

# QUINCY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

## PROGRAM NOTES

April 17, 2021 by Dr. Paul Borg

As we complete this somewhat unusual season, we can find some positive things about the past year amid the chaos. In-person performances were impossible. Our final concert of the 2019-2020 season had to be canceled. Yet even so, the QSO persisted and created a 2020-2021 season full of interesting performances. Learning to experience an on-line venue was difficult both for performers and for audiences. However, our concert series did succeed both for performers and for our audiences.

First, our conductor, Bruce Briney, identified repertory that would fit the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Second, our performers were able to perform in a distanced environment, overcoming musicians' usual physical interaction. Third, our dedicated listeners stayed with us in these unusual circumstances. And now, a limited in-person performance ends this difficult season.

Today's concert involves a larger, more diverse combination of instruments than was possible earlier this season. And we end with a composition that includes all sections of the orchestra: strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion.

### **Symphony in D Major, "Le matin," Hob. I: 6**

**Franz Joseph Haydn**

When Haydn was employed in 1761 by the Austro-Hungarian Esterhazy family, his abilities were quickly recognized. In 1762 Nikolaus succeeded his brother Paul as Prince. Haydn was appointed, first as vice-Kapellmeister, later, upon the death of Gregor Werner in 1766, as Kapellmeister. He served for more than 35 years becoming just as esteemed as his employer. Early on his duties required him to provide music for any event the Archduke wanted to host. Among the earliest of Haydn's compositions for this obligation are the three symphonies—Le matin, Le midi, Le soir—not apparently conceived as a unit, but ever since seen as such—morning, mid-day, evening. Much has been written about the extra-musical context of the titles. The music itself reflects both some of the musical imagery invoked by the titles, but also the early development of what we have come to expect of a classical symphony.

The format of Symphony No. 6 (morning) is what became the traditional classical format: four movements—fast, slow, minuet, fast (finale). What we can hear, additionally, is Haydn's earliest experiments of using musical elements to evoke expectations of morning (or noon or evening). Here, sunrise is expertly evoked in the slow introduction of the first movement. As A. Peter Brown expresses it, "The first movement is perhaps Haydn's most pastoral utterance. . . Its introduction is a sunrise with an ascending D-major scale culminating in the full brightness of morning. . ."

The other movements are infused by Haydn's use of the expert performers he was fortunate to work with. Solo use of individual instruments supplement the usual instrumentation of the movements in an almost concerto-like fashion. These include the flute (first and third movements), violin and cello (second movement), bassoon and double bass (trio of the minuet), and winds contrasting with strings (first and fourth movements). Haydn's original ensemble included only 10-15 musicians. So, the context perfectly fits our own restricted forces this pandemic year.

## **Simple Symphony, Op. 4**

**Benjamin Britten**

When Britten was in his twenties, at the beginning of his career, he wrote several small works for piano. In 1931-2 he used material from some of them to create this Simple Symphony, written for strings alone. It can be performed by a small string ensemble or even just a string quartet. Like all young musicians of his generation, he was taught about important music of the past, how to assess it yet not merely to imitate it. In this case he adopts several of the dance types we will hear next in the Bach Suite.

Britten clues us into the emotional intent of each movement. It is interesting that his serious emotion (sentiment) is surrounded by an almost teen-age obsession with liveliness (boisterous, playful, frolicsome). The musical material itself consists of two melodic ideas in each movement, coming from the earlier piano works. These he uses to create a structural similarity to the dance types. The meter and tempos also evoke the earlier idioms. Yet Britten infuses them with his own exuberant musical insight.

## **Orchestral Suite No. 3, BWV 1068**

**Johann Sebastian Bach**

Earlier this season, we heard one of the six Brandenburg Concertos that Bach wrote in the late 1720s. Each was individual in format and instrumentation. Bach also wrote other orchestral works called “Ouvvertüren” that were not conceived as a group and today are usually known by the title “Suite.” The suite in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century consisted of a series of dance movements, usually in the same key. With Bach, even the order of the dances became somewhat standardized, especially in his keyboard suites.

The orchestral suites, however, are diverse in both the number and choice of dances. Each does begin with a large initial movement, the Ouvertüre, that consists of a slow introductory section followed by a fast contrapuntal section. Repetition allows an overall format alternating slow—fast—slow—fast—conclusion. In this Suite, the strings carry the burden of fast passage work, while the oboes supplement the strings and the trumpets provide the loud framework surrounding various sections both within and overall.

The Air (“on the g string”) is perhaps Bach’s most familiar composition. A walking bass line supports inner-strings’ harmonies that in turn support its haunting, memorable melody. The binary form, repeating each half, allows us to enjoy everything twice.

A Gavotte is a lively duple meter dance, usually beginning mid-measure allowing us to tap our foot after the initial sound rather than with it. Like all the other dances, repetition has all musical statements heard twice. In this case, such repetition is augmented by the repetition of the first gavotte after the second is played. The Bourrée, an even faster duple dance, creates a progression of excitement among the movements of this Suite. The Gigue is the usual ending movement for a Bach Suite. Cast in the usual two segments, now in compound duple meter that offers a suitable ending to the progression of tempo and volume in the dances.

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