

Quincy Symphony Orchestra, Quincy, IL

PROGRAM NOTES

Fire & Water

February 9, 2020

Dr. Paul Borg

We start our program with *fire* then conclude the second half with *water*. Water comes from a beloved symphonic prelude from the late nineteenth century; fire comes in a much more recent composition from twenty-first century Mexico. Both compositions stand somewhat apart from traditional central-European concert repertory and genres: the symphony and the concerto. They provide a suitable frame for our concert which surrounds the talent that our student concerto winners share with us.

**Arturo Márquez** (born 1950)

**Conga del Fuego Nuevo**

Written: 2005

Movements: One

Style: Mexican-style Classical dance

Duration: 10 minutes

Mexican composer Arturo Márquez is known for working within the classical concert tradition, yet imbuing his works with elements of Mexican traditional music. His *Danzónes* for orchestra are examples of this. The *Conga* that we hear this afternoon represents broader Latin associations. Congas are a characteristic Cuban drum. The conga dance as a musical type became known widely when Desi Arnez used it in movies and television during the 1940s and 50s. What Márquez provides us in his *Conga* has recognizable "Latin" rhythmic characteristics supporting his engaging melodic content. Its initial visceral beat supports a melody initially played by the trumpet. This section is later relieved by a slower lyric melody supported by an active though subdued rhythm. The work concludes with a return to the initial musical material for the rousing ending.

**Jean-Baptiste Accolay** (1833-1900)

**Violin Concerto in A Minor**

Written: 1868

Movements: One

Style: Romantic

Duration: 10 minutes

Less well-known than other 19th-century composer/performer/teachers, Jean-Baptiste Accolay created this Violin Concerto intending to provide young violinists an introduction to the qualities that budding virtuosos need to learn and share with their public. He succeeded so well that even mature violinists have made recordings of the work. It consists of a single movement with the customary return of opening material mid-way through. However, what is notable is the great variety of musical tasks that the young violinist is expected to master: First, a declarative statement that exploits the entire range of the instrument. Then, a lyric section displaying the almost vocal quality that can be achieved by the violin. Last, a fast virtuosic ending. It happens two times. Share the excitement!

**Joseph Haydn** (attribution) (1732-1809)

from *Oboe Concerto, Hob. VIIg:C1* (ca. 1790)

Written: 1790?

Movements: first of three

Style: Classic

Duration: 14 minutes

The oboe concerto attributed to Joseph Haydn is a delightful piece that challenges the soloist both with tuneful melodies and with virtuosic passages. It has a traditional structure that begins with a full orchestral introduction. When the oboe enters, its initial cadenza-like passage is continued by a version of the melody with which the work opened. Among the amazing features are the rapid scale passages that wander through and connect the various tunes throughout the work. It concludes with a cadenza, allowing the soloist to play alone. Although the work is catalogued in the Hoboken catalogue of Haydn's works, recent scholarship has questioned the

attribution to Haydn. One reason is the curious stylistic traits that seem unusual for Haydn in his late period. Even more convincing, however, is its absence from the list of works that Haydn himself created, discovered only in 2008. It is not there. Just who composed the Concerto remains a mystery.

**Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

**Symphony No. 8 ("The Unfinished"), D. 759**

Written: 1822

Movements: Two

Style: Romantic

Duration: 25 minutes

One of the most beloved and frequently performed romantic-era symphonies, Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, has the most enigmatic origin in the history of music: why was it unfinished? Though we cannot answer that question here, but we can say what is actually known about its composition. Schubert was only 25-years old when he created this masterpiece. The completed score of the two movements of the symphony was dated 30 October 1822.

Sketches exist of a possible third movement. Various musicians from the mid-nineteenth-century till the present have tried to construct a full 4-movement symphony. Some tried to orchestrate Schubert's sketches of a third movement. Others tried to concoct a fourth movement from other compositions by Schubert. Yet, now there seems no need to try to "complete" it. The symphony as we hear it this afternoon has succeeded with audiences for the past 160 years.

Schubert's works were becoming increasingly popular during the late-1810s. At that time he was influenced by the current Viennese performance traditions. But as he matured in the 1820s, his musical sense became less imitative of the classics (Mozart and Haydn) and more influenced by the innovations of Beethoven's orchestral works. So, when he began composition of his Symphony No. 8, he seemed not to write as easily and quickly, and then interrupted by other compositional requests.

In 1823, Schubert was awarded a Diploma of Honor by the Graz Musical Association, and one of his friends, Anselm Hüttenbrenner, was given the score to give them in acknowledgement of the honor. So, the composition remained forgotten for the next 40 years. It was only 42 years later that this work was premiered! Its performances in the 1860s set off the popularity that it possesses today.

The musical moments you may recognize are the several lyric melodies of the first movement--at the beginning ominously in the bass, the initial melody in the woodwinds, and the famous joyous tune beginning in the cellos. Following, there are sometimes violent rhythmic and dynamic interruptions that startle any listener. In the usual formally type, repetitions of the various musical statements reoccurs. The second movement, also containing wondrous lyric statements, provides many themes, interrupted by other contrasting material. Scholars have suggested that Schubert wasn't quite sure how to complete these movements as a traditional symphony. That he completed his "Great C-Major Symphony" somewhat later proves that he was able to confirm his symphonic ideal. The "Unfinished" remains an enigma.

**Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884)**

**Vltava (The Moldau)**

Written:

Movements: second of six

Style: Romantic

Duration: 12 minutes

During Smetana's lifetime Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) was an integral part of the Austrian empire, ruled from Vienna, not Prague. Owing to this, Smetana's own musical education was oriented to the dominant Germanic-centered classical music tradition. Yet, his most important symphonic composition was an appeal to his *Vlast*, his "country," defined by language and historic traditions. This mammoth six-sectioned

series of symphonic poems was intended to depict musically the various interesting features of what made Czech, Czech.

*Vltava* (the Moldau River) begins in the mountains, flows through the country-side, later separates the two sides of the capital, Prague, and ends in confluence with the Elbe River which goes to the North Sea. This scenario allowed Smetana to create a musical picture of Czech life by following the progress of the river from its beginnings to its exit from Czech lands. He says:

The work tells of the *flow of the Vltava*, beginning from its first tiny sources—the *clod* and *warm* Vltava, the joining of the two little streams into one, then the *sweep* of the Vltava through the groves and along the meadows, through the countryside where harvest festivals are being celebrated; in the light of the moon the dance of the water-nymphs; on the nearby rocks proud castles rear up, wide mansions and ruins; the Vltava swirls in the St. John's rapids, then flows in a broad sweeping current on to Prague, where the *Vysehrad* comes into sight and finally disappears in the distance with its majestic sweep into the Elbe.

Smetana labels sections with descriptive names such as "Forest Hunt," "Rustic Wedding," "St. John's Rapids," and "Vyshrad." You will hear the Moldau theme over and over again as the water proceeds through the land and its various moods.

~ Dr. Paul Borg