

PROGRAM NOTES

by Pam Davis

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G Major, BWV 1049 (1721)

Bach played some of his compositions for Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg in 1719 when he was Kapellmeister of the court at Köthen. The Margrave requested more works from Bach, and although it took some time, he finally submitted the set of six concertos in March 1721. The concertos are extremely varied, in style, instrumentation, length, and structure. This may have been to demonstrate Bach's versatility to the potential patron. (They were not originally composed as a set.)

Whether or not the Margrave's musicians were intimidated by their difficulty, it seems they never performed the concertos and no record exists of the Margrave thanking Bach or paying him a fee.

The lightest of the six concertos in sound and spirit is the fourth. The lively first movement departs from the normal opening with full ensemble, instead opening with the two solo flutes providing the thematic foundation. The middle of the movement sees the violin attempting to outdo the other soloists in virtuosity. The Andante pastoral movement gives the violin a less independent role. In the fugal presto, the violin comes back to the forefront, with momentum propelling long figurations of virtuosic bariolage, somewhat out of the ordinary for Bach.

- ♪ 1721 WORLD EVENTS: Pope Clement XI dies, Sir Robert Walpole becomes first Lord of the Treasury of the United Kingdom, (effectively the first prime minister), Tsar Peter the Great titles himself "The Emperor of all Russia"
- ♪ FIRST PERFORMANCE: unknown
- ♪ MOST RECENT SSO PERFORMANCE: this is the SSO premiere

Caroline Shaw (born 1982)

Entr'acte (2011, string orchestra adaptation 2014)

Composer, producer, violinist, and vocalist Caroline Shaw is from Greenville, North Carolina. She began composing at ten, earned violin performance degrees from both Rice and Yale Universities, and studied composition at Princeton. As a vocalist, she is part of the Grammy Award winning ensemble *Roomful of Teeth*. She was the inaugural Early Career Musician in Residence at Dumbarton Oaks. The youngest recipient of a Pulitzer Prize in Music, Shaw won in 2013 for her a capella piece, Grammy nominated *Partita for 8 Voices*. Her work across the musical spectrum includes collaborations with Renee Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, and Ken Burns.

Entr'acte was originally written for string quartet, but was adapted for string orchestra in 2014. Composer's note:

Entr'acte was written in 2011 after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn's Op. 77 No. 2 — with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further. I love the way some music (like the minuets of Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition.

- ♪ FIRST PERFORMANCE: (original version) April 2011, at Princeton University, with the Brentano String Quartet
- ♪ MOST RECENT SSO PERFORMANCE: this is the SSO premiere

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 -1791)

Overture to *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, K. 87 (*Mithridates, King of Pontus*) (1770)

Mozart wrote this his first serious opera at age 14. Mithridates was an actual historical figure, but the story, based on Racine's play, is fiction. In the opera, the protagonist ends up victorious in battle, but mortally wounded, following machinations of rivalry regarding sons, love, and ambition.

The complete opera lasts close to three hours and at the premiere, ballets were staged between the acts, extending the evening to six hours, seriously delaying after-show dinner plans! Mozart biographer Alfred Einstein described it this way: connoisseurs, he thought, may well have thought 'what a lot of superfluous notes! Any Italian composer could have composed more simply and at the same time more effectively. But what a talent!'

The opera's overture was not lengthy. Overtures containing foreshadowing themes from the opera were not in vogue until the 19th century. This overture takes the traditional Italian opera sinfonia form of three short movements. The slow section (*Andante grazioso*) is bookended by two fast sections: (*Allegro* and *Presto*). The result is lively and elegant.

- ♪ 1770 WORLD EVENTS: Boston Massacre, Beethoven is born, English Poet Laureate William Wordsworth is born
- ♪ FIRST PERFORMANCE: December 26, 1770, at the Teatro Regio Ducale, Milan, directed by the composer
- ♪ MOST RECENT SSO PERFORMANCE: this is the SSO premiere

Franz Schubert (1797 -1828)

Symphony in B flat Major, No. 5 (1816)

Although music was the focus of Schubert family life, Schubert's father was not thrilled that his son chose musical composition as his vocation. His father was a cellist and schoolmaster and insisted that his sons earn their keep by teaching at his school. For two and a half years, Franz struggled with kindergarten aged students, a job he found himself ill-suited to perform. His older brother Ignaz, who also worked at the school, expressed this sentiment: "...the likes of us scholastic beasts of burden are abandoned to all the roughness of wild youngsters and exposed to a host of abuses, not to mention that we are subjected to the further humiliation of an ungrateful public and a lot of dunderheaded bigwigs."

Schubert was always destitute and frequently ill, but somehow turned out a massive body of work, most of which was joyful and graceful. Most famous for his gorgeous melodies, he wrote 600 art songs in his short life.

Frequent get-togethers with friends to play music were dubbed "Schubertiads." These sessions, in which Schubert played viola, would be followed by a trip to the tavern for wine and conversation around art and politics. Sometimes the group would be expanded to an amateur chamber-sized orchestra at violinist Otto Hatwig's house. This group gave the only performance of the fifth symphony in Schubert's lifetime.

After the composer's death, the manuscript was lost for 40 years. It was rediscovered in Vienna by two Englishmen: Sir George Grove and Sir Arthur Sullivan.

Written in four weeks, this 19-year-old's fifth symphony was scored for a small orchestra without clarinets, trumpets, or drums. The influence of Mozart is very strong, but Schubert includes Romantic harmonies and melodies.

The first movement, like the entire symphony, is very concise with a graceful dialogue between strings and woodwinds with a short development and an unorthodox recapitulation in E flat.

The Mozart-y melody of the second movement soon introduces subtle harmonic twists, and resembles Schubert lieder.

The energetic *Minuet and trio* zings with well-placed accents. The surprising choice of a minor key for a brisk scherzo-like movement leads to a contrasting major middle section.

The sonata form finale bubbles along with a frolicking first theme and a bit more wistful second theme. The triplet codetta ends the merry work.

- ♪ 1816 WORLD EVENTS: English novelist Charlotte Brontë is born, Rossini's Barber of Seville premieres in Rome, Indiana becomes the 19th state
- ♪ FIRST PERFORMANCE: 1816, Vienna, at Otto Hatwig's home (public premiere 1841)
- ♪ MOST RECENT SSO PERFORMANCE: December 1949, James Robertson conducting