

## PROGRAM NOTES

QUINCY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

November 15, 2025 Quincy, Illinois

### Academic Festival Overture

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

In March, 1879, the University of Breslau offered to confer on Brahms the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *honoris causa*, calling him “the leader in Germany of music of the most serious type.” Brahms had been offered a similar honor by the University of Cambridge, England. However, to cross a body of salt water even as small as the English Channel was for him an unbearable thought, so he refused to make the journey and did not receive the degree.

He was hardly more enthusiastic about the offer from Breslau. He acknowledged it by merely a post card expressing his gratitude to the faculty, and it was almost two years before he agreed to come to Breslau to enjoy “doctoral beer and skittles.” The **Academic Festival Overture** was in a sense, his doctoral thesis, and was written during the summer of 1880 at a resort frequented by the top society of Austria. He thought at first of naming the piece *Viadrina*, a Latin name for the University of Breslau, but changed his mind.

Brahms described the work as a “very boisterous potpourri of student songs.” The light-hearted Thank You was first performed at Breslau in January, 1881. At the concert, the Rector, the Senate, and the members of the Philosophical Faculty sat in the front rows, and many of them looked askance and shook their heads as Brahms conducted the overture, for it was based in part on songs from students’ beer parties.

The music opens with a tune closely associated with beer mugs. Although this is the principal theme, it is hardly the most important, since the student songs which follow far outshine it. After an episode in E minor and a momentary return of the main theme, we hear the student hymn *We Have Built a Stately House*. After a return of the principal theme, fortissimo and altered, another student song appears: *The Father of our Country*, “sung” by the second violins against the pizzicato cellos. Instead of a development there comes the most ribald song of the overture, *What Comes from the Height There*, a song that ridicules freshmen. There is an abbreviated recapitulation, and at the end the entire orchestra takes up the medieval song touting the joys of student life, *Therefore, Let Us Be Merry*. ~Dr. Lavern Wagner, Feb. 1995

### Concerto for Flute and Chamber Orchestra (2025)

Composer’s Program Note

Timothy Hagen

(b. 1981)

When I think of great concertos—the Sibelius Violin Concerto or the Dvorák Cello Concerto, for example—a couple of important musical elements come to mind. For one, the soloist is cast in a role equivalent to, or sometimes greater than, that of the orchestra, despite the fact that the orchestra outnumbers the soloist by many orders of magnitude. This situation demands the solo part be virtuosic not only in terms of notes flying by but also in terms of presence, sound, and expression. The second important

element is that these pieces are great works of music, not simply impressive vehicles for soloists to show off. They are painstakingly crafted to take the audience on a journey of imagination.

Mozart and Beethoven famously wrote piano concertos as artistic vehicles for their whole selves, demonstrating the full power of their musicianship as both composer and performer. I have been fortunate to have mentors encourage me to approach my own artistry in such a holistic way, which is why I have not pigeonholed myself as only a flutist or a composer. I strive to do both equally well, and since I was a teenager, I have aspired to write and perform my own flute concerto. When offered the opportunity to perform as soloist with the Dubuque Symphony, where I have served as Principal Flute since 2018, I accepted and floated the idea of bringing this dream to life. To my surprise and delight, our Music Director, William Intriligator, took to the idea, and I began to compose.

What resulted is my largest work to date, both in terms of instrumentation and scale: a 30-minute piece that challenges the soloist on every possible level, drawing a wide palette of colors from the orchestra as it aims to lead the listener through the story of a person's life. The first movement, "**Chorale: Endurance**," draws upon an old hymn and imagines our lives as youngsters. With the best of intentions, our parents and communities instill in us both who and how to be, which often come into conflict with who and how we actually are.

If we can endure to reach adulthood, we imagine we might free ourselves from the constraints of others, yet life does not pan out that way. Instead, we are plagued with insecurities. *Is this who I really am? What if the world does not accept me as I am? How can I move forward?* These questions form the heart of the second movement, "**Ballad: Doubt**," which is inspired by the Judy Garland songbook.

In the third movement, "**Soliloquy: Defiance**," a cadenza for the soloist is underscored by only percussion. As we learn to overcome doubt and finally trust in the core of who we are, we find new strength and confidence to live authentically and joyfully. This hard-earned comfort in our own skin is freedom, encapsulated by the finale, "**Bacchanale: Liberation**."

The Concerto for Flute and Chamber Orchestra is dedicated to the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra as well as Marianne Gedigian, Professor of Flute at Rice University, and Rose Bishop, Principal Flute of the Quincy Symphony Orchestra in Illinois.

~Dr. Timothy Hagen, Flutist and Composer

## Symphony No. 5, Op. 107, "Reformation"

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Music played an important part in the Protestant Reformation in Germany. Still today, observances of the Reformation are keynoted by Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. Although Mendelssohn was of Jewish ancestry, he was brought up a Lutheran, and remained attached to the church throughout his life. Many of his compositions are religiously oriented, for example his two great oratorios, *St. Paul* and *Elijah*.

While in England in the fall of 1829, the idea came to him to compose a symphony to commemorate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landmark Protestant Confession of Augsburg, which in 1530 was meant to bind together all those German states which had during the previous decade adopted the Lutheran faith. The symphony was completed in winter 1829-30, and was originally entitled *Symphony for the Celebration of a*

*Religious Revolution*, the title *Reformation Symphony* becoming associated with the piece later. The Roman Catholic Church prevented the performance in 1830 Augsburg, so the first performance, with Mendelssohn conducting, was in Berlin in November 1832. The symphony received few performances during the composer's lifetime, was laid aside, and only published posthumously in 1868.

Both the first and last movements bear witness to Mendelssohn's deep religious convictions. These movements seem to mirror the calm solidarity of Protestantism in northern Europe, and in their finest passages the music rises to moments of grandeur and nobility. The peaceful, yet powerful, response known as the "Dresden Amen" was used in eighteenth century Lutheran churches in Saxony. It was also made famous later by Richard Wagner as the Grail motive in his musical drama *Parsifal*, first performed in 1883.

The simple recurrent phrase of the "Dresden Amen" is first heard at the end of the slow, solemn introduction to the first movement. It seems to lift the listener into another world, leaving the cares of this earth far behind. The major portion of the movement is filled with passionate energy, with a bold, powerful main theme as Mendelssohn maintains the sense of forging ahead through his natural and brilliant gift for contrapuntal writing. The recapitulation is signaled by the reappearance of the "Dresden Amen." The movement is intensely serious, and strongly suggests throughout the magnitude of the religious events which lead to the famous Augsburg Confession of 1530.

The two middle movements remove us from the turmoil of early sixteenth century religious strife. The second movement is a light, almost perky scherzo, containing a liltingly attractive middle section in a bright, contrasting key. The slow third movement is brief, with a lovely cantabile melody in the strings. It is rooted in a minor key, and seems to quietly appeal for calmness and thoughtfulness amid the storm of religious conflict.

After the last movement begins with a short, contemplative andante, we hear immediately the strains of Martin Luther's great chorale-like hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. The melody is introduced simply by a single flute, which is joined by the woodwind chorus, then spreads to the entire orchestra. This leads to new material for the sonata form of the movement. The first new theme is full of verve and energy, with the composer developing its contrapuntal potential in a lengthy fugato. The second new theme is equally sturdy, but also has a joyous ebullience to it. Luther's famous hymn eventually returns to play its part, set at first in counterpoint against the first of the two themes. Phrases of the chorale appear in the development section, and grow in strength in the recapitulation. Then, in a remarkable change of mood, the coda begins quietly and soberly, the composer creating a wonderful sense of expectancy. Ultimately, Mendelssohn leaves us in no doubt as to who wins the day, as the spirit of Luther blazes forth in a final grand statement of *A Mighty Fortress*. Mendelssohn's love of Bach is manifested in the contrapuntal writing in the last half of this fourth movement.

~Dr. Lavern Wagner, Feb. 2003