

PROGRAM NOTES
QUINCY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
February 19, 2023 Quincy, Illinois
Compiled by Dr. Paul Borg

Our concert opens with a newly commissioned work by an Illinois composer. William Camphouse has contributed original compositions for us in 2005, 2012, and 2018. Now, he celebrates our 75th anniversary with the following comments:

BRILLIANCE is a style of modern diamond cut where jewelry craftsmen work newly mined rough stones carefully shaping them with fine detail to create an effect that diffuses light giving the finished gem stone its unique brilliant sparkle.

Jewelers also restore classic gems of value and with that in mind, I created **BRILLIANCE** for the Quincy Symphony's 75th Diamond Anniversary. While doing some polishing and refacing along the way, I re-purposed the timeless melody from Antonio Vivaldi's (1678-1741) "Spring" movement from the "Four Seasons" in a new setting.

Music of Vivaldi's Baroque era was often descriptive and identifiable by a perpetually driving rhythmic pulse, stark dynamic contrast, stable tonality and demand for technically advanced performance skills. With modern instrumentation and a new generation of musicians I hope we have the best of both worlds a 300-year-old classic symphonic standard presented in a contemporary setting that sends bright, sparkling sounds from the stage to the ears of the audience.

The program continues with two works by the most eminent European composer of the 19th century who was directly connected with the United States: Antonín Dvořák. He spent the early-to-mid 1890s in New York City helping establish and direct its new National Music Conservatory. After composing his famous 9th Symphony (*from the New World*), he spent the summer of 1893 just 250-miles north of Quincy, in Spillville Iowa with his family among the town's Bohemian emigree community.

After the symphony's premiere in December 1893, Dvořák sketched some musical ideas which he originally thought of as an orchestral work. But its initial version was a virtuosic piano piece, composed in 1894. He did re-orchestrate it in 1895 as **Suite for Orchestra "American"**. However, that version was only performed after he died. He never heard what we will hear today.

The work consists of five movements. Though each has a distinctive rhythm, they are not designated dances which is common for a suite. The third is called "alla Pollaca," indicating a particular dance rhythm. The Suite includes tunes that evoke folk melodies from America or Bohemia, a common practice for Dvořák. And the theme from the first movement can be heard, reinterpreted, in the final movement. Yet, the Suite is not a usual symphonic work

of the time. Symphonies and Symphonic Poems are the late-Romantic varieties, both of which Dvorák excelled in. What we hear is unusual in his output, and rather infrequent in its performance.

His **Symphony No. 8** (originally published as his 4th) was composed between late-August and early-November 1889. He conducted its premiere in February 1889. He dedicated it "To the Bohemian Academy of Emperor Franz Joseph for the Encouragement of Arts and Literature, in thanks for my election [to it]." By this time in his career, he was recognized as a significant composer in the Austro-Hungarian/German sphere. What was the usual custom to recognize only composers like Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms (in "symphonic" terms) provided Dvorák entrée into a circle of esteemed musicians that the world would acknowledge and perform.

His 8th symphony, however, has been talked about by critics as diverging from his usual, more serious, symphonic ventures. Recent program notes have echoed scholarly claims that it was "different from the other symphonies, with individual thoughts worked out in a new way." Happy or optimistic is the characterization often used.

The work consists of the usual four-movement scheme: fast-slow-dancelike-fast. However, the internal structure of each movement varies from the 19th-century custom: sonata-form; three-part adagio; scherzo-trio; finale-rondo or sonata form. What Dvorák does is use tunes that remind one of folk themes and alternate them with changes of tempo, usually exaggerating the contrast rather than the continuity expected in the formal structure.

An interesting feature of the work is its use of both the piccolo and English horn, unusual in other symphonies by the Germanic composers. This reinforces his interest in instrumental color and contrast that he exploits again in his 9th symphony. Aside from this interest in instrumentation, he excels in creating differing musical results from the same thematic basis. For example, the triadic announcement of the flute at the beginning of the first movement gets echoed in the cello theme at the beginning of the last movement. Then, it is dramatically changed to the loud, bombastic variation that immediately follows. Simple idea, creatively manipulated. The third movement begins like a melancholy waltz. But unlike expectation, it ends with a duple meter swift section after the usual "trio." The key structure is also somewhat unusual. The overall key is G major (a "happy" key). Yet the second movement moves between c minor and E-flat major. The third echoes the minor-key attitude. Yet each ends with a happier, livelier major-key mood.

To quote Peter Laki: "Dvorák's handling of form is indebted to Beethoven and Brahms, but he filled out the form with melodies of an unmistakably Czech flavor and a joviality few composers at the time possessed. The variations vary widely in character: some are slower and some are faster in tempo, some are soft (such as the virtuosic one for solo flute), and some are noisy; most are in the major mode, though the central one, reminiscent of a village band, is in the minor. The music is always cheerful and optimistic."

The 8th symphony has become one of Dvorák's most performed works. Enjoy.