

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Orchestra, Quincy, Illinois
April 10, 2022
Dr. Paul Borg

“Natural Wonders,” the title of this concert has received several different meanings over the past several years. The most familiar of the works—Beethoven’s sixth symphony—is his evocation of nature and its wonders. It anticipates his later celebration of human experience in his ninth symphony. Another work is the one that the Quincy Symphony commissions every year. Randall Faust’s *The Wonder of the Waters* is an evocation of a natural wonder that we all can enjoy. Yet in the past two years we have all experienced concern about just what “Natural Wonders” can mean. Thus, our final work, the *Te Deum* by Dvořák musically surrounds a Gregorian chant text that thanks the Lord for being the eventual protector of all “Natural Wonders.”

The Wonder of the Waters by **Randall E. Faust**, who wrote these notes:

This Overture is a sound track to an imaginary canoe trip from Lake Itasca in Northern Minnesota (the headwaters of the Mississippi river—called the “Father of Many Waters” by the Native Americans) down the river eventually arriving in Quincy, Illinois.

During the course of this canoe trip we are led by our guide—Dr. Bruce C. Briney—across rocky and challenging portages, through stormy and rough waters, to the wider and smoother waters of the river. As we experience the river and its expansive river valley, it fills us with a sense of wonder.

Symphony No. 6, Op. 68 “The Pastoral” by Ludwig van Beethoven

When he finished his *Symphonia Pastorale* in 1808, Beethoven was already well-known as an innovative composer. He elicited power and excitement in his third and fifth symphonies; he showed a gentler side in his second and fourth symphonies. But with the sixth symphony, he pushed the expectations of just what a symphony is beyond what had developed during the 18th century.

Instead of the customary four-movement scheme, he composes five movements. The last three are performed *attacca*. And by providing an overall name, he asks the audience to imagine scenes in a countryside that the titles of the individual movements evoke. The description of nature and the peasants who live in it shows his interest in rural things outside Vienna. Yet, he said it was “more the expression of feeling than a painting;” not a story but an emotional response.

The sequence of experiences begins in a traditional first-movement sonata form, but without a usual initial declaration. The musical ideas quietly portray an arrival in the countryside, dance-like, repeating in upper and lower voices, then reaching an ecstatic joy that exiting the city could allow. It ends with a brief soft closing which invites the second slow movement. This evokes the flowing water in the continual murmuring of the inner voices over which various tunes and fragments echo each other. Someone could be lying next to a bubbling brook. In the only real evocation of nature Beethoven ends the movement with three bird voices that he indicates in the score: nightingale (flute), quail (oboe) and cocoo (clarinet).

The third movement introduces us to a peasant community where the typical minuet movement is replaced by two types of local dances in alternation. One, a fast in triple meter is interrupted by a duple stomping dance. After the traditional alternation of the two types, a startling interruption (*attacca*) begins a storm which interrupts the dances we enjoyed before. One can envision the arriving clouds, experience the flood of water and lightning flashes. A shrill piccolo emphasizes the emotional concern. However, eventually the storm abates. Amid a few left-over thunder booms, an oboe tune announces that it is over. A flute scale introduces (*attacca*) a clarinet solo announcing the musical material that introduces the last movement.

The last movement expresses the joy that the storm over, and we can come back to our enjoyment of each other. Again dance-like melodies and rhythms emphasize the relief that things are back to normal. Many occurrences of quiet to loud shifts in the music reflect the exultation of a Natural Wonder experience.

***Te Deum*, Op. 103 by Antonín Dvořák**

When Dvořák agreed to come to the United States to join the faculty of the New York Conservatory of Music, he was also asked to compose an original composition to premiere in New York. It was to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Spanish encounter with the New World on October 12, the date of Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean. When he failed to get a new poem to use, he chose to use the chant text *Te Deum*, a hymn from the liturgy in which the entire universe praises the Lord for the "Natural Wonders" of existence.

The text has 29 lines that Dvořák divides into four musical sections, mirroring a common symphonic format. He even arranges them in a typical sequence: fast, slow, scherzo, finale. The booming timpani introduces an enthusiastic choral movement that repeats the initial text many times. It is interrupted by a softer, slower middle section that allows the soprano to let the text be understood. The initial verses of the thirteen in this section reenter with its enthusiastic music and the section comes to a close.

Echoing Beethoven's use of attached movements, Dvořák connects all four sections without pause. The second is introduced by a brass fanfare. It then features the bass soloist who articulates the next seven verses with various instrumental and choral accompaniments. It ends quietly allowing . . .

The third section to enter energetically with the next four text verses. The chorus sections alternate in presenting the first verse. When they come together, they allow the text to be presented with enthusiasm in chordal unity. The section ends quietly with the timpani hinting cautiously for what's to come.

The final section begins softly with the soprano soloist leading the chorus in the initial verse segments. After a quiet petition for mercy, the basses add a metric and modulatory creep to a tremolando anticipation of a loud Alleluia which introduces the final verses (not the authentic Gregorian ones). The work closes with the exuberant orchestral coda.

An interesting footnote: Dvořák spent the summer of 1893 in the Czech immigrant community of Spillville, Iowa, just 250 miles north of Quincy. There, of course, he composed his "New World" symphony in which he featured the English horn (second movement) just as he had done in various lyric portions of the *Te Deum*. Thus, our concert begins by coming to Quincy and ends nearby.