

PROGRAM NOTES

Concerto for Four Violins & Cello in B minor, Op. 3, No. 10

In the early years of the eighteenth century, Antonio Vivaldi held the rather modest position of director of a conservatory for homeless girls in Venice, but his compositions were carrying his name throughout Europe. In 1711, he published a collection of twelve violin concertos under the title *L'Estro armonico*, translated variously as "The Spirit of Harmony" or "Harmonious Inspiration." Significantly, Vivaldi chose to have this set published in Amsterdam, and for two good reasons: printing techniques there were superior to any available in Italy and, perhaps more importantly, his music was extremely popular in northern Europe. Each of the concertos of *L'Estro armonico* is a concerto grosso, in which one or more violin soloists is set against a main body of strings and continuo.

The intent in these concertos is not so much virtuosic display (though they are difficult enough, certainly) as it is in making contrast between the sound of the solo instruments and the main body of strings. Four of the concertos in *L'Estro armonico* are for four violins, and of these, the Concerto in B Minor has become the best known. A concerto for four soloists, particularly for four soloists playing the same instrument, is a difficult matter: the composer must find enough for all four to do without burying anyone or allowing the same sonority to become tedious. Vivaldi brings this off with the rapid exchange of passages between soloists, an ingenious contrapuntal texture, and a great deal of rhythmic variety.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger.

Music from La La Land

With 14 nominations and six Oscars, "La La Land" and its charismatic cast cultivated a new worldwide audience for film musicals. With memorable songs by composer Justin Hurwitz, including Oscar winner City of Stars, Robert Longfield's superb arrangement is great entertainment for most any performance. Includes: Another Day of Sun; City of Stars; Mia & Sebastian's Theme and Audition (The Fools Who Dream).

Program Notes by the publisher.

Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48

While many of Tchaikovsky's works exhibit an ability to emote feelings, this serenade seems to encapsulate multiple sentiments, sometimes at the same time. Like Tower's Fanfare and Stravinsky's Symphonies for Winds, Tchaikovsky honored an important predecessor with his composition. In a letter to Nadezhda von Meck, an influential patron of the arts and Tchaikovsky's friend, he revealed that the first movement was "my homage to Mozart; it is intended to be an imitation of his style, and I should be delighted if I thought I had in any way approached my model." Tchaikovsky aptly captures the balance and charm of Mozart's chamber settings, but also infuses the four-movement composition with the lush, heart-rending harmonies that are his trademark. The composer also combines a larger classical structure with elements of the nineteenth-century Viennese waltz, a moving elegy, and a finale that utilizes Russian folk themes, bringing together disparate worlds and channeling both solemnity and joy into one perfect package.

Program Notes by Dr. K. Dawn Grapes.

Eclogue, Op. 10

Gerald Finzi was a British-born composer who lived among his now famous contemporaries Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Arthur Bliss. He became one of the most characteristically English composers of his generation. Unfortunately, Finzi died at the age of 55. His music is expertly crafted and especially gorgeous. In 1929, Finzi began what is believed to have been intended as a piano concerto. This was never finished or given a title, but after his death his publisher, with approval of the Finzi family, gave two of the individual movements names and published them as the separate works *Eclogue* and *Grand Fantasia and Toccata*. The slow movement, *Eclogue*, absorbed Finzi for nearly 25 years. Its intricate harmonies and intertwining melodies are proof of a quarter century worth of intentionality and effort.

Program Notes by Adin Gilmore.

The Dying of the Light

This piece is a song cycle set to the poetry of Dylan Thomas (1914-1953). Most of his poetry is about death and includes tons of imagery and symbolism. Despite the topic of death, his poetry also includes illusions to triumph over the darkness of death. As Gwyneth Walker describes it, "the journey of death is described, but not taken. Death is the adversary, not the ruler."

Davis discovered this piece after hours of perusing through the Edmund Stanley Library in search of repertoire. The name of the piece caught his eye, and once he listened to it, he knew he had to perform it. Although the text of the piece is in English and is long, he wanted to include the text so that viewers can reflect on the poetry. He hopes others can see the message of triumph over darkness, and although light may fade, we are called by God to "rage against the dying of the light."

Below is the QR code to view the full text.

Program Notes by Davis Green.



Flute Concerto in E minor, Op. 57

Saverio Mercadante was born in Altamura, in southern Italy, in 1795. Although his childhood was marked by instability and poverty, he showed early musical promise, and was able to enter the Conservatory in Naples at age 13. There he studied counterpoint, violin, flute, and voice, eventually taking up composition as well. By the age of 18, he had already written a few pieces, including this flute concerto. The solo writing in this piece is highly idiomatic, reflecting Mercadante's study of the flute, and calls for a virtuoso soloist. The piece opens with an extended orchestral introduction, setting a dramatic tone, which the soloist elaborates in a virtuosic first entrance. Soloist and orchestra continue to alternate throughout the movement, with the orchestra providing sparse accompaniment when the soloist is playing.

Danza No. 3

Ludovic Lamothe was born and raised in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He studied piano with his mother, Virginie Sampeur, a well-known Haitian poet and musician. After completing high school, Ludovic left Haiti to study piano at the Paris Conservatory where several of his compositions were published. Both Frederic Chopin and Caribbean music elements influenced his music. An album of his colorful piano pieces was published in Haiti in 1955, which includes waltzes, dances, and pieces inspired by Haitian folk tunes. Danza No. 3 is one of those pieces that makes you want to relax by the beach to enjoy the sun and coconuts.

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

October 31, 1517, is traditionally held to be the day that Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of All Saint's Church in Wittenberg, an act that signaled the start of the Protestant Reformation. This masterwork was composed in 1830 to mark the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession.

Though bearing the number 5, the work was actually the second of Mendelssohn's mature symphonies, written before both the more popular Scottish and Italian Symphonies (numbers 3 and 4, respectively) and the more obscure Lobgesang (Hymn of Praise, number 2). The fact that the fifth was not published until 1868, twenty-one years after the composer's death, explains its current position in the accepted sequence.

Though he himself was baptized as a Reformed Christian at the age of seven, his personal religious beliefs remain the subject of debate. He was the grandson of Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and it is clear that he was proud of the connection. When at the age of twenty he received widespread approbation for reviving the St. Matthew Passion by (Protestant) Johann Sebastian Bach, he remarked, "To think that it took . . . a Jew's son to revive the greatest Christian music for the world!"

The first movement conveys the drama of conflict, even as it references the "Dresden Amen" (a motif also employed in Richard Wagner's Parsifal), which is heard twice, a radiant rising scale played by the strings. Mendelssohn being Mendelssohn, the tension is relieved by the second movement, a cheerful interlude, and the third, a wistful arioso. For the finale, again mindful of the purpose of his commission, the composer turns to Luther's Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God). The hymn is put through various permutations before bringing the symphony to a triumphant close.

Program Notes by Ross Amico.