th. After just five performances, however, the Emperor died and the theaters were closed for a period of mourning. The opera played four more times in June and July, and then was not heard again in Vienna during Mozart's lifetime.

In his classic study of Mozart's operas, Edward Dent gave this plot summary of *Così fan tutte* ("*Thus Do They All!*"): "Ferrando and Guglielmo are two young Neapolitan officers engaged to be married to two young ladies, Fiordiligi and her sister Dorabella. A cynical old bachelor, Don Alfonso by name, persuades the young men to put their mistresses' constancy to the test. They pretend to be called away from Naples on duty, but return that same afternoon disguised as Albanian noblemen. Don Alfonso, with the help of Despina, the ladies' maid, persuades the two sisters to receive them. The strang-

ers make violent love to them, and after some hesitation each succeeds in winning the heart of his friend's betrothed. The affair proceeds with such rapidity that a notary is called in that very evening to draw up a marriage contract for their signatures. Suddenly Don Alfonso announces the return of the soldiers; the Albanians vanish, and the terrified ladies are obliged to confess everything to their original lovers. Needless to say, everything ends happily."

Needless to say, a more prim sensibility might have found this lubricious tale of questionable taste. Beethoven declared it to be simply immoral (he said the same thing about *Don Giovanni*); Franz Niemetschek, one of Mozart's earliest biographers, wondered in 1808 how "that great mind could lower itself to waste its heavenly melodies on so feeble a concoction of text"; Richard Wagner vilified the libretto. What even such astute commentators failed to take into account, however, was the transformative power of Mozart's music. The title of the opera was taken from a line in *The Marriage of Figaro* in which the cynical Don Basilio observes, "*Così fan tutte le belle, non c'è alcuna novità*" — "*That's what all the pretty girls do, there's nothing new in that*" — when the Count tries to seduce his wife's maid, Susanna, and the libidinous teenager Cherubino attempts a dalliance with the gardener's daughter, Barbarina. *Figaro* culminates, however, not in a sexual farrago but in a scene of tender, complete forgiveness, when the Count's advances towards Susanna are exposed and the Countess reconfirms her love for her husband. *Così fan tutte*, for all its deception and sardonic wit, reaches a similar end through the humanizing quality of Mozart's sublime music. "I believe," wrote the noted scholar of 18th-century music H.C. Robbins Landon, "that the particular poignancy of *Così fan tutte* lies in the fact that the necessity for forgiveness is present not only at the end of the opera but throughout the scenes of deception, when the audience knows — although the ladies do not yet — that their actions require more forgiveness than does any other action, perhaps, in any other Mozart opera. The emotions generated are therefore doubly powerful and the cynicism of the libretto is in part assuaged."

Così was virtually forgotten during the 19th century, receiving little recognition until the German conductor Hermann Levi revived it in Munich in 1896; it was not heard in the United States until the Met staged it in 1922. Such neglect was absolutely unjustified — from a purely musical viewpoint, this is the greatest opera Mozart ever wrote. Edward Dent, in his study of Mozart's operas, concluded that it "is the best of all da Ponte's librettos and the most exquisite work of art among Mozart's operas." The eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey called it "a miracle of irresponsible beauty unlike anything else in Mozart." And Mozart authority Alfred Einstein said, "This opera is iridescent, like a glorious soap-bubble, with the colors of buffoonery, parody, and both genuine and simulated emotions. To this, moreover, is added the color of pure beauty."

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 7

Tuesday, August 19, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Alyssa Park, Violin

RUSSIAN TAPESTRY

STRAVINSKY *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*
(1947 revised version)

PROKOFIEV Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19
Allegro
Scherzo: Vivacissimo
Moderato

— INTERMISSION —

RACHMANINOFF Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27
Largo — Allegro moderato
Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro vivace

This concert is sponsored by Bibs, Marge and Sarah
in memory of Alice Spooner.

Pre-concert talk — 6:30-7:15

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements. Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited. Please, no cell phones during the concert.



FESTIVAL PREVIEW WEEK 3

This year's Peninsula Music Festival Russian concert features works by three composers who defined that country's musical personality to the world during the first half of the 20th century. Igor Stravinsky is represented by his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, written in memory of his friend Claude Debussy. Sergei Prokofiev was considered by many to be Russia's musical *enfant terrible* until the lyrical Violin Concerto No. 1 showed a different aspect of his creative personality; American virtuoso Alyssa Park is the soloist. Sergei Rachmaninoff's Symphony No. 2 was one of the most important compositions in spreading his renown in the West.

The Symphony No. 3 in F major, the third installment of this season's Brahms Fest, is complemented on Thursday's concert by the overture to Robert Schumann's only opera, *Genoveva*, Richard Strauss' tone poem inspired by the legendary *Don Juan*, and the flamboyant Concerto No. 2 of Franz Liszt, with Ukrainian pianist Pavel Gintov as soloist.

The Festival Finale brings to the Peninsula Music Festival Lynn Harrell, one of the world's greatest cellists, to perform Antonín Dvořák's superb Cello Concerto, composed while he was director of the National Conservatory in New York City. The 2008 Festival and this season's Brahms Fest conclude with the Symphony No. 4 in E minor, one of Johannes Brahms' most profound creations.

* * *

Music is well said to be the speech of the angels: in fact, nothing among the utterances allowed to man is felt to be so divine. It brings us near to the infinite.

— Thomas Carlyle



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 8

Thursday, August 21, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Pavel Gintov, Piano

BRAHMS FEST III

SCHUMANN Overture to *Genoveva*, Op. 81

BRAHMS Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

Allegro con brio

Andante

Poco allegretto

Allegro

— INTERMISSION —

LISZT Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major, Op. 23

Adagio sostenuto assai

Allegro agitato assai

Allegro moderato

Allegro deciso

Marziale un poco meno Allegro

Allegro animato

Played without pause

STRAUSS *Don Juan*, Tone Poem (after Nicolaus Lenau), Op. 20

This concert is sponsored by June and Jerome Maeder.

Mr. Gintov is performing on the Esther Browning Piano.

Pre-concert talk — 6:30-7:15

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.



PENINSULA MUSIC FESTIVAL

PROGRAM 9

Saturday, August 23, 2008, 8:00 p.m.

Victor Yampolsky, Conductor

Lynn Harrell, Cello

BRAHMS FEST IV – FESTIVAL FINALE

DVOŘÁK Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104

Allegro

Adagio ma non troppo

Finale: Allegro moderato

— INTERMISSION —

BRAHMS Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Allegro giocoso

Allegro energico e passionato

This concert is sponsored in memory of Marcia and Charles Larsen.

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the memory of Marcia Larsen.

Mr. Harrell appears by arrangement with Opus 3 Artists, LLC, New York, NY.

As a courtesy to our musicians, please remain seated until the conductor has left the stage at intermission and at the end of the concert. Also, please do not applaud between movements.

Festival audiences are known for the warm and courteous welcome that they extend to all our performers.

Please help to maintain this fine reputation. Thank you!

Photography and audio recordings of this concert are strictly prohibited.

Please, no cell phones during the concert.

Program 7

Symphonies of Wind Instruments

Igor Stravinsky (1882 -1971)

Composed in 1920.

Premiered on June 6, 1921 in London, conducted by Serge Koussevitzky.

Igor Stravinsky first met Claude Debussy following the premiere of *The Firebird* in Paris in 1910. A mutual admiration sprang up between the two, and Stravinsky dedicated his cantata *Zvezdoliki* (“*King of the Stars*”) to Debussy, and Debussy reciprocated by inscribing the *Scherzando*, the third of his three pieces for two pianos, *En Blanc et Noir*, to Stravinsky. Though they saw little of each other during the First World War, Stravinsky was greatly saddened by Debussy’s death on March 25, 1918. “I was sincerely attached to him as a man,” Stravinsky wrote in his *Autobiography*, “and I grieved not only at the loss of one whose friendship had been marked with unflinching kindness towards myself and my work, but at the passing of an artist who, in spite of health already undermined, had still been able to retain his creative powers to the full, and whose musical genius had been in no way impaired throughout the whole period of his activity.”

In June 1920, Stravinsky left Switzerland, where he had taken refuge during the war, and installed himself in the French coastal village of Carantec in Brittany. Soon after arriving, he received a request from Henri Prunières, editor of *La Revue Musicale*, to contribute a short musical piece to a special December issue of that periodical commemorating Debussy. He accepted the commission gladly, and on June 20th composed a wordless chorale in piano score, which he submitted to Prunières. The chorale, however, was pressed into further service. A full year before, in July 1919, Stravinsky had begun sketching a wind ensemble piece incorporating the mixed-meter rhythms of *The Rite of Spring* and the austere sonorities of *Les Noces*, and the Debussy chorale was conceived as the closing section of this earlier work, which became, in the composer’s words, “a grand chant, an objective cry of wind instruments, in place of the warm human tone of the strings.” The *Symphonies d’instruments à vents* (“*Symphonies of Wind Instruments*”) was drafted in piano score by July 2, 1920 and orchestrated by November 30th, when Stravinsky was living in Garches. The composition was dedicated to Debussy. The premiere, given by Koussevitzky in London on June 6, 1921 was not a success, however, and Stravinsky never published the *Symphonies* in its original version. In 1945 he returned to the piece, and revised the orchestration of the chorale for a CBS Radio broadcast for use as a brief companion piece to the *Symphony of Psalms*; he subsequently rescored the entire piece and simplified its rhythmic notation. This revised version was finished in 1947, first played at a private concert in Hollywood conducted by the composer on January 30, 1948, and published in 1952.

Stravinsky explained that “the title ‘SYMPHONY’ given to this short work must not be taken in the usual sense of the word. There are various short sections in close tempo relations, succeeding one another, and some rhythmic dialogues between separate woodwind instruments, such as flute and clarinet.” “Symphony” here does not connote the traditional Classic-Romantic form, but is rather intended to be taken in its original, 17th-century sense, indicating simply a “sounding together” of instruments. Stravinsky characterized the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* as “an austere ritual which is unfolded in terms of short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments.... According to my idea, the homage that I intended to pay to the memory of the great musician ought not to be inspired by his musical thought; on the contrary, I desired rather to express myself in a language which should be essentially my own.” With its brittle sonorities, acerbic harmonies and crystalline textures, the *Symphonies* is one of the earliest examples of the neo-Classical style that was to characterize in Stravinsky’s music for the following three decades. Though the formal details of the work’s organization are intricate, in broad outline it falls into two large paragraphs. The first section comprises many short, juxtaposed sections in mixed meters which contrast the sound of the full wind ensemble with duets or trios for the woodwinds. (Paul Griffiths noted that “in terms of rhythmic engineering, [this section] makes up a pocket *Rite of Spring*.”) The closing portion of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* is the broad chorale of almost static harmonies written in Debussy’s memory. Noting the transparent sound and the mosaic-like construction of this piece, Eric Walter White commented, “The *Symphonies* is like a carpet woven out of a number of differently colored threads.”

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19 **Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)**

Composed in 1915-1917.

Premiered on October 18, 1923 in Paris, with Marcel Darrieux as soloist.

Very early in his career, Sergei Prokofiev classified his music into four distinct styles: classical or neo-classical; modern; toccata or motoric; and lyrical. It was largely in this last style that he composed his First Violin Concerto. Indeed, the composer himself cited the lovely opening theme as an example of his lyricism. Given that Prokofiev was one of the foremost disciples of modernity at the time, such a romantic notion of melody raised a few eyebrows. It was, however, Prokofiev’s penchant when he was young to compose simultaneously works in more than one of his four manners, and just when a particular faction would hold him up as a model of its specific bias, out popped a Prokofiev piece that just did not do what it was expected to do. He took the greatest delight in this kind of surprise, and one of the continuing themes running through his early works is a dedicated nose-thumbing that missed few musical camps.

Such was the case with the Violin Concerto No. 1. The modernists appeared at the premiere expecting a thorny, dissonant musical thunderbolt in Prokofiev's most raucous, avant-garde style — a work for solo violin and orchestra comparable to the tumultuous *Scythian Suite*, which had taken human sacrifice as its topic. What they heard was a tender, autumnal essay of beautiful timbre and inspired melodies. The modernists were, of course, disappointed, but even the conservatives still felt that they could not trust Prokofiev to continue producing such ingratiating music, so the 1923 premiere fizzled. The reviews were not so much critiques of the performance and the new composition as expressions of sympathy for the “unfortunate soloist,” Marcel Darrieux. It was not until Joseph Szigeti espoused the Concerto in 1935 and played it all over the world that it became accepted as one of Prokofiev's finest creations. There is in this incident an important lesson about second hearings and performances by sympathetic artists.

The gentle mood that pervades this Concerto is established immediately at the beginning by the beautiful principal theme, of which Prokofiev's biographer Israel Nestyev wrote, “It is impossible to find in any of his early works a melody so simple and clear, so soulful and warm.... [It] is typical of Prokofiev's lyricism — serene, contemplative and devoid of emotional stress or psychological complexities.” A quickening of the tempo introduces the second theme, a melody filled with flashing ornamentation and insistent rhythmic motion. After a pause, the development begins quietly with the woodwinds chanting the main theme. The second theme is soon added, and the two melodies are explored simultaneously to reach the highest point of intensity in the movement. Only the lyrical main theme returns in the recapitulation, reaching an ethereal close among the sounds of harp, winds and solo violin in the movement's final pages.

In a reversal of the traditional procedure, the fast movement in this Concerto comes second. This central scherzo, an example of Prokofiev's toccata or motoric style, is in the form of a compact rondo. The theme flies upward into the soloist's glistening high register, a signal that this movement is to be more overtly virtuosic than the preceding one. Two episodes are placed between the returns of the main theme: one is a rhythmically steady motive in walking eighth-notes; the other, an off-beat, repeated-note figure comprising a melody of small intervals. A quick punctuation brings this scherzo to an abrupt close.

The finale returns the introspective mood of the first movement. Two themes are employed here — a descending one of melodic sequences winding through the low instruments and an arched motive for the soloist. It is the grandfatherly low theme that is treated in the development. The recapitulation is ushered in not by the main theme of the finale, but rather by the principal melody of the opening movement in an elaborate trilled version for the soloist. Fragments of the arched theme appear as accompaniment in the woodwinds. The Concerto closes with a coda similar in mood, style and melody to that which concluded the first movement.

Wrote Israel Nestyev of this Concerto, “The musi-

cal ideas unfold clearly and confidently; the themes are clear-cut, simple and human. The grotesquerie is not used for its own sake, but only as a contrast to the predominating lyrical images. The principal theme, which stretches like a rainbow from the beginning of the Concerto to the final coda, glorifies the indestructibility of human happiness.”

Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27 **Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Composed in 1906-1907.

Premiered on January 26, 1908 in St. Petersburg, conducted by the composer.

How much Rachmaninoff's life changed in just a half dozen years! The premiere of his First Symphony in 1897 was a complete failure, a total fiasco. The Russian nationalist composer César Cui ranted, “If there is a conservatory competition in Hell, Rachmaninoff would gain first prize for this Symphony.” Rimsky-Korsakov did not find it “at all agreeable.” Young Rachmaninoff — aged 24 — was plunged into a Stygian despair. For over two years, he entertained the darkest thoughts and composed nothing. Then in 1900, he began consulting one Dr. Nicholas Dahl, a physician specializing in the treatment of alcoholism through hypnosis. Dahl's method of auto-suggestion (and probably his enlightened conversation about music) restored the composer's confidence and desire to work. Within a year, the grand Second Concerto was produced and successfully launched into the world, and Rachmaninoff was on his way to international fame. By 1905, he was one of the most important figures in Russian music.

Beside his prodigious talents as pianist and composer, Rachmaninoff was also a first-rate conductor, and when his stock began rising after the Second Concerto carried his name into important Russian circles, he was appointed opera conductor at the Moscow Imperial Grand Theater. As with his music, he found excellent success with his conducting, but he had understandable misgivings about the way it interfered with his creative ambitions. In an interview with Frederick H. Martens, he said, “When I am concertizing I cannot compose. When I feel like writing music I have to concentrate on that — I cannot touch the piano. When I am conducting I can neither compose nor play concerts. Other musicians may be more fortunate in this respect; but I have to concentrate on any one thing I am doing to such a degree that it does not seem to allow me to take up anything else.” There was much music in him that needed to be written, and he knew that a choice about the direction of his future work was imminent.

By the beginning of 1906, he had decided to sweep away the rapidly accumulating obligations of conducting, concertizing, and socializing that cluttered his life in Moscow in order to find some quiet place in which to compose. His determination may have been strengthened by the political unrest beginning to rumble under the foundations of the aristocratic Russian political system. The uprising of 1905 was among the first signs of trouble for those of his noble class (his eventual move to the United States was a direct result of the swallowing

of his family's estate and resources by the 1917 Revolution), and he probably thought it a good time to start looking for a quiet haven.

A few years before, Rachmaninoff had been overwhelmed by an inspired performance of *Die Meistersinger* he heard at the Dresden Opera. The memory of that evening and the aura of dignity and repose exuded by the city had remained with him, and Dresden, at that time in his life, seemed like a good place to be. Besides, the city was only two hours by train from Leipzig, where Arthur Nikisch, whom Rachmaninoff considered the greatest living conductor and who had shown an interest in his music, was music director. The decision to move to Dresden was made early in 1906, and by autumn the composer, his wife and their new-born daughter were installed in a small but smart house complemented by an attractive garden. They arrived quietly, and lived, as much as possible, incognito and in seclusion. When he chanced to meet a Russian acquaintance on the street one day, Rachmaninoff pleaded, "I have escaped from my friends. Please don't give me away." The atmosphere in Dresden was so conducive to composition that within a few months of his arrival he was working on the Second Symphony, the First Piano Sonata, the Op. 6 collection of Russian folk songs and the symphonic poem *The Isle of the Dead*.

The Second Symphony was unanimously cheered when it made the rounds of the Russian concert societies in 1908, and it was an important item on Rachmaninoff's first American tour the following year. With this work, *The Isle of the Dead*, the Second and Third Concertos, and the popular Prelude in C-sharp minor, he made a profound impression on the American musical scene. He was twice offered the post of music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and twice declined. For the two decades before his death in 1943, his cross-country concert tours became an institution. Many of his compositions continue to enjoy a popularity greater in America than anywhere else in the world.

Philip Hale, writing of the renown that has attached itself to Rachmaninoff's works in general and to the Second Symphony in particular, stated, "The reasons for the popularity of the Symphony are not far to seek. The themes are eminently melodious, and some of them are of singular beauty; there is rich coloring; there are beautiful nuances in color; there is impressive sonority; there are frequent and sharp contrasts in sentiment, rhythm and expression; there is stirring vitality." Underlying these attractive external qualities is Rachmaninoff's philosophy of the emotional, communicative powers of music. He stated, "Music should express the sum total of a composer's experiences." Once asked specifically about the nature of music, he replied, "What is music? How can one define it? Music is a calm moonlit night, a rustling of summer foliage. Music is the distant peal of bells at eventide. Music is born only of the heart and

it appeals to the heart. It is love. The sister of music is poetry and the mother — sorrow!" It is easy, as has been frequently demonstrated, to ridicule such an open-hearted philosophy. However, this Second Symphony generates much warmth, joy, and true sentiment, and can move many listeners more deeply than other pieces of more rigorous intellectual accomplishment.

The majestic scale of the Symphony is established at the outset by a slow, brooding introduction. The low strings and then the violins give out a fragmentary theme which generates much of the material for the entire work. A smooth transition to a faster tempo signals the arrival of the main theme, an extended and quickened transformation of the basses' opening motive. The expressive second theme enters in the woodwinds. The development section deals with the vigorous main theme to such an extent that the beginning of the formal recapitulation is engulfed by its surge. The lovely second theme reappears as expected, again in the woodwinds. The coda resumes the energetic mood of the development to build to the fine climax which ends the movement.

The second movement is the most nimble essay to be found in Rachmaninoff's orchestral works. After two preparatory measures, the horns hurl forth the main theme, which bears more than a passing resemblance to the *Dies Irae*, the ancient chant from the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead that haunted the composer for many years. The vital nature of the music, however, does not support any morbid interpretation. Eventually, the rhythmic bustle is suppressed and finally silenced to make way for the movement's central section, whose skipping lines embody some of Rachmaninoff's best fugal writing. Almost as if by magic, the opening scherzo returns amid a full-throated cry from the brass. Once again, this quiets and the movement ends on a note of considerable mystery.

The rapturous third movement, wrote Patrick Piggott, "is as romantic as any music in the orchestral repertory — if by romantic we mean the expression, through lyrical melody and richly chromatic harmony, of a sentiment which can only be described as love." This is music of heightened passion that resembles nothing so much as an ecstatic operatic love scene. Alternating with the joyous principal melody is an important theme from the first movement, heard prominently in the central portion and the coda of this movement.

The finale bursts forth in the whirling dance rhythm of an Italian *tarantella*. The propulsive urgency subsides to allow another of Rachmaninoff's wonderful, sweeping melodic inspirations to enter. A development of the *tarantella* motives follows, into which are embroidered thematic reminiscences from each of the three preceding movements. The several elements of the finale are gathered together in the closing pages to produce the rich and sonorous tapestry appropriate for the life-affirming conclusion of this grand and stirring composition.

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 8

Overture to *Genoveva*, Op. 81 Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

*Composed in 1847.
Premiered on June 25, 1850 in Leipzig, conducted by the composer.*

Robert Schumann was a crucial figure in the history of 19th-century German music. Working in the decades after Beethoven's death, when many musicians felt that the possibilities of the grand, abstract genres had been exhausted, he urged his fellow German composers not to succumb to the easy (and lucrative) temptation of cranking out vapid piano pieces and operatic transcriptions, but to search out renewed expressions of symphony and quartet and opera that would not only revere the great traditions of the nation's artistic heritage but also reflect the expanded sensibilities of the Romantic age.

As early as 1842, Schumann issued a call from his platform as editor of the influential periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* ("New Music Journal") to continue the efforts begun by Weber, then already dead sixteen years, to create a German opera as an alternative to the flood of Italian and French theatrical pieces washing across Europe. ("Canary-bird music," he called these imports.) He heeded his own advice, and began casting about for a subject for an opera — Hamlet, Tristan, Mazeppa, Attila, Mary Queen of Scots, Wilhelm Meister and a clutch of others were considered and rejected. It was not until 1847 that he settled on Friedrich Hebbel's 1843 dramatization of the legend of St. Genevieve, itself based on the version of 1799 by Ludwig Tieck, as the stuff of what proved to be his only completed opera. He asked his friend Robert Reinick to help prepare the libretto, but after a few false starts they disagreed, and Schumann turned to Hebbel himself. Upon his arrival in Dresden, however, Hebbel found the composer so distraught over the death of his sixteen-month-old son, Emil, that collaboration was futile. Schumann, a man of some literary pretension, finally wrote his own libretto.

In his biography of Schumann, Peter Ostwald summarized the plot of *Genoveva*: "Siegfried, a crusader, leaves his castle to go to war. He asks Golo, his trusted friend, to watch over his wife, Genoveva. Fearful and lonely, she invites Golo to comfort her by singing of her absent husband. The song excites both of them, and Golo takes advantage of Genoveva by trying to force himself on her. She repulses him. Humiliated and vengeful, Golo searches out Siegfried, who has been wounded in battle, and tells him that his wife has been unfaithful. Siegfried believes him, and condemns Genoveva to death. After returning to his castle, however, he finds that Genoveva is innocent after all, and that his friend has betrayed him. Golo is banished and dies. The opera ends happily, with the lovers reunited and the populace rejoicing."

Schumann prettied up the end of the opera more than fact allowed. (George Bernard Shaw called the libretto "nakedly silly" and "pure bosh.") The historical, fifth-century Genoveva (Genevieve) escaped the ax, but left her husband and went to Paris, where the religious order she established helped to feed the starving inhabitants during the siege of Childeric. Later, her prayers were credited with saving the city from attack by Attila the Hun, though she lost her life in the hostilities. She is the patron saint of Paris. Genevieve's virtues of holiness and purity were essential to her canonization, but were hardly melodramatic fodder for the 19th-century stage. *Genoveva* was finally produced in 1850 in Leipzig after almost two years of delays, but it was only a *succès d'estime*, closing after just three performances and never successfully revived.

The Overture, written in only five days — April 1-5, 1847 — during Schumann's first burst of enthusiasm over *Genoveva*, remains the only part of the opera known to modern audiences. The Overture is his finest work in the genre, except for *Manfred*. It follows conventional sonata form, with a brooding, slow introduction leading to a vigorous main theme and a bounding contrasting melody in the horns that is one of Schumann's greatest orchestral inventions.

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90 Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

*Composed in 1882-1883.
Premiered on December 2, 1883 in Vienna, conducted by Hans Richter.*

Brahms had reached the not inconsiderable age of 43 before he unveiled his First Symphony. The Second Symphony followed within eighteen months, and the musical world was prepared for a steady stream of similar masterworks from his pen. However, it was to be another six years before he undertook his Third Symphony, though he did produce the *Academic Festival* and *Tragic Overtures*, the Violin Concerto and the Second Piano Concerto during that time. When he got around to the new Symphony, he was nearly fifty, and had just recovered from a spell of feeling that he was "too old" for creative work, even informing his publisher, Fritz Simrock, that he would be sending him nothing more. It seems likely — though such matters always remained in the shadows where Brahms was concerned — that his creative juices were stirred anew by a sudden infatuation with "a pretty Rhineland girl." This was Hermine Spiess, a talented contralto who was 26 when Brahms first met her in January 1883 at the home of friends. (Brahms was fifty.) A cordial, admiring friendship sprang up between the two, but this affair, like every other one in Brahms' life in which a respectable woman was involved, never grew any deeper. He used to declare, perhaps only half in jest, that he lived his life by two principles, "and one of them is never to attempt either an opera or a marriage." Perhaps what he really needed was a muse rather than a wife. At any rate, Brahms spent the summer of 1883

not at his usual haunts in the Austrian hills and lakes, but at the German spa of Wiesbaden, which just happened to be the home of Hermine. Work went well on the new Symphony, and it was completed before he returned to Vienna in October.

Brahms' Third Symphony, the shortest of his four works in the form, is the most clear in formal outline, the most subtle in harmonic content and the most assured in contrapuntal invention. No time is wasted in establishing the conflict that charges the first movement with dynamic energy. The two bold opening chords juxtapose bright F major and a somber chromatic harmony in the opposing moods of light and shadow that course throughout the work. The main theme comes from the strings "like a bolt from Jove," according to Olin Downes, with the opening chords repeated by the woodwinds as its accompaniment. Beautifully directed chromatic harmonies — note the bass line, which always carries the motion to its close- and long-range goals — lead to the pastoral second theme, sung softly by the clarinet. The development section is brief, but includes elaborations of most of the motives from the exposition. The tonic key of F is re-established, not harmonically but melodically (note how the bass leads the way), and the golden chords of the opening proclaim the recapitulation. A long coda based on the main theme reinforces the tonality and discharges much of the music's energy, allowing the movement to close quietly, as do, most unusually, all the movements of this Symphony.

The second and third are the most intimate and personal movements in Brahms' orchestral music. A folk-like theme appears in the rich colors of the low woodwinds and low strings to open the second movement. The central section is a Slavic-sounding plaint intoned by clarinet and bassoon that eventually gives way to the flowing rhythms of the opening and the return of the folk theme supported by a new, rippling string accompaniment. The romantic third movement replaces the usual scherzo. It is ternary in form, like the preceding movement, and utilizes the warmest tone colors of the orchestra.

The finale begins with a sinuous theme of brooding character. A brief, chant-like processional derived from the Slavic theme of the second movement provides contrast. Further thematic material is introduced (one theme is arch-shaped; the other, more rhythmically vigorous) and well examined. Brahms dispensed here with a true development section, but combined its function with that of the recapitulation. As the end of the movement nears, the tonality returns to F major, and there is a strong sense of struggle passed. The tension subsides, and the work ends with the ghost of the opening movement's main theme infused with a sunset glow.

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major, Op. 23 **Franz Liszt (1811-1886)**

Composed in 1839 and 1849.
Premiered on January 7, 1857 in Weimar, conducted by the composer with Hans von Bronsart as soloist.

"Franz Liszt was one of the most brilliant and provocative figures in music history. As a pianist, conduc-

tor, composer, teacher, writer and personality — for with Liszt, being a colorful personality was itself a profession — his immediate influence upon European music can hardly be exaggerated. His life was a veritable pagan wilderness wherein flourished luxuriant legends of love affairs, illegitimate children, encounters with great figures of the period, and hairbreadth escapes from a variety of romantic murders. Unlike Wagner and Berlioz, Liszt never wrote the story of his life, for, as he casually remarked, he was too busy living it." If it were not for the fact that Liszt's life had been so thoroughly documented by his contemporaries, we might think that the preceding description by Abraham Veinus was based on some profligate fictional character out of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Not so. By all accounts, Liszt led the most sensational life ever granted to a musician. In his youth and early manhood, he received the sort of wild and unbuttoned adulation that today is seen only at the appearances of a select handful of rock stars. He was the first musical artist in history with enough nerve to keep an entire public program to himself, rather than providing the grab-bag of orchestral, vocal and instrumental pieces scattered across an evening's entertainment that was the typical early-19th-century concert. He dubbed those solo concerts "musical soliloquies" at first, and later called them by the now-familiar term, "recitals." ("How can one *recite* at the piano? Preposterous!" fumed one British writer.)

By 1848, Liszt had made his fortune, secured his fame and decided that he had been touring long enough, so he gave up performing, appearing in public during the last four decades of his life only for an occasional benefit concert. Amid the variegated patchwork of duchies, kingdoms and city-states that constituted pre-Bismarck Germany, he chose to settle in the small but sophisticated town of Weimar, where Sebastian Bach had held down a job early in his career. Once installed at Weimar, Liszt took over the musical establishment there, and elevated it into one of the most important centers of European artistic culture. He stirred up interest in such neglected composers as Schubert, and encouraged such younger ones as Saint-Saëns, Wagner and Grieg by performing their works. He also gave much of his energy to his own original compositions, and created many of the pieces for which he is known today — the symphonies, piano concertos, symphonic poems and choral works. Liszt had composed before he moved to Weimar, of course — his total output numbers between 1,400 and 1,500 separate works — but the early pieces were mainly piano solos for use at his own recitals. His later works are not only indispensable components of the Romantic musical era in their own right, but also were an important influence on other composers in their form, harmony and poetic content.

As if composing, conducting and performing were insufficient, Liszt was also one of the most sought-after piano teachers of the 19th century. He was popular with students not just because he possessed an awesome technique that was (and remains) the despair of every serious pianist. Liszt was also a direct link to that nearly deified figure, the glorious Beethoven, who had, so the story went, actually kissed the young prodigy with his own lips. Furthermore, Liszt was a pupil of Carl Czerny,

the most eminent student of Beethoven. To make this already unassailable combination of technique and tradition absolutely irresistible, Liszt brought to it an all-encompassing view of man and his world that enabled the mere tones of the piano to surpass themselves and open unspeakable realms of transcendent delight. He was a truly remarkable man, arguably the most important figure in terms of his cumulative influence on the art in all of 19th-century music.

Liszt sketched his two piano concertos in 1839, but they lay unfinished until he went to Weimar. He completed the Second Concerto, in A major, in the summer of 1849, but he did not get around to having it performed for more than seven years. Liszt required of a concerto that it be “clear in sense, brilliant in expression, and grand in style.” In other words, it had to be a knockout. While it was inevitable that this Concerto would have a high percentage of finger-churning display, it was not automatic that it should also be of high musical quality — but it is.

The procedure on which Liszt built this Concerto and other of his orchestral works is called “thematic transformation”; or, to use the rather more jolly phrase of William Foster Apthorp, “The Life and Adventures of a Melody.” Never bothered that he was ignoring the Classical models of form, Liszt concocted his own new structures around this transformation technique. (“Music is never stationary,” he pronounced. “Successive forms and styles can only be like so many resting places — like tents pitched and taken down again on the road to the Ideal.”) Basically, the “thematic transformation” process consists of inventing a theme that can be trotted out in a wide variety of moods, tempos, orchestrations and rhythms to suggest whatever emotional states are required by the different sections of the piece.

There are at least six such scenes in Liszt’s Piano Concerto No. 2. The composer provided no specific plot for any of these, but wrote music of such extroverted emotionalism that it is not difficult for listeners to provide their own: languor, storm, love, strife, resolve and battle is only one possible sequence. It is a diverting game to play, and Liszt has invited all to take part. The melody on which this Concerto is based is presented immediately at the beginning by the clarinet. It courses through each section, and can most easily be identified by the little half-step sigh at the end of the first phrase.

***Don Juan, Tone Poem (after Nicolaus Lenau), Op. 20*
Richard Strauss (1864-1949)**

Composed in 1888.

Premiered on November 11, 1889 in Weimar, conducted by the composer.

It was in the 1630 drama *El Burlador de Sevilla* (“*The Seducer of Seville*”) by the Spanish playwright Tirso de Molina that the fantastic character of Don Juan first strutted upon the world’s stages. Tirso based his play on folk legends that were at least a century old in his day, and whose roots undoubtedly extend deeply into some Jungian archetype of masculine virility shared, from complementary viewpoints, by men and women alike. Don Juan found frequent literary representations

thereafter, notably in works by Molière, Dumas, Byron, Espronceda, de Musset, Zorrilla and Shaw. A story of such intense passion was bound to inspire composers as well as men of letters, and Gluck, Delibes, Alfano, Dargomyzhsky and half a dozen others wrote pieces based on the character and his exploits. The most famous treatment of the tale is, of course, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and it was through that opera that Richard Strauss first became acquainted with the Spanish Lothario. In June 1885, Strauss attended a production of Paul Heyse’s play *Don Juans Ende* with his mentor, Hans von Bülow, and the drama and its subject, building on the influence of Mozart’s masterpiece, made a powerful impression on the young composer.

Strauss started sketching his own *Don Juan* late in 1887, soon after he had met Pauline de Ahna in August. Pauline, a singer of considerable talent, got on splendidly with Strauss, and they were soon in love and married. The impassioned love themes of *Don Juan* were written under the spell of this romance. For the program of his tone poem, Strauss went not to da Ponte or the Spanish authors, but to the 19th-century Hungarian poet Nicolaus Lenau. Lenau, born in 1802, was possessed by a blazing romantic spirit fueled in part by a hopeless love for the wife of a friend. In a fit of idealism in 1832, he came to America and settled on a homestead in Ohio for a few months. Disappointed with the New World, he returned to Europe, where he produced an epic on the Faust legend in 1836, and then undertook a poetic drama based on Don Juan. Lenau left this latter work unfinished in 1844 when he lost his mind and was admitted to an asylum, where he died six years later. Lenau’s *Don Juan* was not a rakish extrovert but rather a vain, sensual idealist. In the author’s words, “My Don Juan is no hot-blooded man, eternally pursuing women. It is the longing in him to find a woman who is to him incarnate womanhood, and to enjoy in the one all the women on earth whom he cannot as individuals possess. Because he does not find her, although he reels from one to another, at last Disgust seizes him, and this Disgust is the Devil that fetches him.” In Lenau’s version, Don Juan meets his death in a sword duel with the father of one of the women he has seduced. Disillusioned and empty, ready for death, he drops his guard and welcomes his fate.

Strauss’ tone poem captures the feverish emotion and charged sensuality of Lenau’s drama, but other than three abstruse excerpts from Lenau’s poem that appear in the score, the composer never gave a specific program for *Don Juan*. The body of the work comprises themes associated with the lover and his conquests. The vigorous opening strain and a stentorian melody majestically proclaimed by the horns near the mid-point of the work belong to Don Juan. The music depicting the women in his life is variously coquettish, passionate and ravishing. (Norman Del Mar called the beautiful oboe melody “one of the greatest lovesongs in all music”). In the closing pages, an enormous crescendo is suddenly broken off by a long silence. A quivering chill comes over the music. A dissonant note on the trumpets marks the fatal thrust. Quietly, without hope of redemption, the libertine dies.

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda

Program 9

Cello Concerto in B minor, Op. 104 **Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

Composed in 1894-1895.
Premiered March 19, 1896 in London, conducted by the composer with Leo Stern as soloist.

During the three years that Dvořák was teaching and composing in New York City, he was subject to the same emotions as most other travelers away from home for a long time: invigoration and homesickness. America served to stir his creative energies, and during his stay from 1892 to 1895 he composed some of his greatest scores: the “New World” Symphony, the Op. 96 Quartet (“American”) and the Cello Concerto. He was keenly aware of the new musical experiences to be discovered in the land far from his beloved Bohemia when he wrote, “The musician must prick up his ears for music. When he walks he should listen to every whistling boy, every street singer or organ grinder. I myself am often so fascinated by these people that I can scarcely tear myself away.” But he missed his home and, while he was composing the Cello Concerto, looked eagerly forward to returning. He opened his heart in a letter to a friend in Prague: “Now I am finishing the finale of the Violoncello Concerto. If I could work as free from cares as at Vysoká [site of his country home], it would have been finished long ago. Oh, if only I were in Vysoká again!”

Elements of both Dvořák’s American experiences and his longing for home found their way into the Cello Concerto, the last of his works composed in this country. The inspiration to begin what became one of the greatest concertos in the literature was a concert by the New York Philharmonic in March 1894 at which Victor Herbert (*the* Victor Herbert of operetta fame) played his own Second Cello Concerto. This work convinced Dvořák that the cello was a viable solo instrument, something about which he had been unsure despite the assurances of Hanus Wihan, cello professor at the Prague Conservatory, who had been urging his fellow faculty member to write a piece for the instrument. (Apparently Brahms, Dvořák’s friend and mentor, also had a similar mistrust of the cello as a solo instrument. When he first saw Dvořák’s score he wondered, “Why on earth didn’t I know that one can write a violoncello concerto like this? If I had only known, I would have written one long ago!”) The thoroughly middle European character of the music, however, belies its American catalyst. It might just as well have been written in a Czech café as in an East 17th Street apartment.

Dvořák’s Cello Concerto occupies the pinnacle in the solo literature for the instrument because of its wealth of melodic ideas, its solid construction and its glowing orchestration. The opening movement is in sonata form, with both themes presented by the orchestra before the entry of the soloist. The first theme, heard immediately in the clarinets, not only contains the principal melody, but also serves to establish the importance given to the

wind instruments throughout the work, their tone colors serving as an excellent foil to the richness of the cello. “One of the most beautiful melodies ever composed for the horn” is how Sir Donald Tovey described the second theme. The cello’s entrance points up the virtuosic yet songful character of the solo part. The effect of the music for the soloist is enhanced by the use of the instrument’s burnished upper register, a technique Dvořák learned from Victor Herbert’s Concerto.

Otakar Sourek, the composer’s biographer, described the second movement as a “hymn of deepest spirituality and amazing beauty.” It is in three-part (A–B–A) form. A touching bit of autobiography is attached to the composition of this movement. While working on its middle section, Dvořák received the news that his beloved sister-in-law, Josefina Kaunitzová, who had aroused in him a secret passion early in his life, was seriously ill. He showed his concern by using one of Josefina’s favorite pieces as the theme for the central portion of this *Adagio* — his own song, *Let me wander alone with my dreams*, Op. 82, No. 1. When he returned to Prague in April 1895, he learned of her death, and revised the finale to include another reference to the same song, thus producing the autumnal slow section just before the end of the work.

The finale is a rondo of dance-like nature. Following the second reprise of the theme, in B major, the *Andante* section recalls both the first theme of the opening movement and Josefina’s melody from the second. A brief and rousing restatement of the rondo theme led by the brass closes this majestic Concerto.

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98 **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

Composed in 1884-1885.
Premiered on October 25, 1885 in Meiningen, conducted by the composer.

In the popular image of Brahms, he appears as a patriarch: full grey beard, rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes. He grew the beard in his late forties as, some say, a compensation for his late physical maturity — he was in his twenties before his voice changed and he needed to shave — and it seemed to be an external admission that Brahms had allowed himself to become an old man. The ideas did not seem to flow so freely as he approached the age of fifty, and he even put his publisher on notice to expect nothing more. Thankfully, the ideas did come, as they would for more than another decade, and he soon completed the superb Third Symphony. The philosophical introspection continued, however, and was reflected in many of his works. The Second Piano Concerto of 1881 is almost autumnal in its mellow ripeness; this Fourth Symphony is music of deep thoughtfulness that leads “into realms where joy and sorrow are hushed, and humanity bows before that which is eternal,” wrote the eminent German musical scholar August Kretzschmar.

One of Brahms’ immediate interests during the composition of the Fourth Symphony was Greek drama. He was greatly moved by the tragedies of Sophocles in

the German translations of Professor Wendt, and many commentators have seen the combination of the epic and the melancholy in this Symphony as a reflection of the works of that ancient playwright. Certainly the choice of E minor as the key of the work is an indication of its tragic nature. This is a rare tonality in the symphonic world, and with so few precedents such a work as Haydn's in that key (No. 44), a doleful piece subtitled "Mourning Symphony," was an important influence. That great melancholic among the famous composers, Tchaikovsky, chose E minor as the key for his Fifth Symphony.

Repeatedly accused of being forbiddingly metaphysical or overly serious, the Fourth Symphony was not easily accepted by audiences. The crux of the problem was the stony grandeur of the finale, which undeniably confirms the tragedy of the work. The normal expressive function for a symphonic finale is to be an uplifting affirmation of the continuity of human experience. The classic models are Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and Sir Donald Tovey pointed out that in all that master's works, only three have minor tonality endings. Even that great prophet of *Weltschmerz*, Gustav Mahler, ended only his Sixth Symphony on a pessimistic note. So, in this last of his symphonies, it would seem that Brahms grappled with innermost feelings and found a hard-fought acceptance of his own mortality. The outward sign of his perceived great age, his magnificent beard, found its counterpart in tone in this grand Symphony, perhaps the greatest work in the form since those of Schubert and even Beethoven.

It is fitting that the Fourth Symphony was on the program for the final appearance Brahms made before his beloved Vienna. Hans Richter scheduled the piece for the Vienna Philharmonic's concert of March 7, 1897, and invited Brahms to attend. Brahms was already mortally ill with the liver cancer that would end his life in less than a month, but he struggled from his bed to a box in the *Musikvereinsaal* for the concert. Each movement of his Symphony brought a shattering response from the audience. Florence May, Brahms' loving biographer, described the touching scene: "Tears ran down his cheeks as he stood there, shrunken in form, with lined countenance, strained expression, white hair hanging lank, and through the audience there was a feeling as of a stifled sob, for each knew that he was saying farewell. Another outburst of applause and yet another; one more acknowledgment from the master; and Brahms and his Vienna had parted forever."

Brahms' Fourth Symphony is large in size and emotional impact while enormously subtle in detail. The first movement begins almost in mid-thought, as though the mood of sad melancholy pervading this opening theme had existed forever and Brahms had simply borrowed a portion of it to present musically. The movement is founded upon the tiny two-note motive (short-long) heard immediately at the beginning. Tracing this little germ cell demonstrates not only Brahms' enormous compositional skills but also the broad emotional range that he could draw from pure musical expression. To introduce the necessary contrasts into this sonata form,

other themes are presented, including a broadly lyrical one for horns and cellos and a fragmented fanfare. The movement grows with a wondrous, dark majesty to its closing pages which, to Tovey, "bear comparison with the greatest climaxes in classical music, not excluding Beethoven."

"A funeral procession moving across moonlit heights" is how the young Richard Strauss described the second movement. Though the tonality is nominally E major, the movement opens with a stark melody, pregnant with grief, in the ancient Phrygian mode. The mood brightens, but the introspective sorrow of the beginning is never far away. Though in sonatina form (sonata without development section), the movement has none of the airy sweetness of so many of Mozart's *andantes* cast in that form, but possesses rather an overriding sense of comforting tears washing away great loss. To the noted German musicologist Phillip Spitta, this was the greatest slow movement in all of the symphonic literature.

The third movement is the closest Brahms came to a true scherzo in any of his symphonies. Though such a dance-like movement may appear antithetical to the tragic nature of the Symphony, this scherzo is actually a necessary contrast within the work's total structure since it serves to heighten the pathos of the surrounding movements, especially the granitic splendor of the finale. Brahms, as always, took great care with the deployment of his orchestral resources, and he emphasized the singular brightness of this movement by calling for the silvery tingle of the triangle — its only appearance anywhere in his symphonies.

The finale is a passacaglia — a series of variations on a short, recurring melody. The passacaglia was a compositional technique highly favored by Baroque composers that fell into disuse with the changed requirements of the music of the Classical era. It had never been used in a symphony before this one, and it reflects both Brahms' interest in the music of earlier eras and his faith in the inexorable expressive powers of the old formal types. The theme, to which Brahms added a single chromatic note, was taken from Bach's Cantata No. 150, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*, though John Horton has made a convincing argument that the form was influenced by François Couperin and Georg Muffat. Pedantry was not Brahms' point here, but it is essential to understanding his style to realize that he was familiar with this old music (from his own study and as an editor for several fledgling musicological series) and could draw whatever resources from it he needed to vivify his works. There are some thirty continuous variations in the finale, though it is less important to follow them individually than to feel the massive strength given to the movement by this technique. The opening chorale-like statement, in which trombones are heard for the first time in the Symphony, recurs twice as a further supporting pillar in the unification of the movement. Yet Brahms never lost sight of the central aesthetic of the Symphony, and his friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg wrote to him, with no little wonder, "Who can resist an emotion strong enough to penetrate all that skillful elaboration?"

©2008 Dr. Richard E. Rodda