Part III Examples of program notes for a particular musical work

Every year instrumentalists and professional groups bring to cities large and small throughout the United States a great variety of "classical" music. And the concerts of regional symphony orchestras are also highly diverse in their programming. So in writing program notes, be prepared for works composed by the famous and not-so-famous.

The following examples of program notes cover some 34 different composers from the programs of the Danbury Symphony or programs by pianists or chamber groups performing for the Danbury Concert Association. There is a short comment before each.

DSO = Danbury Symphony Orchestra **DCA**=Danbury Concert Association

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J. S. Bach (1685-1750) Concerto in D minor for Two Violins, BWV 1043

Comment: **What to say about the great Bach? Mentioning that for the concerto form he was influenced by Antonio Vivaldi reminds the reader that composers are all impacted by other musical works throughout their lives.**

Considering the esteem in which Johann Sebastian Bach is now held, it seems impossible it would be nearly one hundred years after his death before the world began to recognize what he had accomplished. Very few of his works were published in his lifetime. He had been the perfect musical servant with a life of servitude to God and to royalty. "I worked hard," Bach stated in appraising his life. During a particularly peaceful time around 1720, Bach was a Kapellmeister at Cöthen in central Germany. The prince, his employer, provided him with an orchestra of eighteen players and the obligation to compose new orchestral works for his concerts. By that time, concertos by Antonio Vivaldi had been published and circulated widely in Europe, and Bach even arranged some of them for other instruments. Influenced by Vivaldi's concerto form—three-movements, "slow-fast-slow," and simple themes that return several times during a movement--Bach then put his own stamp on this concerto form.

That stamp is obvious in this Concerto for Two Violins, with its marvelous counterpoint. A fugue is utilized effectively both in the forward-thrusting first movement, with the two violins acting as independent voices, and then in the long and calmly beautiful second movement. Here the melodic phrases are passed generously and gently from one soloist to the other. For the final movement, Bach provides a sense of musical "fits and starts," wonderful contrast to the linearity of the other movements

DSA Chamber Orchestra Kremlin November 10, 2002

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Samuel Barber (1910-1981) Souvenirs for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 28

Comment: The following is special for me because it seemed to just fit together so well with a quick history of the composer, enhanced by several pithy quotes by him. Others must have agreed with me because I found on the Internet that two chamber groups in the

West had utilized this program note for their concerts and happily with appropriate citation.

Daisy and Roy Barber, of the pleasant Philadelphia suburb of West Chester, brought a determined child into the world: "I wasn't meant to be an athlete. I was meant to be a composer, and I will be, I am sure." So wrote young Samuel Barber, not yet in his teens, to his mother hoping she would dissuade his physician father from molding his only son to his image and likeness. The budding composer found a special place of musical joy in visits to his mother's sister, Louise Homer, a contralto of international reputation. Her husband, Sidney, a composer and music professor would become Barber's surrogate musical father. The joy compounded when at fourteen, Barber entered the newly opened Curtis Institute in Philadelphia majoring in three areas: piano, composition, and voice. Musical talent had concentrated in young Barber. He himself sang the premiere of his song, Dover Beach (1931), composed with quartet accompaniment. In the 1930s, as his talents blossomed, no type of composition --- symphony, concerto, opera, vocal -- was left unexplored. With Toscanini championing Barber's soulful Adagio for Strings, the composer gained permanence in the "Hall of Fame of Great Tunes." By 1950, Barber had traveled to all the great capitals of Europe with his lifelong friend and companion, Gian Carlo Menotti, the successful opera composer, who had been Barber's classmate at Curtis. Elegance had its charm for them both and they spent many an hour in grand hotels enjoying the music of the salon orchestras. In 1951, Barber composed Souvenirs, a suite containing a waltz, schottische, pas de deux, two-step, hesitation tango, and galop. "Think of that coming out of your serious minded Westchester Presbyterian nephew," Barber wrote to Sidney Homer. For the listener, this totally enjoyable sextette of pieces needs to be seen through the eyes and words of the composer: "Imagine a divertissement in a setting of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; 'Souvenirs' ---remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness."

DSA ***Spoleto Festival USA Chamber Music April 1, 2001***

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) String Quartet No. 3

Comment: So-called "modern" music often needs the insights of both the composer and knowledgeable critics. This is an illustration of using both via quotations.

"What a listener should not do is to expect Bartók to turn into Mozart or Schubert at any moment. Just relax and let the music come to you. After several hearings you will begin to develop connections in the music and realize that it is largely tonal music." This quotation—so apropos to today's program---this writer happened upon while reading about the six string quartets of Bela Bartok, which are considered great treasures of 20th century music. Bartok, a Hungarian and deeply affected by his years of study of his country's folk music, wrote the six quartets over a period of thirty years. As a result, they evidence the evolution of a master modern tonalist. Of the six quartets, No. 3 is the shortest, only about 15 minutes long. It is in one movement, but there are four segments, with distinct transitions. The first and third portions are slow, somewhat acrid, while the second---the most lyrical with a distinct gypsy flavor---is fast and energetic, as is the short coda.

Bartok brings out a great variety of instrumental colors, using *pizzicatos* (plucking), *glissandos* (sliding along the scale), *col legnos* (striking the strings with the wood of the bow), and *sul ponticellos* (playing near the instrument's bridge, resulting in a glassy sound). In speaking of his string quartets, Bartok wrote: *"The melodic world of my string quartets does not essentially differ from that of folk-song, only the framework is stricter. It must have been observed that I place great emphasis on the work of technical arrangement, that I do not like to repeat a musical idea without change, and I do not bring back one single part in exactly the same way. This method arises out of my tendency to vary and transform the theme. . . . The extremes of variation, which is so characteristic of our folk music, is at the same time the expression of my own nature."*

DCA Alianza String Quartet November 16, 2008

Arnold Bax (1883-1953) Elegiac Trio for Flute, Viola, and Harp

Comment: Many composers transmit their emotions into their music. The concept of "elegy" or "requiem" finds itself in many a work, often because of the personal experience of the composer.

Though born a proper Englishman without concern for where the next pound was coming from, Arnold Bax not only had musical talents, but a great love of literature. The early poetry of William Butler Yeats, drew Bax into a love of Irish literature. While developing a major output of compositions of every type except opera, Bax fell in love with Ireland, choosing a tiny village in Donegal as a retreat. He also wrote poetry under the pseudonym of 'Dermot O'Byrne,' and came to know and respect many of the Irish Literary revival figures including Padraig Pearse, a major proponent of Irish nationalism and of Irish language studies. Pearse was a major figure in the 1916 Easter Uprising against the British, resulting in his execution, along with a dozen others. Bax was heartsick at the deaths. Soon after he wrote the Elegiac Trio, which included the harp, the instrument that is at the heart of Gaelic music. Bax, who would later emphasize a big sound in seven symphonies, here lets simplicity speak for his sadness.

DCA America's Dream Chamber Players May 17, 2008

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Ludvig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1, "Ghost"

Comment: There's nothing like an interesting name applied to a work to bring a question: "Why that name?" Often, as in this case, how the work came to be named doesn't have any connection to how it came to be written. Someone, probably the music publisher, chose the name after hearing the trio's second movement.

The "Ghost" trio came to life in 1808 as a special work of gratitude to the Countess von Erdody, in whose Vienna home Beethoven and his manservant had taken residence. (Beethoven had a reputation for being a difficult tenant, ever complaining and ever moving.) Consistent with his irascibility, Beethoven had broken completely with Prince Karl Lichnowsky, his principal Viennese patron of a dozen years. So the Countess, of a distinguished Hungarian family, had the goal to

assure that bachelor Beethoven would have sufficient income to remain permanently in Vienna. Through the Countess's contacts, she helped him gain sufficient annual stipends from local nobility. Since she was a very fine pianist, Beethoven's wrote the two trios of Op. 70 as a gift, the kind only a genius could provide. (The Countess is also one of four or five candidates thought to be the "Immortal Beloved" ["Unsterbliche Geliebte"], the object of an unsent Beethoven love letter discovered after his death.)

This trio is indeed a delicious musical sandwich: two outer movements of melodic, rhythmic persuasion, and an inner movement, "Largo," of unusual introspection. Beethoven's student Carl Czerny said that the largo movement reminded him of the ghost of Hamlet's father, thus providing a name for the trio. (German was the first language into which Shakespeare's plays were translated, and Beethoven had even considered writing an opera based on MacBeth.)

The "ghost" movement is indeed Beethoven at his most unusual and according to one critic, "one of the first atmospheric 'mood pieces' in music history." Indeed the mood begins immediately with eerie string sounds and a subtle motif from the piano that wends its way through abrupt stops, outbursts, and the kind of tremolo that pianists would use accompanying silent movies, sounds that would imply mystery and fear of what's to come.

In the two outer movements, melodic inventions central to Beethoven's keen imagination abound. The trio's very first measures change from a thematic rush of notes to an immediate quiet, reflective second theme led by the cello. Then the piano introduces a third barcarolle-like theme. The movement is one of pulsating energy. In the final movement---Presto---the piano's role is more paramount, shifting from dramatic chords to scampering up and down the keyboard. In the final measures, the "ghost" stirs up a bit of fun, with an exhilarating chromatic run by the piano, finalizing with two emphatic chords.

DCA Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio October 20, 2013

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata in C Minor, No. 32, Op. 111

Comment: Arguably no composer has been written about more than Beethoven. So little can be written in any analysis that hasn't already been done, but sometimes one can suggest a "theme." That Beethoven's last piano sonata was in the non-traditional two movements, the world of "contrast" raised itself as worth considering.

For the competent pianist, there is no greater Beethoven gift than his 32 piano sonatas. The very name of some of those sonatas---Pathetique; Moonlight; Hammerklavier; Tempest; Appassionata---suggest the driving force of the man who tore himself away from the classical era of Haydn and Mozart and led music into the romantic era.

During Beethoven's time, the piano became the powerful instrument we know today. Beethoven's emotions—pent-up in a life of little joy, no lasting love, plus ultimate deafness---express themselves directly in music with massive sounds and variable sonorities and---don't let us forget---melodies of the first order.

Critics see Op. 111 as Beethoven's brilliant "goodbye" to his years of composing piano sonatas. He would live five more years after its publication in 1822, but not compose another sonata. All

indications are that he had explored and exhausted the sonata's potential for him. (He would, however, not abandon the piano, for a year later he published the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120, a near hour-long masterpiece.)

"Contrast" is the word this writer would like to emphasize in Beethoven's final piano sonata. Since there are only two movements, not the traditional three, the contrasts are readily noted:

First Movement	Second Movement
Minor key	Major key
Sonata form/fugal	Theme and Variation
Allegro	Adagio
Turmoil	Serenity
Down to earth	Up to heaven

It is hardly surprising that Beethovern chose C minor as the key of the sonata's first thrust because that key had been his favorite to introduce musical drama (e.g. the "fate" opening of Symphony #5, the mysterious opening to Piano Concerto #3). And the listener to the first movement should know what to expect from the Beethoven's own instruction: "Allegro con brio ed appassionato." ("Brisk with vigor and passion.") Talk about contrast! In the very first measure of the sonata, the pianist strikes the piano with forceful octaves, but quickly moves to quiescence anticipating the main theme of the movement, which is dark and brooding. And so the movement moves alternately between percussive octaves, brilliant counterpoint, rapid fire notes, and pensive interludes. In spite of the drama and passion of the first movement, it ends peacefully.

For the more serene second movement, twice the length of the first, the key is C major: "Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile." ("A little aria: Slow, very simple and songlike.") The theme and variation form was a Beethoven favorite (he wrote some two dozen works of that form) and the theme he chose here is of simple, hymn-like beauty. After a highly pensive presentation of the theme come three variations, each faster than the previous one. Then a quiet, lengthy variation introduces unusual trilling, finally leading back to the simple theme and a peaceful conclusion that raises the listener's sense upward as if Beethoven sought to remove all earthly constraints. It is an ending that Andras Schiff, the famed pianist and teacher, believes was Beethoven's way, after a life of great difficulties, to express his gratitude for being alive and giving his gift of great music to all mankind.

DCA Llewellyn Sanchez-Werner, piano October 21, 2018

Johannes Brahms Academic Festival Overture

Comment: There comes a time when a work you are to write about has a real meaning in your own life. This writer spent 40 years in the world of academe, so this Brahms' composition will always stir his retired soul.

In 1879, the University of Breslau honored Brahms with an honorary degree, noting that he was "the most famous living German composer of serious music." Effusive words of gratitude often burst forth from individuals when a college or university confers upon them an honorary degree. Brahms was a composer, not

a speaker. He chose to accede to the request of the University authorities to compose "a Festal Ode." On January 5, 1881 Brahms himself conducted his musical gratitude, the Academic Festival Overture. The staid University Rector, Senate and the Faculty of Philosophy could hardly have been more surprised to learn that the essence of the Overture was student songs! Brahms concept was brilliant: take four well-known German student songs and present them in radiant orchestral colors and fantasias. The overture begins as if a wound-up clock had just started ticking. Soon a brass choir entones the first of the Teutonic tunes, Wir hatten begauet ein stattliches Haus (We have built a stately home). After a transition, the violins introduce the second song, Hochfeierlicher Landesvater (Most Solemn Song to the Father of the Country), lushly orchestrated and romanticized. Enter the freshman! The woodwinds, accompanied by plucked strings, now bring on the jaunty third melody, Fuchsenritt, a song utilized for freshmen initiation and which begins Was kommt dort von der Hoh? (What comes there from on high?.) Then a fantasy of the three tunes allows the orchestra to build to the grandiose hymn-like Gaudeamus Igitur (Let us now enjoy ourselves while we are still young!), the medieval song that for centuries had roused in university students (albeit only males then), the joy of being young and fancy-free.

DSO, Nov 9, 1997

Johannes Brahms Schicksalslied (Song of Destiny)

Comment: If you have sung a choral work, writing about it should help understand what to emphasize for the listener. So it was for me and Brahms' Schicksalslied. In a previous year I had participated in a weeklong rehearsal, then performance of the work at the Berkshire Choral Festival.

Dvořák once reflected upon the religious faith of Brahms, his friend and musical champion. "Such a great man! Such a great soul! And he believes in nothing!" This may be somewhat overstated, but if a composer's religious faith is found in his choral works, Brahms appears to be on the far edge of some mystical world. For example, his German Requiem evokes a world of melodic richness but its prose is broadly non-Christian. Immediately after the successful premiere of the Requiem, Brahms began work on a musical adaption of "Schicksalslied," a poem from the novel Hyperion by the German writer Frederich Hölderlin (1770-1843). It took Brahms three years to complete this relatively short work. Brahms appreciated the poem's contrasts of unchanging spirits (the gods) with the changing world of humans. The bipolar nature of the poem (first contemplating the tranquility of the gods, then the chaos of human experience) just wasn't appropriate for a balanced musical composition so Brahms chose an unusual three-part structure: an instrumental prelude, the choral portion (the poem), then an instrumental postlude. The composition begins with a prelude that portrays the calm of the eternal spirits and anticipates in mood the theme which the altos spin seamlessly out of the prelude. The entire chorus praises the changelessness of the spirits in phrases of Brahmsian beauty. A short transition in mysterious chords leads to a unison rendering of the words "Doch uns ist gegeben...", whose ultimate sense is "But for us down here, things aren't so good and

they don't get better." This portion of the poem is repeated in a fugue-like manner and the chorus describes the human experience, comparing it to a cataract of water, thrashing downward from rock to rock. The choral portion concludes on a unison descending phrase, as if all the world is heading for, well, you know where. But then the musical equivalent of a rainbow is provided by Brahms as the music of the prologue now returns in glorious C major. It is Brahms way of saying that life may be a bit more beautiful than Hölderlin believed.

Danbury Concert Chorus, April 7 1995

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Violin Sonata No. 1 in G major, Op. 78

Comment: Johannes Brahms remains one of the most intriguing musical geniuses because of a personality that seemed at odds with so many people. Yet he recognized greatness in instrumentalists and composed with their abilities in mind after developing strong friendships. His clarinet works came to be because of the clarinetist Richard Mulfield. But here is the imprint of the great violinist Joseph Joachim, Brahms longest and dearest friend, for whom this sonata, as well as the violin concerto and his later double concerto for violin and cello were dedicated.

There hangs above this writer's piano at home a framed print of Johannes Brahms in his later years, seated at the piano, arms outstretched on the keyboard, his white beard catching the ashes from the cigar he smokes. He stares forward, the epitome of "gemutlichkeit." The complexities of the personality of bachelor Brahms---rough-hewn in social gatherings, easy to anger others, ever in love with Clara Schumann, but never to marry even after the death of Robert---make for interesting reading. But his genius as a composer goes without saying. Though it would take him twenty years of work to finish his Symphony No. 1 (he said himself he heard the footsteps of Beethoven behind him), he could at times bring forth masterpieces almost in assembly line speed. Consider this sequence of compositions: Symphony No. 2 (1877), Violin Concerto (1878), Violin Sonata No. 1 (1879).

One of his great admirers and friends was the Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim, as famous a violinist in Europe as anyone in the 1870s. For Joachim, Brahms composed his sole violin concerto and with his advice followed with the violin sonata. (There is some evidence that Brahms had written several previous sonatas only to toss them as ultimately unworthy of his name.) Brahms was a great pianist, but had little ability with the violin, so it is clear that Joachim was a sturdy support for both the concerto and sonata. They both loved Clara Schumann and they were as close friends as she had. Ten years after the sonata was published, Clara wrote to Brahms to tell him that Joachim had stopped over and they played together the violin sonata. "I reveled in it," she wrote, "and I wish that the last movement could accompany me in my journey from here to the next world."

There are chamber works of the mature Brahms that one must "work on" to enjoy. Not so his first violin sonata, for it is as lyrical a work as Brahms ever wrote. Rather than the typical four movements, he kept it in three. (He reportedly wrote his publisher jokingly that he would accept 25% less that his usual fee as a result.) The title "Rain Sonata" has been applied to the sonata based on Brahms' use in the final movement of melodic material from his song "Regenlied""

Pour, rain, pour down,
Awaken the old songs,

That we used to sing in the doorway
When the raindrops pattered outside.
I would like to listen to it again,
That sweet, moist rushing,
My soul gently bedewed
With holy, childlike awe.

It is not surprising that with such a nostalgic world of looking-back, perhaps in melancholy, Brahms' music takes on the emotions of the poem. A three-note motto figure permeates the sonata as sort-of raindrop equivalent and appears in the very first notes of the violin at the sonata's beginning. The first movement shows off the piano and violin in equal partnership, both reflecting a tender, reflective mood. In the "Adagio" movement the music moves from a languid beginning through somber march to a flush of passion, then nostalgic reflection. And in the final movement, the rain of youth and its memories become described in the music.

DCA Trio Valtorna November 18, 2012

Max Bruch (1838-1920) **Pieces for Clarinet, Viola and Piano, Op. 83**

Comment: Some composers are principally known for one specific work; in the case of Max Bruch it's his G Minor violin concerto. But usually for such a composer, there is much more to find out. A not-too-long "bio-type" paragraph as in the first paragraph here can serve that purpose.

For a German child prodigy who had begun composing at the age of nine, Max Bruch also had a deep love of language. So it is that of the 100 opuses written in his lifetime, two-thirds of them are songs, choral works or operas. Though popular in his day, these works have slid into musical obscurity and Bruch is mainly remembered for his G Minor violin concerto, one of the great ones of the romantic era. (He did write two others.) Second in popularity is Kol Nidrei for cello and orchestra, based on "Hebrew Themes." With this work came the assumption that Bruch had Jewish roots, but there is no evidence of this. And he loved folk music, a fact that appears in his third most popular work, the Scottish Fantasia for violin, harp and orchestra. Though he lived well into the 20th century, he refused to abandon the romantic world of Mendelssohn and Schumann for the world of modernism.

His few chamber works are from youthful endeavors and none focused on the clarinet as did his Opus 83 that he wrote when he was 72 years of age. Waking up to the fact that his son was an excellent clarinetist, he composed "Eight Pieces" for the instrument, piano and viola. For reasons known only to the composer, he requested that all eight never be performed on the same program. The two on today's program illustrate the moodiness Bruch could achieve in eight different ways. "Romanische Melodie" (No. 5) has the flavor of folk themes, wistful and reflective. "Allegro vivace" (No. 7) elevates the spirit to such joys as skipping down the road in youthful abandon or chasing an escaping puppy and, in the last measures, grasping it in sheer delight. (This writer is the one suggesting these mental pictures, not the composer.)

DCA The Schumann Trio March 18, 2012

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Claude Debussy (1862-1918) Suite Bergamasque

Comment: On one visit to relatives in Northern Italy, I enjoyed a visit to Bergamo (also the birthplace of famed opera composer Gaetano Donizetti.) In addition to the '"mask" characters, Bergamo is famous for a dessert "polenta e osei." Though it looks like a mound of yellow polenta, it's sponge cake, with small chocolate "birds" emerging on top.

Bergamo, Italy, a hilly city some 30 miles east of Milan, is a major center in the development of the "commedia dell'arte" of the 16th century. For this, actors represented stock characters by the use of masks and colorful outfits, for example the clown "Arlecchino (Harlequin)" and the adventurer "Scaramuccia (Scaramouche)." These engaging characters later were transformed into "Punch and Judy" in England, with "Punch" derived from "Pulcinella," the persistent chaser of women. The characters often were simply referred to as "masks," thus the "Bergamo masks" or "Bergamasques."

Debussy's Suite Bergamasque provides four musical impressions of this comedic theatrical world. The most famous section, "Clair de lune," was inspired by the poem of the same name written by Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). The "commedia dell'arte" emerges in the first lines of the poem: "Your soul is a chosen landscape

Where charming masked and costumed figures stroll."

In the original French, the second line is: "Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques."

DCA Orli Shaham, Pianist April 24, 2004

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) L'Isle Joyeuse

Comment: How many musical compositions are inspired by art? Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition," and Respighi's "Botticelli Triptych," come to mind. Not surprisingly, an impressionist like Debussy looked to his French artists.

"Love" is the subject of Jean-Antoine Watteau's painting, "L'Embarquement pour l'ile de Cythère" (1717), the inspiration for Debussy's "L'Isle Joyeuse." In the painting, elegant French men and women in colorful dress are posed on a small hill overlooking water. They are in the process of arriving (or are they leaving?) this island of Cythère, the birthplace of Venus, whose statue on the pinnacle of the hill is enshrouded in flowers. In the French Rococo tradition, cherubs fly about, trying to decide which of the couples need help. A listener might hear in "L'Isle Joyeuse" leftover portions of "La Mer," the composer's depiction of the moods of the sea. The shimmering treble notes and rolling chords give a watery effect, but there are also horn calls, perhaps summoning cherubs to their duties. Whatever Debussy's musical impression provides to the listener, there's love in the air.

DCA Santiago Rodriguez, pianist October 15, 2000

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Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904) Cypresses for String Quartet

Comment: When a completely unknown work of a major composer is presented, one must dig into the composer's reason for writing it. It is not surprising to learn, ultimately, that it was love that stimulated the composer.

Songs by Dvorak transcribed for string quartet: "Death Reigns in Many a Human Breast" "When Thy Sweet Glances on Me Fall" "You Ask Why My Songs" "Nature Lies Peaceful in Slumber and Dreaming" "Thou Only Dear One, But For Thee"

Ah, first love!!! For Antonin Dvořák, Josefina Cermakova, one of his piano students, was definitely "it." How else to explain why this 23-year old (O.K. First love was a little late) would write 18 songs over just two weeks extolling the joys and pains of youthful love? The basis for the songs was a cycle of Romantic poems entitled "Cypresses" by the Czech poet Gustav Pfleger-Moravsky; themes of unrequited love, death, and nature pervaded. Just the fact that the cycle was named for the cypress tree, long a symbol of both sadness (Greek myth) as well as resurrection (Christian thought), provides an insight. Dvořák at that time of writing the songs was blossoming as a composer, having already written several symphonies and even an opera. Though he had longed for Josefina, she did not reciprocate his feelings, so Dvorak married her sister and their marriage was blessed with six children. Yet Josefina, now his sister-in-law, remained close to his heart. At the time he was composing his great cello concerto, she was terminally ill and Dvořák incorporated the melody of a favorite song of hers into both the second movement and finale.

Dvořák transcribed 12 of his cypress songs into string quartet form 22 years after composing the songs. By this time he was a mature composer. The five "Cypresses" chosen for today's concert illustrate the variety and beauty of Dvořák 's original intentions. The "Death" that reigns in the first Cypress is both questioning in urgency, but ultimately comforting. The "Glances" that fall in the second Cypress are in a major key and happily received by the youthful recipient. In the third, the sparkling joy and vivacity suggests that "Mother Nature" isn't having nightmares while dreaming. For "Thou only…" Dvořák invests the warmer aspects of strings in a lengthy arioso melody. The fifth Cypress is actually the final one of the twelve-part cycle, so we may surmise that the mood projected is the one that Dvořák deeply felt: one of questioning life, but ultimately relenting into se*renity.*

DSA The Lark Quintet with Gary Graffman, piano November 12, 2011

Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) Ritual Fire Dance (arranger unknown)

Comment: The challenge of giving another musical framework for a well-known work always provides special interest to the hearer. Here the Trio Solisti arranged Falla's most famous work for violin, cello and piano But the work itself has a fascinating piano performance history.

The "Ritual Fire Dance" is an exercise in musical frenzy. Arguably Manuel de Falla's most famous composition, this dance from the 1915 ballet "El Amor Brujo" ("Love, the Magician")

provides a gypsy girl, with the opportunity to exorcise herself from the ghost of her former husband, while whirling around a blazing fire. It was the great pianist Artur Rubenstein (1887-1982) who took Falla's own arrangement of the dance for piano, augmented it with judicious bravura notes in the conclusion and turned it into a sensation. At the first concert he performed the work, "the audience went wild," Rubenstein said, "and I had to repeat it three times."

From his studies in France and impressionist composers, Falla developed a style that took Spanish music to a higher level of color and harmony. Though Falla first arranged the "Fire" dance for chamber orchestra, it was the piano version that became one of the best known classical works of the 20th century through its programming by the pianists Rubenstein and Spanish-born Jose Iturbi (1895-1980). The latter actually became a movie star in some six MGM musicals, in several of which he performed the Falla work in grandiose style.

The beginning, a buzzing tremolando, quickly takes on a haunting repetitive theme. Then a quiet segment of pure rhythm suddenly bursts into fortissimo pulsating chords of Oriental exoticism. Ever advancing in urgency, the dance concludes with massive octaves and a final downward collapse that suggests the gypsy's purpose of destroying the ghost of her dead husband has been achieved. In fact, it hasn't, but you'd have to sit through the rest of the ballet to find that out.

DSA, Trio Solisti, April 3, 2011

Piano Quartet in C Minor (Op. 15) Gabriel Fauré (1845-1925)

Comment: Some chamber works are regarded as singularly beautiful as this Faure quartet. If the composer is not well known, some of the background that suggests all the difficulties that the composer had to reach such a pinnacle may help the reader to appreciate the work.

I. Allegro molto moderato II. Scherzo: Allegro vivo III. Adagio IV. Allegro molto

Gabriel Fauré is remembered principally for his Requiem. Though not a composer of immense output, Fauré produced works of singular beauty: French songs treasured by concert artists, music to accompany many dramas (e.g. Pelléas et Mélisande), and chamber music such as his two piano quartets. Like César Franck and Camille Saint-Saëns (the latter his teacher) he was an organist of great abilities. He supported his composing by being organist in some of the greatest of Paris churches. His composing years were followed by years of teaching with his students including Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger.

When Fauré began his active composing in the 1870s, the "middle class" was seeking salon music for performance. In 1877, Fauré entered this world with a highly successful violin sonata. Fauré then chose the larger challenge of a piano quartet. Economic difficulties, an aborted engagement (to the daughter of his long-time admirer and supporter, the great French soprano Pauline Viardot), and a finale he finally decided to discard---all created delays so that the quartet took seven years to complete.

The quartet's outer two movements frame an inner two that are among the gems of quartet literature. The first movement begins with unison strings that boldly proclaim the melody over

syncopated chords in the piano. A second theme is heard in short graceful measures. The writer J. B. Priestley sees the two themes as “great birds swooping and rising.”

The second movement is the essence of gallic wit and charm. It could be what An American in Paris would have sounded like if composed by a Frenchman. The strings are pizzicato; the rhythm alternates from 6/8 to 2/4. A lyrical trio contrasts the ambulatory first theme. The sadness of the adagio theme of the third movement has suggested to some an elegy for Fauré’s lost love, Marianne Viardot. The melody gains in strength by the addition of instruments to the cello. Walter Cobbett, chamber music expert, has stated that “Were this not very long movement to be lost to us, an immeasurable void would be created in the music of the nineteenth century.” The fourth movement with three musical subjects reflects the energy of the first movement and provides a full-circle in its ardent conclusion.

DCA The Ames Piano Quartet April 20, 1996

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Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936) Violin Concerto in A Minor

Comment: By 1996, the Board of the Danbury Symphony Orchestra, an orchestra of unpaid volunteers from talented amateurs to some of professional level, chose to hire a concertmaster, a key member for the positive evolution of the orchestra. For his debut performance, Alex Romanov chose a concerto that would be both enjoyable and new to the audience.

The prolific Russian composer Alexander Glazunov today is mainly remembered by some ballet music (Raymonda, The Seasons), a few of his eight symphonies, and his violin concerto. The talent of this young St. Petersburg man from a financially secure family was recognized early and in 1879 Rimsky-Korsakov became his teacher. Glazunov moved as a young man among the Russian Five (Alexander Borodin, Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Mily Balakirev, Modeste Musorgsky and Cesar Cui) and felt strongly the Russian nationalism they espoused in their music. Though Glazunov would never write music with such intense nationalism, he did help complete one of the great nationalist compositions, Borodin's opera Prince Igor, a work left in bits and pieces upon the death of its composer in 1887. Glazunov’s incredible memory retained so much of what he had heard Borodin play on the piano of the opera's themes that he and Rimsky-Korsakov were able to complete the opera.

As Glazunov developed his musical compositions he turned more to structure and lyricism in a sopra-national manner. He had particular early success when Franz Liszt championed his music. (Liszt had similarly helped Borodin gain a European foothold.) The English also found Glazunov’s music most attractive and he received honorary degrees from both Oxford and Cambridge. Though his compositions were many, he would compose little after 1905 when he was appointed head of the St. Petersburg Music Conservatory. There he would stay bridging the Czarist and Communist years and serving the next generation of Russian composers. Both Prokofiev and Shostakovich were his students. Shostakovich was particularly grateful to Glazunov, a man who never married and placed his whole being into raising the next generation of Russian composers. Though young Shostakovich, along with others first looked upon Glazunov as someone who had "backed into the twentieth century," Shostakovich would later write (in Testimony) that "Glazunov earned our respect. His practical knowledge in the important area of musical instruments was invaluable. For too many composers...have theoretical textbook knowledge and understanding, but no practical knowledge. Glazunov, for instance, learned to play the violin while writing his violin concerto. You must admit that's a heroic deed." The difficult years after World War I took its toll on the heavy-set Glazunov. He

held out until 1928 when he left Russia for Paris and his final years, including one trip to the United States where he conducted the Detroit Symphony in 1930.

The Glazunov Violin Concerto, written in 1904 for the virtuoso Leopold Auer, is among the shortest of the romantic concertos. The form is unusual in having no absolute separation of the three movements. The first two movements, except for brief portions of high-spiritedness, bring an overall sense of quiet and reflectiveness, all the more to contrast with the bountifully joyous finale. The concerto begins with an underpinning of pulsing orchestral chords and the violin introduces the first of two similar themes, the first full of melancholy, and the second more positive. A quiet passage leads to an andante section, a harp provides special atmosphere, and the violin plays a melody of lyrical beauty adding effective double-stopping. A quiet bridge to the second movement allows the orchestra to re-introduce both first themes for further comment by the violin. A lengthy cadenza that utilizes the first themes neatly segues into the final movement which, with a fanfare, introduces one of the happiest tunes found in any concerto. As the finale continues, the violin and orchestra engage in a conversation with variations on the tune showing off both the violinist and some of Glazunov's best orchestral writing.

DSO Alex Romanov, Violinist April 14, 1996

Charles Ives (1874-1954) "The Alcotts" from the Concord Sonata

Comment: Danbury, the "Hat City," spawned millions of men's felt hats including ones worn by Abraham Lincoln. Danbury also spawned Charles Ives, ever its favorite composer son. However, as Alred F. Rosa wrote in 1971 in an article about Ives' music: *"He has, in a sense, been condemned, as T. S. Eliot said of Ben Jonson, by the most perverse of conspiracies---to be much talked about and little heard."*

At the beginning of the 1900s, American classical composers were mainly New Englanders. One important group, known as the "Boston Six," included Edward MacDowell, Amy Beach and Horatio Parker. These composers studied in Germany or had German-trained music teachers here; no wonder their music had a romantic European bent. But Charles Ives, Parker's student at Yale, took a new direction, one that made his music "modern" and "American," even stretching toward dissonance and atonality by pairing one melody against another in his works. Many of those melodies were American hymns or songs of the Civil War learned in his youthful Danbury days from his father, who was a band leader in the Civil War.

After Yale, Ives had to mesh working in his New York insurance business with composing his many songs and symphonic works. Everything he did he attacked with great intensity, and in October 1918, Ives suffered a heart attack. It actually ended his life of composition and began a life of revising and assembling works previously written. The next fifteen years, with his wife Harmony, he was in artistic isolation in his West Redding home. One major project was the "Concord Sonata" based on music composed from 1904 to 1915.

A great admirer of the transcendentalist author Ralph Waldo Emerson, Ives sought to honor him and other authors of that tradition---Nathaniel Hawthorne, Luisa May Alcott and Henry David Thoreau--- all living in Concord, Massachusetts from 1840-1860. The sonata's first New York performance was in 1938 at Town Hall, where a review by the well-respected critic Lawrence Gilman stated: *This sonata is exceptionally great music--it is, indeed, the greatest music composed by an American, and the most deeply and essentially American in impulse and implication. …It has passions, tenderness, humor, simplicity, and homeliness [and] a sense of*

those mysteries that are both human and divine" Truth be told, the Concord Sonata's difficulties, both to performer and listener, has never made it a favorite in the concert hall.

The shortest and most lyrical of the movements honors the family life of philosopher Bronson Alcott and daughter Luisa May. Ives, in his Essays Before a Sonata, explains what he wished to achieve in this movement*: "[The] memory of that home under the elms—the Scotch songs and the family hymns that were sung at the end of each day…a strength of hope that never gives way to despair – a conviction in the power of the common soul which, when all is said and done, may be as typical as any theme of Concord and its transcendentalists."*

To a first listener, if you think the very first notes are similar to those "knocking of fate" notes from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, you're right. And before long Beethoven's "knock" will be plenty loud. Here is Ives at his cleverest because these notes also were the beginning notes to two hymns of the day: "Missionary Chant" and "Martyn." On their piano, the Alcotts played an arrangement of the symphony and many hymns, so in a typical Ives ploy, he coalesced hymns and Beethoven in just a few notes! Snatches of other tunes may be detected, including, midway, a well-disguised "Loch Lomond," one of the "Scotch" songs. Those Beethoven notes reappear majestically in the penultimate measures, but then quietly, reflectively fade away. Welcome back to Danbury, Mr. Ives.

DCA Llewellyn Sanchez-Werner, piano Nov. 13, 2016

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Two by Liszt

Comment: A masterwork of Franz Liszt is his Annees of Pelerinage, three suites bringing his world of travels into musical form, "Years of Pilgramage." The second suite "Deuxieme annee," of ten works all relates to aspects of Italian culture, but especially written works. Many pianists will choose one or two of these "Abbees" for their programs. The following two, from two different concerts, are both from "Deuxieme annee."

"Aprés Une Lecture du Dante" *From* Années de Pèlerinage, Deuxieme année (Years of Pilgrimage, Second Year)

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi retrovai per una selva oscura,
Che la diritta via era smarrita"

"In the middle of the road of our lives
I found myself in a dark forest
With the path no longer clear"

So begins *Inferno*, the first part of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy.* In view of the multiple journeys that Liszt took throughout Europe and his preoccupation with the sacred and profane in life, it is not surprising that he took these words to heart. The title "Aprés Une Lecture du Dante" the final work of his second "Years of Pilgrimage," is actually taken from a poem by Liszt's friend Victor Hugo. As Liszt's pianistic vision of Hell, the work is hellish, both for performer and listener, given the intensity of its drama. (Perhaps Hell is overflowing with notes!) Still some strains of transcendence appear a few times, and at the end another "h" word comes to mind: Hope.

DCA Gilles Vonsattel, piano April 21, 2007

Sonetto del Petrarca no. 104 in E Major

In a "Top Ten" list of the greatest composer-lovers, few would challenge the right of Franz Liszt to occupy the top spot. Among his most famous affairs was a decade of passion and co-habitation with the married Countess Marie d'Agoult. The liaison produced three children, including Cosima Liszt, who would become Richard Wagner's wife.

For Liszt, who embodied romanticism in word, deed, and music, it is not unexpected that he would find interest in the sonnets of Petrarch, the 14th century Italian humanist whose words dealt with all aspects of love. Liszt transformed three of the 360 sonnets into songs, then transcribed these for piano alone as his second set of "Années de pèlerinage" ("Years of Pilgrimage in Italy"). Sonnet 104 is a letter to a lover that begins, "Pace non trovo, e non ho da far guerra"("I don't find peace and don't have the desire to fight"). Thirteen more lines of self-pity leads to the final assessment of his depression: it's all because of the woman he adores! Liszt's "Sonetto" begins in modest agitation, moves to a central climax, but ends pensively, perhaps Liszt's musical musings whether some of the blame for the difficulties might be his.

DSA Jeffrey Biegel, Piano May 3, 2003

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Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959) Nonet No. 2

Comments: Some of the great European composers spent years in the United States during their most fertile composing years before returning to Europe. Dvorak and Prokofiev come quickly to mind in that regard. However especially because of pre-World War II angst, especially among Jewish composers, many composers chose to leave Europe permanently. Among these was the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinu.

It is possible that infant Bohuslav Martinů was infected with a good case of music by the daily tolling of bells in the church tower in the family's Bohemian town of Policka. It was, in fact, his father who was the bell ringer. Growing up in the Czech world, young Martinů went to Prague for initial musical studies, helped by monetary support of the townsfolk. There he became a fine violinist and a youthful composer. But he knew of the musical foment in Paris, so at the age of thirty-three during the "Roaring 20s" he moved there to study and be influenced by jazz and the music of Igor Stravinsky, whom he admired a great deal.

Escaping the Nazi hordes, Martinů came to the United States in 1941, living in trying conditions on Long Island, where he learned English by seeing the same movies over and over. Serge Koussevitzky of the Boston Symphony then brought him to the Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood) as a teacher in summer time. During his 1941-1946 stay in the United States, Martinů wrote five symphonies. Interestingly, his Symphony No. 3 was composed in Ridgefield, Connecticut in 1944, where he had come with his wife to get away from the big city life of New York. Martinů returned to Prague in 1946, but came back often to the United States, teaching at Princeton University. He ultimately became a citizen, but never again took up full-time residence here, preferring a life in Switzerland. Martinů became among the 20th century's most prolific composers with some 400 works (e.g. 39 concertos, 16 operas, 15 trios, and 6 symphonies).

Martinů's music is marked by rhythmic excitement, and the combination of the tone color of instruments, elements that are especially clear in this Nonet, one of his final works.

The first movement has a buoyant jauntiness to it, a bit of the Parisian influence Martinů experienced in the 1920s, with strings and winds in friendly competition. The second movement contrasts dramatically with the first as a sense of melancholy pervades. (It is true that Martinů was terminally ill at the time he wrote the Nonet.) But in the third movement the composer brings a sense of the folk rhythms of his native Czechoslovakia to the fore, something quite appropriate because Martinů had often indicated that the music of his homeland provided great influence to him.

The Nonet No. 2 was premiered in 1959 at the Salzburg Festival by the Czech Nonet, to whom the work was dedicated. In fact, when the Czech Nonet performed for the Danbury Concert Asssociation in 2004, on their program was their Martinů gift.

DCA Frisson November 11, 2018

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) Concerto for Violin and String Orchestra in D minor

Comment: Who knew there was more than one Mendelssohn violin concerto? This writer didn't until a Russian group brought it to Danbury.

In this year [2009] of celebrating Mendelssohn's 200th birthday, we are reminded that young Felix, like Mozart, was a genuine prodigy. While Mozart at 16 had written the Divertimento that opens today's program, Mendelssohn at 13 had already written this D Minor violin concerto for a beloved teacher and friend, Edmund Rietz. The concerto was basically forgotten for some 130 years until the great violinist Yehudi Menuhin was shown the manuscript in London in 1951 by its musicologist owner. Menuhin excitedly gained the Mendelssohn family's permission to edit it for performance and played its American premiere in 1952 in Carnegie Hall.

Perhaps it was because Mendelssohn wrote his magnificent E Minor violin concerto 22 years later that this youthful concerto was overlooked. But there are several more likely reasons for the oversight. First, Mendelssohn was reluctant to publish his many compositions, since he was a musical tinkerer and liked to revisit them for further work. Also, just three years after Mendelssohn's death, Richard Wagner published his first anti-Semitic writings, which resulted in direct attacks on Jewish composers, preeminent at that time being Mendelssohn (though he had become a Christian years before.) It was one reason why Mendelssohn and his music were soon out of favor under the powerful voice of Wagner.

Prior to composing this concerto, Mendelssohn had already written many so-called "string symphonies," so it was natural that the concerto would be for string orchestra and violin. A rambunctious allegro opening movement is followed by a reflective andante of equal length. The short final movement has a gypsy-like feeling. It seems that the amusing final measures suggest young Felix wasn't quite certain how to end the concerto.

DCA Chamber Orchestra Kremlin October 4, 2009

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) Octet for Strings

Comment: As in the case of Samuel Barber, the history of the composer's family can be fascinating. That surely is the case with Felix Mendelssohn. Featuring the first great composition of this composer allowed a chance to visit with the Mendelssohn family.

In a recent interview, the pianist Alfred Brendel stated that Mendelssohn as a composer was a greater "teenage genius" than Mozart. Certainly it is true that nothing young Mozart wrote at sixteen was as masterly as Mendelssohn's Octet for Strings. Young Felix was the descendant of several generations of the family considered in their time to be "the Rothschilds of culture." So important was the Mendelssohn family to German arts and letters that in 1820, the 72-year-old Goethe welcomed the eleven-year-old Felix to visit him for several weeks. The youthful Felix played some of his own compositions for Germany's literary giant, but also some by Bach, a favorite of Goethe. Years later Mendelssohn would be a key player in bringing Bach out of the shadows and into his rightful place in music history. Music cascaded from the brain of the teenager. In his thirteenth year alone, he composed six symphonies, five concertos, and a three-act opera entitled The Uncle from Boston. He and his beloved sister Fanny even put on performances of Shakespeare for the family during the Sunday afternoon cultural events sponsored by the Mendelssohn family in their Berlin home. From such experiences, 17-year-old Felix was inspired to compose some of the most famous music ever written—the Overture to Midsummer's Night's Dream.

But it was when he was sixteen that Mendelssohn composed the Octet. It was a groundbreaking work, for though octets for wind instruments were common at the time, there were none for strings alone. By the time of the Octet, Mendelssohn had written a dozen of what are now called his "String Symphonies." With this experience, it is not surprising that his first masterpiece would be a composition for strings.

The first movement is all exuberance, with the vigorous theme, in its upward thrust, seemingly releasing skyward the magical romantic notions from the classically trained youth. The second movement, slower and more lyrical, with a tinge of melancholy, leads to the gem of the composition, the scherzo. It is a prize example of the light, transparent, and joyful movements that would become a Mendelssohn trademark. Fanny Mendelssohn wrote of this Octet's scherzo: "It is a complete success. The whole piece is played staccato and pianissimo, with shivering tremolandos and light, brilliant flashes." The final movement begins fugally, then chatters energetically to bring to a conclusion the composition that Ernest Sanders states is "perhaps the singularly most astonishing creation by so young a composer in the history of Western music."

DSA Chamber Orchestra Kremlin November 10, 2002

Paul Moravec (b. 1957) Tempest Fantasy for Piano Trio and Clarinet
Three movements: Ariel, Sweet Airs, Fantasia

Comment: It is rare indeed when a concert features a Pulitzer Prize work performed by the group for whom the composition was written.

Paul Moravec, a member of the music department at Adelphi University, composed *Tempest Fantasy* for the Trio Solisti and clarinetist David Krakauer and he won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize in

music for it. How this work came to be is illustrative of compositional evolution. Because of a longtime friendship with violinist Maria Bachmann, Moravec dedicated a short piano piece to her in 1996. She asked him to convert it for violin and piano, which he did; he named it "Ariel Fantasy," referring to that spritely character in Moravec's favorite Shakespeare play, *The Tempest*. So taken was Bachmann with the result that she suggested Moravec write a longer work on the Tempest theme for the Trio Solisti. As had Brahms, Moravec greatly respected a clarinetist, in this case David Krakauer, so he composed a five-movement work for piano trio and clarinet----and the rest is Pulitzer Prize history.

The three movements of the fantasy to be heard show Moravec's capacity to give every instrument a chance to show off with both beautiful and unusual sounds. Melodic fragments are the order of the day, often in endearing rhythms. The briskness of the first movement, "Ariel," suggests a modern version of a Mendelssohn scherzo. The intensely lyrical "Sweet Airs" reflects the beauty of Caliban's words:

"Be not afraid; the isle is full of noises,

Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not."

Though the two movements "Prospero" and "Caliban" will not be played tonight, aspects of the composer's music about them exist in the final movement, "Fantasia," a frenetic, but joyful congregation of all the composers "flights of purely musical fancy" about *The Tempest*.

Moravec, in a radio interview in 2006, remarked that he was one of today's composers seeking to bring "memorability back into music," meaning, among other things, tunefulness and tonality.

DSA Trio Solisti April 5, 2008

Flute Concerto in D Major (K. 314). Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Comment: A great plus for writing about a work of Mozart are the hundreds of letters that the genius wrote, often to his father. They certainly add to the knowledge of Mozart's thinking on various matters and in this case it shows that his need for monetary sustenance led him to seek money for commissions even though he may have disliked the instrument he had to write for.

Mozart's trip to Mannheim in late 1777 had as a purpose his possible employment by the enlightened supporter of the arts, the Elector Karl Theodor. At the very least, Mozart hoped that he might tutor some, if not all, of the four illegitimate children of the Elector. But as throughout Mozart's life, he would not receive from royalty any lengthy employment. He did, however, through friendship with the principal flautist of the famous Mannheim orchestra, receive a commission from a Dutch surgeon, an amateur flautist. As Mozart wrote to his father on Dec. 10, 1777, for 200 gulden he had to compose "three short, simple concertos and a couple of quartets for the flute." Two months later Mozart had finished two concertos and three quartets, only to be paid 96 gulden for his work. In a confessional letter to his father (for Mozart consistently received written berating from his father for his poor finances), Mozart admitted to receiving less than half of the original promised payment. Mozart wrote: "[Father] you know that I become quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument which I cannot bear." The diminished payment may have been appropriate since the Flute Concerto in D Major (the

second of the concertos written) was in fact a transcription of Mozart's already written and successful oboe concerto. Regarding the music of this concerto, the ever present sense of melody (writers constantly refer to Mozart's sense of a "vocal line" in all his music) pervades the first two movements, while the rondo finale allows the flute's perkiness to take center stage.

DCA I Solisti New York with Ransom Wilson, flutist May 21, 1995

W. A. Mozart (1756-1791) Piano Concerto No. 24 in C Minor, K 491 (arranged by Ignaz Lachner)

Comment: Danbury audiences have heard a trio (piano, violin, cello) perform their version of Moussorgskys "Pictures at an Exhibition," an 11-membe group perform Rimsky-Korsakov'e orchestral beauty," Cappricio Espagnol"(see later) as well as the aforementioned DeFalla "Ritual Fire Dance." Arrangements can bring new insight to a composition.

It would seem that some composers are born with a gene that makes them want to take someone else's composition of smaller dimensions and make it much grander. Cases in point:
1) Maurice Ravel who took Moussorgsky's piano work "Pictures at an Exhibition" and gave it a magnificent orchestration;

2) Modernist Arnold Schoenberg who decided that a piece he dearly loved---Brahms' Piano Quartet No. 1---needed to be orchestrated because too many pianists played the work too loudly, he said, and "you hear nothing from the strings. I wanted once to hear everything, and this I achieved."

Then there are composers born with a gene that urges them to take a work and shrink it. So it seems to be with Ignaz Lachner (1807-1895), a German who, though a composer in his own right, sought to make some of Mozart's piano concertos more accessible to musicians by transcribing them for piano and string quartet and bass. Today provides a sample of Lachner's talent for "shrinking"

For two-thirds of his short life, Mozart produced 26 piano concertos that brought the form to a new level of perfection. The vast majority of the concertos provided an energetically restrained and melodious first movement, a second movement of serenity and beauty, then a conclusion overflowing with verve and joyous energy, helped by being in major keys. The Viennese found Mozart's concertos most entertaining, so, as the Mozart biographer Alfred Einstein suggested, it would be hard to imagine the expression on the faces of the Viennese audience when on April 7, 1786, Mozart played for them a work in a minor key, his 24th piano concerto. Instead of the expected ebullient Mozart, they heard a work of passion and gravity, one that deeply impressed Beethoven more than any of Mozart's others.

What immediately sets this concerto apart from others of its time is the lengthy orchestral introduction, some two minutes long. (Beethoven would similarly begin his Piano Concerto No. 3 with such a waiting time.) One would expect with such an introduction that the opening notes of the soloist would be something mighty and unforgettable. Mighty, no, but unforgettable, yes: the simplest and quietest of themes, one that would pervade the movement, with strokes of dynamic force, only ending the movement in almost a whisper. The Larghetto movement

provides one of Mozart's calmest and longing melodies, a contrast to the two movements it separates. The final movement, structured as a theme-and-variations, returns to the sense of sadness, albeit with incredible cleverness in the variations. But Mozart doesn't let up on the emotional sense of the minor key, ending the concerto with several emphatic chords.

One writer has spoken of the "brooding darkness" of the entire work. And some see despair in the music. Yet Mozart in early 1786 was premiering his "Marriage of Figaro," while working on concertos #22, #23 and #24. Clearly he was at the top of his musical powers. Perhaps in #24 he was echoing some of his own despair, yet in "Figaro" he provided a comic masterpiece. Geniuses, it would seem, are quite capable of juggling all emotions at the same time.

DCA Fine Arts Quartet with Alon Goldstein, piano May 21, 2017

Otto Nicolai (1810-1849) Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

Comment: A writer should always look on how to connect the world of ages past with that of the present. An example of this occurs at the end of the first paragraph of this note.

Otto Nicolai is a member of the "I'm-remembered-for-only-one-opera" Club like Engelbert Humperdinck (*Hansel and Gretel*) and Ruggiero Leoncavallo (*Pagliacci*.) He had little time to enjoy the very successful Berlin premiere of *Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor* in 1849 for he died two months later. Born and raised in Germany, Nicolai called Vienna his home from 1837 to 1847 when he held a variety of important musical posts, including the head of the Hofopera. From members of that opera's orchestra he initiated the Philharmonic Concerts and thus created the Vienna Philharmonic. (So as you rouse yourself on New Year's Day and watch the Vienna Philharmonic on TV in their traditional New Year's concert of Viennese waltzes and polkas, thank Otto!)

Few opera overtures are happier experiences than this curtain raiser to Nicolai's version of the Falstaff story. From the wonderfully atmospheric quiet beginning to the rousing conclusion, Nicolai used melodies from the third act to structure the overture. In this final act of the opera, the Mistresses Ford and Page have tricked the corpulently amorous Falstaff into an evening masquerade in Windsor Forest to receive his comeuppance. The quiet, opening measures of the overture is the music of the moonrise. The Mistresses' friends have come dressed as elves and the *vivace* melody that follows is their dance. Next is an "infectious, lilting theme" not used in the opera, but Wagner (not to let a good thing escape) stole it for *Die Meistersinger*! The overture continues with snippets of other melodies and a rousing conclusion that puts a joyful cap on a masterpiece.

DSO An Evening in Vienna IV May 8, 1999

George Perle (1915-2009) Toccata (1969)

Comment: Sometimes artists will choose works for their program not knowing of a "local" connection to the composer and the note writer is only too happy to bring that connection

into the prose. And, as always in any modern work, it is good to have the composer's words about the composition.

George Perle may not be well known to the average classical music listener, but he was an influential composer and professor of music in many universities; his books on "twelve-tone" music and on the music of Alban Berg are considered classics. As the New York Times said in Perle's obituary: "He seemed not to mind that his writings on music theory, Berg and 12-tone music had overshadowed his own composition for much of his life." A composer in a variety of forms, he received a 1986 Pulitzer Prize for his Fourth Wind Quintet. His well-received Piano Concerto No. 1 (1990), commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, was recorded featuring pianist Michael Boriskin, who for years was a Danbury resident. Perle was so pleased by Boriskin's performance that he wrote a second piano concerto and dedicated it to Boriskin.

In Italian, the verb "toccare" means "to touch, to feel, to handle," as in this writer's recalling his mother telling him: "Non ti tocca quella torta" ("Don't touch that cake!") But in piano music, the name "toccata" suggests aspects of pulsing, percussive music. Of course, there is nothing more important in piano playing than "touch," so in one sense all works are toccatas. But as a musical form, it is one of the earliest, particularly in organ music.

Perle wrote this about the 1969 work: "The Toccata, like almost everything I've written but rather more decisively than many of the pieces that precede it, I think, reflects my preoccupation through all these years with something one might provisionally call 'post-diatonic tonality.' If I tried to say anything more about this concept in this brief note, it would be misunderstood. Besides, I hesitate to tell listeners in advance what they *ought to hear in a new work of mine, beyond what is already implied in the title itself."*

DCA, Michael Brown, piano November 16, 2013

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Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) La Valse

Comment: How unexpected that a Frenchman should compose a paean to the Viennese waltz. So in the notes, the rationale for Ravel's work must include the "Great War." It brought to an end the Austro-Hungarian Empire that had thrived in its Viennese capita for decades to "three-quarter time"

La Valse brought Maurice Ravel's lifelong interest in the waltz to its highest point. Though the work was completed in 1920, as early as 1906 Ravel wrote to a friend: "What I'm undertaking at the moment is not subtle: a grand waltz, a sort of homage to the memory of the great Strauss—not Richard, the other one, Johann." His intent was clear for the original title of the piece was "Wien" (Vienna). But the work had a long gestation period, being delayed by "The Great War," during which Ravel served as an ambulance driver and saw the horrors of the battlefield at first hand. What had started as a positive, romantic work honoring Viennese three-quarter time instead turned into the ironic La Valse. Ravel composed the work for orchestra, originally for a ballet that never came to pass. Later he transcribed it for piano.

From the ghostly beginning sounds of La Valse, a waltz emerges. (Some commentators have suggested a musical development as if Edgar Allen Poe was the composer.) A slow transformation brings the full waltz melody into creation with a pulsating rhythm. A series of

waltzes follow, with alternating loud and soft sequences. Ravel expected the listener to be transported back to ages past for he himself wrote that "through breaks in the swirling crowds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed." With mounting force, the waltz reaches an "apotheosis," and the melody is torn apart in a cataclysmic conclusion. Can we not assume it was Ravel's way of noting that the beauty, the elegance*, the nobility of "old Vienna" now had vanished into shadowy memories?*

DSA Xiayin Wang, piano April 10, 2016

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Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) Capriccio Espagnol (adapted)

Comment: Clearly in writing this program note, I was reflecting on the deficiency in today's early education for impressionable minds to be exposed to the great variety of music instruments and the energy of much of classical music.

If this writer should ever be called upon to teach a course in music appreciation, the first music he would play for students would be Capriccio Espagnol, in the glory of its masterful full orchestration. How could anyone not be immediately caught up in the energy and enthusiasm of the music? Rimsky-Korsakov begins with an "Alborada," literally a "song at dawn," but it's a mighty tempestuous dawn. The variations that follow give some reflective time before the "Alborada" returns. The final two sections, a gypsy song and fandango, meld together as the Spanish dance rhythm propels the music to a crashing conclusion.

But there is so much more to the composition. On closer inspection, one finds it the perfect guide to the effective use of almost every instrument of the orchestra. Rimsky-Korsakov, in his Autobiography, made emphasized this: "Melodic designs and figuration patterns, exactly suiting each instrument, brief virtuoso cadenzas for instrument solo, the rhythm of the percussion instruments, etc., constitute here the very essence of the composition and not its garb or orchestration." Perhaps that is why the composer/pianist Easley Blackwood, who has taught for over forty years at the University of Chicago, chose to arrange this "Caprice on Spanish Themes" for a chamber ensemble. It is this version that is heard at this concert, clarifying even further the individual instrument's importance.

DCA The New York Chamber Ensemble April 6, 2002

Overture to "William Tell" Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

Comment: For children in the 1930s and 1940s, the "William Tell Overture" could not have been missed. Mickey Mouse conducted it in one of the great Disney cartoons, "The Band Concert," and the hoofs of the Lone Ranger's mighty horse Silver pounded out of the radio to the sounds of the overture's finale five times a week. It truly is one of the first "tone poems," with the music painting very distinct pictures.

…..And after his 39th opera he rested. It was in Paris in 1830, among an admiring audience, that Rossini ended his incredible output of operas with William Tell, an opera about the legendary

hero of Swiss independence. Rossini had adapted many of his Italian operas for the Parisian public, but this was the first fully for them, a “grand” opera. Rossini worked especially hard to write an overture unlike any other he had ever written. The resulting masterpiece was, in the inimitable words of George Bernard Shaw, “the very quintessence of all [Rossini’s] claptrap.” Beginning in the cellos, the overture rises like the sun only to be countered by an alpine storm. A serene clearing of the air follows with the famous trumpet call shattering the calm and announcing the entrance of Swiss soldiers. The quickstep that follows still brings the thrill of patriotic fervor to any listener in any land. After William Tell, Rossini mounted his symbolic operatic steed Argento and rode off into the life of the rich and famous, living another 38 years, but composing no more operas (and very little else for that matter.

DSO November 3, 1991

Franz Schubert Symphony No.8 in B Minor, "Unfinished"

Comment: Writing about well-known works, such as Schubert’s “Unfinished,” makes a writer dig for something unusual . Schubert’s “Unfinished” melodies ending up on Broadway provided something different to the reader.

Schubert, a genius in music, may have accidentally been a genius in advertising, too. By not "finishing" his symphony, he propounded the marketing ploy that "You gotta have a gimmick!" But did he really leave the symphony "unfinished?" Fragments of a scherzo movement exist that was in the same discovered bundle of Schubert's music containing the symphony. But they may have been unrelated in fact. No one will ever know. Yet, few symphonies seem more complete in mood and impact than the "Unfinished." Schubert may well have recognized this and decided nothing could top these two movements. After all, he, the "Bohemian,” would be the first to say that there is no musical commandment that states "Thou shalt have four movements!"

The symphony's opening measures in the lower strings provide a somber mood that quickly leads to the first theme. This melody, in a minor key, has a rolling quality and soon gives way to the second theme, one of the most beloved symphonic tunes ever written. Sigmund Romberg, unlike Schubert, would make a bundle of money from this melody by using it as the basis for "Song of Love," the hit song of Blossom Time, the 1926 operetta loosely based on Schubert's life. In addition, millions of young radio listeners to Walter Damrosch's NBC Music Appreciation series on Friday mornings in the 1930s would learn the melody and sing it to Damrosch's words: "This is the sympho--nee that Schubert wrote and never fin-ished." The remainder of the movement finds the two themes altered and reviewed. The movement ends much as it began, with the somber first notes. The beginning of the second movement is peaceful, but soon there are emphatic stridings in the orchestra. A return to calm and melancholy ends the symphony.

DSO Nov. 9, 1997

Alexander Scriabin Two Poèmes, Op. 32; Waltz, Op. 38; Vers la Flamme, poème, Op. 72

Comment: Sometimes a writer is presented with an unexpected good way to end, as happened in this brief overview of works by Scriabin.

Alexander Scriabin, along with Sergei Rachmaninoff, provided more works for piano than other Russian composers. At one point they were students together at the Moscow Conservatory, Where Scriabin, a composer in his teens, developed a great love for the music of Chopin even to the point, it is said, that he slept with a book of Chopin's compositions under his pillow. As famous as Scriabin was in Russia and Europe, it was late in the 20th century before he came into prominence in this country, helped by Vladimir Horowitz who included Scriabin's works in his concerts. Scriabin lived two different compositional lives: the first under the Chopin shadow and the second under a life of mystical influence, having succumbed to influences from Nietsche to Hinduism . These two lives appear in today's program: the Poèmes and Waltz from the first life (where the Chopin influence is clear) and "Vers la Flam me" (one of his last piano works) from his mystical world. According to Horowitz, who knew Scriabin, "Vers la Flamme: depicts earth's succumbing to ever increasing heat in the atmosphere. How topical is that?

Xiayin Wang, Piano November 8, 2009

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Josef Suk (1874-1935) Elegy for Piano Trio, Op. 23 (1902)

Comment: Sometimes travel provides help in understanding a composer's inspiration. Having been to Prague and toured the Vysehrad castle, I found this very comfortable to write about.

Prague, the red-roofed city on the Moldau River and center of Czech culture, is dominated by Vysehrad, an ancient castle and fortress that stands on one of the cities "seven hills." In 1874 Bedrich Smetana completed his six-part masterpiece, Ma Vlast (My Fatherland), which begins with a musical depiction of medieval activities in that ancient castle. That same year Josef Suk was born into a musical family and Vysehrad would also be an inspiration for him. Josef was taught by his father both in violin and piano and then was sent to the Prague Conservatory for studies in composition, where he became the favorite student of Antonin Dvorak. Suk would begin a life as a composer, a son-in-law of Dvorak, and a longtime member of the Czech Quartet. His compositions broke-away from the folk traditions of Dvorak and commentators on Suk's music have noted a particular melancholy in many of his orchestral and chamber works. This is certainly true in his Elegy, a work coming from an epic poem by a Czech poet about that hilltop castle Vysehrad. The short work sets an immediate lamenting theme from the violin, then quietly joined by the cello. Shortly the piano enters forcefully, driving the strings to agitation, yet quickly returns to a meditative state that brings the piece to a gentle conclusion. Left behind is the memory of a haunting work by a composer largely forgotten.

DCA, Brown—Urioste—Canellakis Trio April 2, 2017

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Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) Capriccio Italien

Comment: There are certain times when you can let your imagination run wild, especially for music that has a mix of great joy as well as some sadness. Emotions run high in

much of the music of Tchaikovsky and in his Capriccio Italien a possible story came to mind---and became the essence of the *program note.*

Tchaikovsky loved the warmer climes. What Russian wouldn't?. So in 1880, to regain his composure after several years of depression (including his ill-conceived marriage that lasted two months), he traveled to Italy. It was from pre-Lenten Rome that he wrote his patroness Madame von Meck: "I am putting together a fantasia based on tunes heard in this sunny country." This would become the Capriccio Italien, commencing with a fanfare heard from nearby police barracks.

This writer sees a plot in Capriccio Italien, a possible MGM short musical film entitled "A Russian in Rome." The story would go something like this. It is the day before Lent (Mardi Gras) and Tchaikovsky leaps from bed, awakened by the trumpets from the local constabulary. The first thoughts are of his homeland ("heavy" theme in the lower strings.) He sits and writes his patroness: "Though I am here in this beautiful sunny world, I am first and foremost a Russian." Nostalgia for St. Petersburg overcomes him, but the second blast from trumpets animates him to the Italian world. He goes out onto the balcony and hears in the distance a beautiful Italian song (woodwinds first play the theme, then harmonizing trumpets.). He dresses quickly and walks to the street as two more songs are played by a small group in a tiny park. He sits down on a bench to enjoy them, but again he's overcome by melancholy (return of first theme.)

Suddenly around the corner comes a vibrant group of Roman youngsters dancing a "saltorella," ("saltare' in Italian is "to jump"), tambourines flashing. Tchaikovsky follows the dancers at a distance as they wind through the narrow sun-browned streets. Rounding a corner (the orchestra in a slow emphatic transition), he finds himself in the Piazza Navonna along with half of Rome hearing again in glorious orchestration the first Italian song he'd heard from the balcony. The dancers and musicians spiral about the Bernini Fountain of the Four Rivers. Suddenly the dancers spot the bearded, pale-faced stranger and pluck him from the crowd and vault him to the top of the gushing fountain. The music comes to a crashing conclusion.

THE END

"Ars Gratia Artis"

DSO May 9, 1998

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Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, No. 1 in B-Flat Minor, Opus 23

Comment: When such a great story exists around how one of the great piano concertos first came to life, it needs to be told. And, knowing it or not, my generation had heard Tchaikovsky's melodies in many a popular song.

Poor Tchaikovsky! He spent the vast portion of his life close to poverty only to have the composers of Tin Pan Alley make a fortune off his melodies long after he was dead. In those great song years just before World War Two, Pyotr Il'yich had three hit songs --- MOON LOVE (adapted from the second movement of his Fifth Symphony), OUR LOVE (a theme from the Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture) then the giant hit TONIGHT WE LOVE (using the main theme from today's piano concerto.) Can we blame the songwriters for stealing those melodies? (Well, stealing may be a bit harsh as the melodies were in public domain.) Do you know of any

greater melodist in history than Tchaikovsky? For example, consider just the catchy melodies that follow one after the other in the complete Swan Lake Ballet or the complete Nutcracker. How could any one human be so melodically inspired? There is only one answer --- Tchaikovsky simply had the gift. (Yes, he did incorporate folk songs into some compositions including both of today's works, but most of the time, the melodies came straight from his head.) Add to this his talent as a master orchestrator and the result is great music from the romantic era. He used the traditional number of instruments and provided a special clarity to his orchestrations. One reason for this is his use of woodwinds. Pay special attention to that and you'll have an insight into the secret of Tchaikovsky's music.

On October 25, 1875, proper Bostonians had the treat of a lifetime – the world premiere of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto! How Boston became the site for the first performance demands an explanation. Quite simply, Tchaikovsky's boss at the Moscow Conservatory goofed! Here's what happened. Tchaikovsky, after completing his studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, took a position as teacher, for about $25.00 a week, at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory. The director of the conservatory was Nicolay Rubinstein, a great pianist and brother of an even greater pianist, Anton Rubinstein. The self-critical Tchaikovsky, himself not well-versed on the piano, completed the concerto over two months at the end of 1874. On Christmas Eve, he showed Nicolay the concerto manuscript for his constructive criticism and even played it (as best he could.) Nicolay, his "boss," showed no Christmas spirit; he mercilessly chopped the concerto to pieces declaring it, ultimately, impossible to play. Tchaikovsky was stunned for he had even dedicated the concerto to Nicolay. He recovered quickly enough to change the dedication. Without altering a note of the concerto, he dedicated it to Hans von Bülow (then the reigning European pianist) and sent him the manuscript. Von Bülow responded enthusiastically writing to Tchaikovsky that "The ideas are so original, so noble, characteristics which compel me to congratulate equally the composer and those who are destined to enjoy it." And the first of those millions so destined would be Bostonians. Von Bülow was about to begin his first tour of the United States so he took the Concerto with him. Since his first concerts were in Boston, he decided to introduce Tchaikovsky's concerto there. Well, that's the story. The Bostonians thought it interesting and unusual. One reviewer at the premiere spoke of "the extremely difficult, strange, wild, ultra-modern Russian Concerto…the composition of a young professor at the Conservatory of Moscow." Von Bulow covered all the major Eastern centers of culture in his tour of 139 concerts. As a result the concerto was the first major work of Tchaikovsky to be heard throughout the major concert centers of the United States.

Oh, by the way, Nicolay Rubinstein eventually changed his mind about the concerto!

I. *Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso: Allegro con spirito*.

The beginning measures of the concerto are perhaps the best known of any concerto. French horns provide the descending notes (in minor key) that lead to the crashing upward chords of the piano entry. This introduction of the great "tune" of the concerto is in D major! Indeed, the "tune" and its repeat is the last time this gorgeous theme will be heard in the concerto. The minor key returns after the lengthy introduction. Quietly, a distant trumpet call announces the real musical meat of the movement, first a jerky, jaunty theme (adapted by Tchaikovsky from a song he heard beggars sing), then several lyrical themes that contrast. The lengthy movement

plays upon these themes building to a central climax by orchestra alone for fifty measures, then joined explosively by the pianist in double octaves soaring upward. This is not the end of the movement, but it pre-figures the same approach (mounting energy by the orchestra over many measures) that will in fact be the brilliant ending to the concerto.

II. *Andantino semplice; Prestissimo.*

The movement, with its main theme of almost lullaby mood, could not be more of a contrast between the more frenetic first and third movements. The beautiful theme is introduced by a flute, then taken up by the piano, and then moves to cellos. A scherzo-like middle introduces a waltz-like melody taken from a French song of the composer's younger days. The movement ends with a return of the lyrical first theme.

III. *Allegro con fuoco*

"Fiery fast" is one translation of the movement's notation. It doesn't have to be fast, but it surely must be burning as the piano introduces the first theme, having a fiery Cossack flavor. This is contrasted with the second theme, a melody whose first four notes have a distinct relationship to the four-note introductory theme of the concerto. This will be the melody that Tchaikovsky uses for the final climax of the concerto, an ending that finds the orchestra loudly proclaiming the theme while the piano provides dramatic movement in ascending octaves to a fortissimo ending.

DSO November 14, 1999

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VIENNA—City of Music

Comnent: This is the type of program note often for a concert featuring one type of music. A concert of Viennese music needed a brief overview of how Vienna had become a center for the music of 19th century Europe.

All the beautiful compositions on tonight's program are by composers either born in Vienna or whose musical lives matured there. It may seem a bit odd to talk about cemeteries first, but the composers buried in the cemeteries of Vienna tell the story of Vienna's greatness in music:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Carl Czerny, Christoph Willibald Gluck, Gustav Mahler, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Antonio Salieri, Arnold Schoenberg, Franz Schubert, Johann Strauss, Sr., Johann Strauss, Jr., Josef Strauss, Franz von Suppe, Hugo Wolf. Though both Franz Josef Haydn and Anton Bruckner knew Vienna as their home, they are buried in other Austrian cities.

Vienna was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, an enormous amount of Europe that had been accumulated by the Hapsburgs, the ruling house of Austria, over centuries through marriage and war. With the ascendancy of the Empress Maria Theresa (who reigned from 1740-1780), the empire came to be reorganized, giving an increasing importance to its capital Vienna. People came there because it was the seat of power and the site of a great deal of money. Music abounded from salons to restaurants. The Court and the Church, as well as the "middle class," provided opportunities for composers to be heard.

The Viennese loved the good life, and the great composers themselves bear evidence to this themselves. Haydn, in 1790, wrote from his modest habitat at the Esterhazy's, where he was court composer, to thank a Viennese hostess for "those beautiful musical evenings." He compares his meals in his "mess" as the Esterhazy's to those in Vienna:

> "Instead of that delicious slice of beef, a chunk of a cow 50 years old; instead of a ragout with little dumplings, an old sheep with carrots; instead of pastry, [I get] dry apple-fritters and hazelnuts…forgive a man whom the Viennese spoiled terribly."

Beethoven recognized the good life in Vienna also. In the summer of 1794 he wrote to his publisher Simrock:

> "It's very hot here; the Viennese are anxious, they will soon not have any ices left…They have arrested several persons of consequence here, they say a revolution was about to break out---but I believe, so long as the Austrian still has porter and sausages, he won't revolt."

And then along came the Strauss family to give the Viennese the gift of the waltz, and the Viennese operetta came to be the rage. It all fit into the sense of the need for entertainment and good times. Perhaps the Danube was more brown than blue, but that didn't matter. All in all, life was good.

DCA Amadeus Virtuosi of New York, May 22, 2004

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Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) I Quatro Stagioni (The Four Seasons), op. 8, nos. 1-4

I. La primavera, (Spring), E major II. L'estate (Summer), G minor
III. L'autunno (Autumn), F major IV. L'inverno (Winter), F Minor

Comment: The hugely popular "Four Seasons" provides a chance to do some outlining of each "season" as if each is one act of a four-act play, adding a little humor to the inevitability of seasonal changes.

In the watery musical history of Venice, one name now floats above all others---Antonio Vivaldi. Born of a violinist father, he too became a master of that instrument and became a major force in the evolution of the concerto form in music. Renowned in musical circles in Europe during his lifetime, for several hundred years after his death, he essentially disappeared from the musical scene. The musicologist H.C. Robbins Landon describes one special event in that re-birth as follows: *In 1950, I happened to be in New York when the famous Cetra recording of The Four Seasons arrived at The Liberty Music Shop and a clerk put it on. The shoppers, myself included, stopped their own activities and started to listen, entranced, to this seductive music which had lain forgotten on library shelves for two hundred years. The Vivaldi renaissance had begun.*

As popular as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* now is (there are some ninety versions currently available on CDs), not too many realize that it was meant to be program music. When Vivaldi sent the four concertos entitled *I Quatro Stagioni* to a publisher in Amsterdam in 1725, he provided sonnets for the first edition that indicated clearly the music's intent to be descriptive of nature. Many baroque composers made such attempts, settling usually for musical bird calls or tempestuous winds. ("Real" thunder would have to wait for the development of timpani!) Cuckoos, nightingales, and goldfinches seemed particularly ripe for musical transformation. For

example, one of the other flute concertos of Opus 10 is *Il Cardollino*, (the goldfinch,) filled with fluty bird sounds; Handel wrote a bouncy organ concerto entitled *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, with plenty of organic cuckooing.

To get a clearer picture of each season's depiction of nature, here are brief summaries:

SPRING -- **Cast of characters**: Birds, a shepherd, his dog, nymphs and more shepherds.
I. Allegro: Birds greet spring, but a storm comes. When over, winds are calm, birds sing.
II. Largo: Leaves rustle, shepherd sleeps, his dog barks (violas emphatic!)
III. Allegro: Nymphs and shepherds dance (Shepherds, what's wrong with peasant girls?)

SUMMER -- Cast of characters: Peasant farmers, birds, lots of bugs.
I. Allegro non molto: Heavy sun beats down on land, birds sing, and farmers and shepherds fear storms, first gentle breezes then heavy north wind.
II. Adagio: Shepherd still fearful, swarms of bugs come, he tries to sleep, more bugs.
III. Presto: Shepherd and farmer were right --- a storm breaks, including hail.
AUTUMN -- Cast of characters: Drunken peasants, hunters, dogs chasing wild beast.
I. Allegro: Peasants sing and dance over good harvest, drink too much, fall asleep.
II. Adagio molto: Good fresh air, lots of people sleeping, most still drunk.
III. Allegro: At daybreak, the hunters and dogs chase an animal, corner it, and it dies exhausted.
WINTER -- Cast of characters: Anyone ever caught in windy, ice-cold Winter!
I. Allegro non molto: Freezing wind blowing, stamp feet to keep them warm, teeth chatter.
II. Largo: In front of a fire, while outside people are being soaked in icy rain.
III. Allegro: Walk carefully on the ice. Oops, someone fell and got up, but we're inside again and the winds take up their wintry blasts.

DSA St. Luke's Chamber ensemble May 22, 1999
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Richard Wagner (1813-1883) Selections from "The Ring of the Niebelungen"

Comment: Every writer has favorites that he draws upon to bolster his own prose. One of mine is Deems Taylor, whose books about classical composers and their music were best sellers in the 1930s and 1940s. So I chose part of one of his most famous essays for this Wagner program note.

In October 1936, Deems Taylor, then a well-known composer and music commentator, spoke about "*The Monster*" to the radio audience of the live New York Philharmonic Sunday broadcasts:

He was an undersized little man, with a head too big for his body---a sickly little man…He was a monster of conceit. Never for one minute did he look at the world or at people, except in relation to himself…He had theories about almost any subject under the sun, including vegetarianism, the drama, politics, and music… was almost innocent of any sense of responsibility. Not only did he seem incapable of supporting himself, but it never occurred to him that he was under any obligation to do so….An endless procession of women marches through his life. His first wife spent twenty years enduring and forgiving his infidelities. His second wife had been the wife of his most devoted friend and admirer, from whom he stole her…He was completely selfish in his other personal relationships…The name of this monster was Richard Wagner. Everything that I

have said about him you can find on record…And the curious thing about his record is that it doesn't matter in the least…The joke was on us. He was one of the world's great dramatists; he was a great thinker; he was one of the most stupendous musical geniuses that, up to now, the world has ever seen…What if he was faithless to his friends and to his wives? He had one mistress to whom he was faithful to the day of his death: Music.

"The Entrance of the Gods into Valhalla" occurs in *Das Rheingold*, the first opera of the Ring Cycle. The gods are definitely having problems of control. The Rhine gold has been stolen and fashioned into a ring that has been cursed. The two giants who have built Valhalla, the god's new home, have a Cain and Abel falling out over the ownership of the ring. The killing horrifies the gods, but they learn, after much thunder, lightning and general carryings-on of nature, that Valhalla is ready to be occupied. A rainbow emerges and the gods march over the rainbow into their new trophy home. Wagner's rainbow theme and the theme of Valhalla merge into a memorable and emotional housewarming (although the ultimate housewarming won't happen for another three operas!)

"The Ride of the Valkyries" With the soaring Valkyries, we cross the emotional threshold into Wagner's Ring Cycle, the greatest music drama ever written. *The Ride of the Valkyries* is heard at the beginning of Act III of the Ring's second opera, *Die Walkure*. The Valkyries, the mythical women who gather the bodies of fallen heroes and bring them on their steeds into Valhalla, are gathered on a mountain ready to fly. Music of such charging intensity with upward-leaping notes and fierce rhythms has seldom been duplicated. (The Valkyries, with their manly ways of spears and shields, are plums for satire. In 1944, Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe New York nightclub presented an "operatic" spectacle featuring "The Siegfried Follies" with "The Valkuties" and the "Rhein Babies.

DSO April 16, 2000

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Franz Waxman (1906-1967) Fantasy on Bizet's *Carmen*

Comment: A goodly number of excellent composers left Europe in the early 20th century to come to the United States, some heading toward Broadway (e. g. Sigmund Romberg and Rudolf Friml) while others chose Hollywood, writing film scores (e.g. Erich Korngold and Franz Waxman.)

In September 1999, Franz Waxman's face appeared on a U. S. Postal Service stamp, part of a "Hollywood Composers" series that included Bernard Herrmann (Psycho), Max Steiner (Gone With the Wind), and Dmitri Tiomkin (High Noon). The German born Waxman (originally Wachsmann) had begun musical studies in Berlin, earning money by playing in the Weintraub Syncopaters, a jazz orchestra. He brought his musical talents to the thriving German film industry of the early 1930s, conducting and arranging the musical score of the The Blue Angel, the film that made Marlene Dietrich the universal femme fatale. After becoming a composer for German films, Waxman, a Jew, was forced to escape Nazi Germany. Hollywood became a natural destination. There he composed the scores for such classic films as The Philadelphia Story and Hitchcock's Rebecca. He later gained back-to-back Academy Awards for Sunset Boulevard and A Place in the Sun.

In the mid-1940s, Warner Brother's decided to resurrect the old "soaper" Humoresque, the story of a violin prodigy, a poor New York Eastside Jewish boy (John Garfield), whose talent is overwhelmed by the love for the married woman who provides him financial support (Joan Crawford). The producers asked Waxman for a new piece to be featured in a critical scene. Though Garfield appeared to be playing the violin in the film, it was Isaac Stern who provided the "fireworks" for the sound track. Waxman turned to the tuneful opera Carmen and devised a Fantasy from its melodies. The great Jascha Heifitz, impressed by Waxman's composition, asked the composer to expand the work for Heifitz's appearance on radio's Bell Telephone Hour. The result is a work which brings familiar themes from the opera into an exciting continuity of melody, demanding violin virtuosity of the highest order

DSA Ayako Yoshida, violin; Andrew Armstrong, piano May 19, 2001

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Earll Wild (1915-2010) Piano Sonata 2000

Comment: Earl Wild lived before the era of competitions, with their pursuant fame. One can arguably claim he was the first American-born "virtuoso" pianist. He also composed music.

Born in Pittsburg, Earl Wild began piano at age 3 and by teenage years he was soloing in the Liszt Piano Concerto No. 1. He became known at the time when American audiences swooned over pianists only if their name was of European origin, so an early change in name to Earlano Wildkowski might have gained him more attention. Still he became known as one of the last great romantics, a tradition he absorbed in his youth by attending dozens of concerts of great pianists such as Ignace Paderewski and Artur Schnabel. But Rachmaninov became his musical idol, with young Wild attending over 30 recitals by the Russian giant, while also becoming a good friend.

Wild's concert career extended over 70 years, especially championing a revival of the works of Franz Liszt. He performed in the White House for each of six consecutive presidents from Herbert Hoover to Lyndon Johnson. "Roosevelt used to lean out of his wheelchair to see how I executed a particularly difficult passage," he once told a reporter. In 1942, Arturo Toscanini chose Wild as soloist for the one and only time that the famed conductor of the NBC Symphony programmed Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Wild in later years would transcribe many of the great Gershwin tunes into wonderful etudes. Ms. Wang, in her Danbury 2009 program, performed two of them. For this program she chose to include Wild's only piano sonata, composed in 2000 during his 85th year.

Wild described his sonata in this way: "My sonata [is] a stylistically eclectic work, it incorporates Civil War tunes, echoes of popular music of the 1920s and, in the finale—entitled "Toccata a la Ricky Martin"---there is a distinctive Latin American flavor." This writer admits to not recognizing any Civil War tunes in the sonata, but certainly in the first movement the jazz world of blues and stomp are readily discernible, while the "Adagio" movement has an American "pop" sense, and the playful final movement has surging Latin energy. And how did that Puerto Rican-born "pop star," Ricky Martin, enter the sonata world? As Wild tells it: "I turned on the television one day, and there [Martin] was. He exuded so much energy I thought it was just wonderful." Yes, there is definitely some of Martin's "La Vida Loca" here.

Xiayin Wang, pianist April 10, 2016

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