GREEN BAY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Victor Yampolsky, *Conductor*
Bruce Atwell, *Horn*

Saturday, April 10, 2010

ANTONÍN DVORÁK (1841-1904)

Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22

I. Moderato
II. Tempo di Valse
III. Scherzo: Vivace
IV. Larghetto
V. Finale: Allegro vivace

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Horn Concerto No. 4 in E-flat major, K. 495

I. Allegro moderato
II. Romanza: Andante
III. Rondo: Allegro vivace

— INTERMISSION —

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, “Jupiter”

I. Allegro vivace
II. Andante cantabile
III. Menuetto: Allegretto
IV. Molto allegro

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Serenade for Strings in E major, Op. 22
Antonín Dvorák

Born September 8, 1841 in Nelahozeves, Bohemia
Died May 1, 1904 in Prague

Composed in 1875.
Premiered on December 10, 1876 in Prague, conducted by Adolf Cech.

In the mid-1860s, Emperor Franz Joseph, in a magnanimous burst of generosity, established a State Commission to award grants to aid struggling artists in the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the summer of 1874, less than a year after his marriage and just as the newlyweds were expecting their first child, the young Bohemian composer Antonín Dvorák decided to apply for the prize to supplement his meager income as organist at Prague's St. Adalbert Church. He first presented himself at the Prague City Hall to obtain official certification of his poverty, and then gathered together a hefty stack of his recent scores — the Third and Fourth Symphonies, the *Dvur Kralové* Songs, the overtures to the operas *Alfred* and *King and Charcoal Burner*, a later-destroyed *Romeo and Juliet Overture*, a piano quintet and a string quartet — and sent them with his application for assistance to Vienna.

The members of the grants committee were a most distinguished lot — Johann Herbeck, Director of the Court Opera, the renowned critic Eduard Hanslick and the titan of Viennese music himself, Johannes Brahms. Their report noted that Dvorák possessed "genuine and original gifts" and that his works displayed "an undoubted talent, but in a way which as yet remains formless and unbridled." They deemed his work worthy of encouragement and, on their recommendation, the Minister of Culture, Karl Stremayer, awarded the young musician 400 gulden, the highest stipend bestowed under the program. It represented Dvorák's first recognition outside his homeland and his initial contact with Brahms and Hanslick, both of whom would prove to be powerful influences on his career through their example, artistic guidance and professional help. An excited burst of compositional activity followed during the months after Dvorák learned of his award, in February 1875: the G major String Quartet, the *Moravian Duets* for Soprano and Tenor (it was these delectable pieces which, when he submitted them to support an application for another government grant three years later, caused Brahms to recommend him to the publisher Simrock), the B-flat Piano Trio, the D major Piano Quartet, the E-flat String Quintet, the Fifth Symphony and the lovely Serenade for Strings all appeared with inspired speed.

The Serenade for Strings, Op. 22, written in only eleven days in May 1875, is one of Dvorák's most popular short compositions. In his classic study of the composer's music, Otakar Sourek noted that the piece is "mainly cast in a poetic mood, with an overtone of ardent longing, yet not altogether devoid of a certain cheerful gaiety." As its name implies, this Serenade is lighter in character, simpler in structure and less weighty in argument than the larger orchestral genres. The gentle opening movement is cast in a three-part form whose outer sections grow from a short, songful phrase presented immediately by the second violins. The movement's central portion is based on a melodic motive that tours up and down the chords of the harmony in tripping rhythms. A sweetly nostalgic waltz is presented as the second movement. The third movement is a fully developed scherzo with a bright, good-natured main theme and intervening lyrical episodes. The deepest emotions of the Serenade are plumbed in the *Larghetto*, a tenderly romantic song of almost Tchaikovskian introspection. Reminiscences of this music and of the opening movement occur during the vivacious finale, a lively folk dance brimming with bubbling high spirits.

Horn Concerto No. 4 in E-flat major, K. 495
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg

Died December 5, 1791 in Vienna

Composed in 1786.
Scored for two oboes, two horns and strings.

Mozart completed this delightful work for the horn player Joseph Leutgeb on June 26, 1786. Their relationship may be surmised from the following jocular dedication on the manuscript of the Third Horn Concerto: “Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart has taken pity on Leutgeb, ass, ox and simpleton, Vienna, May 27, 1783.” Leutgeb was an old friend of the Mozart family from Salzburg, where he was a colleague of Wolfgang and his father, Leopold, in the orchestra of Archbishop Colloredo. Leutgeb played well enough to tour successfully through Germany, France and Italy performing his own Horn Concerto. In 1777, he settled in Vienna but, finding it impossible to make a living from music, purchased from his wife’s family a cheesemonger’s shop with the help of a loan from Leopold Mozart. (When Leopold saw Leutgeb’s tiny establishment, he quipped that it was “the size of a snail shell.”) Wolfgang moved to Vienna in 1781, and he and Leutgeb again fell into the easy friendship of their Salzburg days. It was for this pal of his that he wrote the Concert Rondo (K. 371), the Quintet for Horn and Strings (K. 407) and the four Horn Concertos (K. 412, 417, 447 and 495). The nature of the relationship between the two musicians may be surmised from the mock dedication quoted above. In the K. 495 Concerto, Mozart used four colors of ink in the solo part to confuse Leutgeb; K. 412 was peppered with such good-natured insults as “Take courage,” “You ass” and “Thank heavens, that’s enough.” They must have had a merry time together, but there was also a deep, mutual concern. When the horn player-cheese maker fell behind in his loan payments, Wolfgang defended his friend to his straightlaced father. Mozart knew well from personal experience the problems of the debtor. Things apparently went well for Leutgeb in later years, however, and he died in prosperity in 1811.

The Horn Concertos, like all of Mozart’s concertos for winds, take account of the specific characteristics of the solo instrument. These works are simpler in structure than those for piano, and give frequent, brief rests to the soloist to allow recovery of lip and lung. The construction of the thematic material is determined by the nature of the particular instrument. Since the horn of Mozart’s day had no valves and could play chromatic passages only with difficulty, the composer was largely limited to themes based on scales and chords. The freshness, variety and difficulty of the horn writing in these concertos is testimony to Mozart’s ingenuity — and to Leutgeb’s considerable talent.

The Horn Concerto No. 4 is in the traditional three movements. The opening movement is a sonata-concerto form in the “singing allegro” style that Mozart learned while still in knee pants from John Christian Bach, the youngest son of Johann Sebastian, who had settled in London and met the touring Mozarts there when Wolfgang was only eight. The generally sunny optimism of the first movement is clouded by some richly Romantic harmonies in the development section. The recapitulation presents swift and challenging passages to the soloist in which Mozart, with an almost devilish glee, must have pressed Leutgeb to the limits of his technique. The second movement, titled *Romanza*, is a lovely song that utilizes the rich, burnished sonority of the solo horn. Its lyrical theme, presented immediately by the soloist, returns twice after intervening episodes. The second episode, like the middle of the preceding movement, is touched with the hint of dark emotionalism that pressed on so many of the works Mozart wrote during his last five years. The finale, brimming with high spirits and bounding energy, is a rondo in the swinging, 6/8 meter hunting-horn style that recalls the distant ancestors of the concert instrument. Never was a friendship immortalized in music of greater charm and geniality.

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, “Jupiter”
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Composed in 1788.
Scored for flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani and strings.

Mozart’s life was starting to come apart in 1788 — his money, health, family situation and professional status were all on the decline. He was a poor money manager, and the last years of his life saw him sliding progressively deeper into debt. One of his most generous creditors was Michael Puchberg, a brother Mason, to whom he wrote a letter which included the following pitiable statement: “If you, worthy brother, do not help me in this predicament, I shall lose my honor and my credit, which I so wish to preserve.”

Sources of income dried up. His students had dwindled to only two by summer, and he had to sell his new compositions for a pittance to pay the most immediate bills. He hoped that Vienna would receive *Don Giovanni* as well as had Prague when that opera was premiered there the preceding year, but it was met with a haughty indifference when first heard in the Austrian capital in May 1788. He could no longer draw enough subscribers to produce his own concerts, and had to take second billing on the programs of other musicians. His wife, Constanze, was ill from worry and continuous pregnancy, and spent much time away from her husband taking cures at various mineral spas. On June 29th, their fourth child and only daughter, Theresia, age six months, died.

Yet, astonishingly, from these seemingly debilitating circumstances came one of the greatest miracles in the history of music. In the summer of 1788, in the space of only six weeks, Mozart composed the three greatest symphonies of his life: No. 39, in E-flat (K. 543) was finished on June 26th; the G minor (No. 40, K. 550) on July 25th; and the C major, “Jupiter” (No. 41, K. 551) on August 10th.

The “Jupiter” Symphony stands at the pinnacle of 18th-century orchestral art. It is grand in scope, impeccable in form and rich in substance. Mozart, always fecund as a melodist, was absolutely profligate with themes in this Symphony. Three separate motives are successively introduced in the first dozen measures: a brilliant rushing gesture, a sweetly lyrical thought from the strings, and a marching motive played by the winds. The second theme is a simple melody first sung by the violins over a rocking accompaniment. The closing section of the exposition (begun immediately after a falling figure in the violins and a silence) introduces a jolly little tune that Mozart had originally written a few weeks earlier as a buffa aria for bass voice to be interpolated into *Le Gelosie Fortunate*, an opera by Pasquale Anfossi. Much of the development is devoted to an amazing exploration of the musical possibilities of this simple ditty. The thematic material is heard again in the recapitulation, but, as so often with Mozart, in a richer orchestral and harmonic setting.

The *Andante*, in sonata form (as are all the movements of Mozart’s last six symphonies, save the minuets), uses rich chromatic harmonies and melodic half-steps to create a mood of brooding intensity and portentous asceticism. Much of the movement, especially the development, makes use of the repeated notes of the opening theme and the quick, fluttering figures of the second subject.

Because of its somber minor-key harmonies, powerful irregular phrasing and dense texture, the *Minuet* of the Symphony No. 40 was judged by the legendary Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini to be one of the most darkly tragic pieces ever written. The character of the *Minuet* is emphasized by its contrast with the central trio, the only untroubled portion of the entire work.

The finale opens with a rocket theme that revives the insistent rhythmic energy of the first movement. The gentler second theme, with a full share of piquant chromatic inflections, slows the hurtling motion only briefly. The development section exhibits a contrapuntal ingenuity that few late 18th-century composers could match in technique, and none surpass in musicianship. A short but eloquent silence marks the beginning of the recapitulation, which maintains the Symphony’s tragic mood to the closing page of the work.

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