

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra, Quincy Illinois

January 30, 2021

Dr. Paul Borg

In the third concert of our 2020-2021 season we continue our observance of physical distance (and masks) by using small groups to perform. This time we focus on the core of the symphony orchestra—the string section. Since the early 18th century, what became known as a symphonic orchestra coalesced around this body of string players. The classical symphony added a few winds and timpani for instrumental color; in the 19th century more and more wind and percussion players were added to form the ensemble we know today. However, throughout the past centuries, many works have continued to be written using strings alone. The only additions to today's concert are a timpani player and a harpsichord-continuo player.

In the 1720s Johann Sebastian **Bach** was seeking new employment. He copied and sent a set of six “concertos” to the Margrave of Brandenburg, hoping to become his music master. He never received a reply, and the compositions remained unknown until around 1850 when they were rediscovered in the **Brandenburg** library. Ever since, they have become among the best-known and frequently performed of Bach's instrumental works. Each of the six is scored for a different group of musicians. The **third concerto** is very interesting because of its number, “three.”

First, although there are technically three movements, the second, as preserved, consists of only two notated chords. It allowed for a member of the ensemble to improvise a “middle movement,” free to engage his/her imagination, as was the tradition at the time. What we hear today is a written-out “improvisation” which connects Bach's outer two movements.

Second, the string sections (violin, viola, cello) are each divided into three parts, unlike the orchestral tradition of two violin, one viola, and one cello (bass) section. This allows an amazing and often virtuosic interaction among the three parts of each group as well as the interaction among the three sections—a sort of triple trio effect. You will notice engaging activity among the three individual violin parts, (viola, and cello, too) as well as between the violin, viola, and cello groups. An original, energetic, lively product.

And third? Well, just enjoy. We won't play it three times.

In Haydn's early career he inherited the musical ensemble of the Prince of Esterhazy. It was for its primary violinist, Luigi Tomasini, that **Haydn** wrote four **concertos**. Today's is the first (though numbered 4 in the catalogue). Our youth competition winner, Isabella Trinh of Quincy High School, plays the first of its three movements. This movement consists of an initial musical section played by the orchestra which reappears in the middle and at the end as a frame for the movement. Then, however, the soloist enters to perform the emotional and technical passages that allow her to share with us her insight and abilities. Our listening lets us enjoy both these lyric statements and the exuberant scale passages that are demanded of the performer.

Peter **Warlock** (the name adopted by Philip Heseltine for his musical works) is a British composer, music critic, and general *bon vivant*, dying at age 36 possibly by suicide. His musical output is mostly songs with English texts. His interest in English Renaissance music led indirectly to one of his best-known works, his 1926 **suite** of dances entitled *Capriol*.

In 1589 Thoinot Arbeau published his *Orchésographie*, an imaginary dialogue between Arbeau and a lawyer, Capriol. Their discussion is an exhaustive description of dance types and their musical characteristics from the 16th century. Warlock adapted several of the tunes that appear in this book for the suite we hear today. First written for piano duet, he later provided both string-orchestra and full-orchestra versions. He follows the meter, tempo, and formal organization for each of the dance types forming a series of brief, contrasting movements

Basse-Danse—triple meter, moderate tempo, four-measure repeated phrases.

Pavane—duple meter with a persistent long-short-short underlying rhythm, sedate tempo, four-measure phrases.

Tordion—compound duple meter, lively tempo, four-measure phrases.

Bransle—duple meter, fast tempo, three- and four-measure phrases, occasionally extended.

Pied-en-l'air (a Galliard figure)—compound triple meter, slow tempo, two-measure phrases.

Mattachins—Duple meter with another persistent, underlying rhythm, fast tempo, four-measure phrases that increase in metric confusion and harmonic dissonance to end the suite in the 20th century.

Wolfgang Amadeus **Mozart** was 20 years old when he composed his *Serenata notturna* in 1776. At the time he lived in Salzburg and was, like his father Leopold, a member of the musical establishment of the Prince-Archbishop Colloredo. The musicians were responsible for all sorts of occasions, both religious and secular. Generally, the serenades were performed outdoors in late summer. However, the *Serenata notturna* is unusual in several respects. It was composed in January, for some unknown performance circumstance. It consists only of three movements, whereas other serenades and divertimentos included as many as eight or nine movements. And the instrumentation consists of two groups of strings, supplemented by timpani. The first contains solo instruments: 2 violins, a viola, and a contrabass; the second an ensemble of two violin parts, viola, cello, and timpani.

The three movements are a march, a minuet, and a rondo-finale. All follow standard 18th-century formal patterns: sonata-like binary sections with repetitions. The minuet is continued by a trio after which the minuet returns. The rondo, the longest movement, consists of an initial section that returns after several intervening, somewhat contrasting sections.

What makes Mozart's use of these forms interesting is the inventive musical substance he fills them with. The march, for example, begins with a unison call to "attention" by the entire ensemble. Immediately following is a contrasting, graceful tune played by the solo group. The alternation of these two musical elements offers the listener the enjoyment of contrast within continuity. Likewise, the minuet is a stately triple-meter dance, supplemented by a lively trio, scored for the solo group.

Most complex is the rondo. Its initial section reverses the beginning of the march. A graceful tune is interrupted by some "attention" chords. The interior sections are performed mostly by the solo group. They include a slow introduction to the variation in a different key and an eventual return to the opening material. The composition ends with more "attention" chords.