Program Notes Written by James Pegolotti for Concerts by the Danbury Concert Association from April 20, 1996 to October 20, 2019. A total of 60 programs.

Alpha List by Composer VI: Johann Strauss to Ellen Taafe Zwilich

Johann Strauss, Jr. (1825-1899) By the Beautiful Blue Danube (Arranged by Adolf Schulz-Evler)

As the traveling piano virtuosos emerged in the 19th century, led by the stalwart Liszt, they demanded great showpieces to exhibit their technical prowess. Liszt provided many of these himself, usually transcriptions of themes from operas. Another favorite source was the waltzes of Johann Strauss, Jr. Answering this call, Adolf Schulz-Evler, a Polish-born pianist (1852-1905), composed "Concert Arabesques on Themes from 'On the Beautiful Blue Danube,'" the full title to this florid work, which was highly popular in the early 20th century as an encore. More than two hands seem to needed for the thousands of cascading notes, musically portraying not only the placid Danube but the passionate one. ***Jeffrey Biegel, piano May 3, 2003***

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) Sextet from Capriccio

When Richard Strauss, then Europe's most successful opera composer and in his early seventies, wrote his final opera in the early 1940s, he chose a libretto that sought to answer the unanswerable: What is more important in an opera, the words or the music? Capriccio is set near Paris around 1775, where a poet and a composer are rivals for the love of a countess. Theoretically, whomever she chooses as her lover will settle the question. Since she finds them both attractive, the argument is never settled.

In the opening scene the countess is in her chateau listening to the slow movement of a string sextet. This setting by the elder Strauss is a far cry from those chosen in his first operatic years when he was young and spunky. At that time he turned the early 20th century opera world on its salacious ear when he chose the gruesome activities of Salome and Elektra for his first major operas.

In Capriccio, Strauss's creative spirit exudes in the calm beauty of the sextet, one of the few pieces for chamber groups he ever wrote. The sextet utilizes a five-note theme immediately presented, which moves with dispatch from upper to lower strings, then back again. In the middle of the work there is some slight musical apprehension, but it quickly subsides as the music calmly progresses to a serene conclusion. ***Chamber Orchestra Kremlin November 10, 2002***

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) L'Histoire du Soldat for Violin, Clarinet and Piano

Igor Stravinsky in his middle years as a composerfound himself homeless, cut off from his Russian homeland by the World War and the Russian Revolution. His Parisian pre-war triumphs, the ballets Firebird, Petrouska, and Rite of Spring, had brought fame and notoriety. Now forced to Switzerland by the war, he was cut off from royalties and his family estate in Russia. With an author friend, similarly in dire financial straits, he decided to write a modest stage work, small in

scope, and therefore easily staged by many, with some quick royalties resulting. The outcome was The Story of a Soldier, a Russian tale with a Faust theme: a violin-playing soldier back from a war meets an old man (the devil in disguise) who strikes a deal – the violin for a magical book of answers to life's questions. The book proves useless to the soldier, and the devil, after stalking him in several other disguises, finally reveals himself in his unmistakable scarlet tunic, and takes the soldier "down under." The Story of a Soldier, composed in 1918, was "a narrative ballet in five scenes to be read, played, and danced," scored for only seven instruments. A year later, Stravinsky provided a large-scale suite for symphony orchestra. Simultaneously, he arranged five of the eleven pieces in the original score for a trio of violin, piano, and clarinet, the version in today's performance. The violin represents the soldier's soul; the piano corresponds to the devil. Stravinsky had spent years in Paris where "Le jazz hot" had found a special home; he took the world of syncopation and ragtime to heart. Such influence, according to the Stravinsky himself, brought about "a wholly new sound in my music, and L'Histoire marks my final break with the Russian Orchestral School."

Spoleto Festival USA Chamber Music April 1, 2001

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1917) Three Movements from "Petroushka"

In 1910, Stravinsky's first great success, The Firebird, composed for Diaghileff's Ballets Russes, brought him early fame. Diaghileff came to Stravinsky for a second ballet at a time when the composer contemplated a concert piece for piano and orchestra. Stravinsky wanted the piano to be mischievous, poking sly fun in a variety of ways at the orchestra. In an imaginative leap, the impish piano became the puppet Petroushka. The ballet takes place in the early 1800s at a carnival in St. Petersburg. A magician introduces three puppets to the crowd: a brutish Moor, a beautiful ballerina, and the sad, dispirited Petroushka. In a fantasy of the Commedia dell' Arte tradition, the puppets exhibit human emotions and Petrouska falls in love with the ballerina. The destruction of Petrouska by the jealous Moor leaves the magician with a crumpled puppet, while on the roof of the puppet theater the ghost of Petrouska appears in spirited activity.

Stravinsky himself made the piano transcription of three scenes from the ballet.
In the short Russian Dance, the repetitive theme provides a sense of the swirling energy of the carnival crowd, as well as the mechanical aspects of the puppets. In Petroushka's Room depicts the poor puppet, thrown into his "cell," dreaming of the arrival of the ballerina. He alternates between joy and despair. The Shrovetide Fair, the longest of the scenes, begins with a marvelous pianistic depiction of hurdy-gurdy sounds, and the comings and goings at the festival – a man with a ponderous dancing bear; a rich merchant amusing himself by throwing money to the crowd; heavy-footed men dancing vigorously to a Russian tune. In this colorful depiction of the carnival scene, Stravinsky has written a score that seems to demand that the pianist have more than two hands! Perhaps Petroushka is helping.

Santiago Rodriguez, piano October 15, 2000

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) Infernal Dance, Berceuse, and Finale from The Firebird
Transcription by Guido Agosti (1901-)

Guido Agosti, Italian pianist and teacher, is not well-known to us, but better known is his teacher Ferruccio Busoni and guess who was the idol of Busoni? None other than Franz Liszt! So the Lisztian shadow also appears over this transcription of music from The Firebird, the first of the

great ballets composed by Stravinsky and based on a Russian tale of good and evil. A Prince, hunting in the forest, captures the mystical Firebird, but releases it upon the entreaties of the winged creature. Proceeding further, the Prince stumbles onto castle and gardens of a sinister Magician where captive princesses are held. The Magician, sensing the presence of the intruder, seeks the Prince's destruction and summons up all his demons in the Infernal Dance. The Firebird, grateful to the Prince, returns to calm the infernal ones singing a hypnotic lullaby, the Berceuse. The Finale, based on an old Russian folk-tune, emerges in an exciting transition from the lullaby. The evil spell is broken by the Firebird and the Prince and his chosen princess are wed. ***Pamela Mia Paul, piano May 25, 1`996***

Dia Succari (1935-2010) La Nuit du Destin (1978)

To counter the current sad reports of turmoil in Syria, it's important to know that Euterpe, the muse of music, has a home in Aleppo, the birthplace of the late Dia Succari. Aleppo, the country's largest city (now over two million people and inhabited for over five millenia), has been a center of Arabic traditional and classic music. Not surprisingly, in Nuit du Destin the composer has drawn from the area's musical past. One haunting theme is repeated in various guises, with pianistic suggestions of Arabic instruments throughout. To an Occidental listener, certain sequences of notes conjure up the mysteries of the Near East. A unique aspect of this "Night of Destiny" is that the composer asks the pianist to perform appropriate improvisations in the middle of the scripted music. (To hear more of Dia Succari's music, go to his website http://www.dia-succari.com and click on "Musique," then click on any of the dozens of his compositions and hear them played***.)*** ***Joel Fan, piano September 18, 2011***

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

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, 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.

Brown—Urioste—Canellakis Trio April 2, 2017

Josef Suk (1874-1935) **Piano Quartet in A Minor, Opus 1**
I. Allegro appassionato II. Adagio III. Allegro con fuoco

At the age of eleven, Josef Suk began his studies at the Prague Conservatory and proved a gifted violinist and pianist. At seventeen he was Antonin Dvorak's favorite composition student. (Suk would later also become a favorite of Dvorak's daughter and marry in her.) In 1891, Suk brought his teacher portions of a piano quartet. With Dvorak's encouragment, he completed Opus 1, the springboard to dozens of future instrumental compositions including two symphonies. Suk's fame did not readily span the oceans, but in Europe he was well-known both for his music and as a member for forty years of the famed Czech Quartet that played some 4000 concerts internationally. He spent his last years as teacher and administrator at the Prague Conservatory and when he died, the London Times headlined: "A Great Czech Composer." The New York Times had no obituary. The famed pianist Rudolf Firkusny, a student of Suk's, recalled that his teacher had said that if he got to heaven: "I would drop on my knees and kiss (Beethoven's) shoes. In another corner will be Wagner. I will sink as low as I can. In yet another corner will be Mozart. I will creep under a table and not even admit that I am a composer." Suk's modesty was somewhat extreme.

The first movement of Opus 1 begins with a passionate theme, quickly dims to reflective modes from the various instruments, then alternates in mood to an energetic conclusion. The second movement's contemplative theme clearly utilizes two phrases from the Bach-Gounod Ave Maria for Suk, like Dvorak, strongly felt his Catholic tradition. Yet Suk, unlike Dvorak, never utilized Slavonic musical folk-idioms in his compositions and in the final movement, the energy is provided mainly by the piano leading toward an uplifting final musical "rush."

NOTE: If you think more than one famous musician has the name Josef Suk, you are right. Suk's grandson (and therefore Dvorak's great- grandson), a current violinist of international repute, is also named Josef Suk.

The Ames Piano Quartet April 20, 1996

Carlos Surinach (1915-1997) **Tres Cantos Bereberes**

Carlos Surinach, born in Barcelona, spent the first half of his life in Spain. His musical studies began there, but he went to Germany in 1940 because, in his own words, he "wanted to make popular Spanish forms suitable for the concert hall, and for that, Germany was very useful; they write music very seriously." When he moved to the United States in 1951, the Australian-born composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks commissioned Surinach to write Tres Cantos Bereberes for her 1952 New York concert, "The Hispanic Influence in Modern Music"; it introduced Surinach to the American music public. This and other compositions, with their strong rhythmic sense, brought him to the attention of modern dance companies for which he composed many ballet scores. Among these is Martha Graham's Acrobats of God, the ballet's name being the term she used to describe her dancers. Surinach became a United States citizen in 1959 and later taught at New York's Queens College.

"I very rarely quote folk tunes," Surinach told WQXR's Robert Sherman. "They may inspire me, but the mood comes into my imagination; once I hear a theme, I digest it and dissolve it into powder, so that when it comes back from my mind, it's something else." In the three Berber songs, Surinach achieves a mood of the North African people for whom agriculture has been a paramount way of life. Certainly in the second of the Cantos, "Andante," the listener can sense

the quiet solitude of a Berber shepherd on an African plain. Rhythmic patterns abound in the first and third songs, and the pronounced use of oboe and flute emphasizes a musical quality that speaks of the Moors and Berbers who had once overrun Spain.

New York Chamber Ensemble April 6, 2002

Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770) Sonata in G minor, op. 1, no. 4, "Devil's Trill"

Tartini, a master violinist and composer of some 200 concertos, remains today best known for only one composition – the "Devil's Trill" sonata. While initially sent by his parents to become a priest, he chose to escape the seminary and spend early years one step ahead of the Church. He fell in love with the niece of the local Cardinal, and ultimately had to find sanctuary when the Cardinal learned of his clerical escape. Maybe that's why he had a dream, which he described to a friend, where he made a pact with the devil. In the dream the devil played a sonata of great beauty. Tartini awoke and noted down the sonata as best he could remember. Whether the devil inspired the sonata or not, one should also know that Tartini sought to teach and improve violin technique. As one writer noted of the Sonata: "Its intricate trills and double stops appear to be academically as well as demonically designed to develop the left hand." The sonata, with its alternating slow and fast movements common to the time, finds the violin prominent throughout. This is hardly unexpected when one recalls that violin accompaniment at the time came from the light-sounding harpsichord, hardly a partner in impact as would be the pianoforte in later years. The "demonic" trills are the feature of the last movement. Leopold Auer, also a great violinist and teacher, once said of the sonata: "If it really was inspired by the devil, it proves that whatever his other faults, His Satanic Majesty is a musician of the first order!"

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

Art Tatum (1909-1956 See Berlin, Irving

Carl Taussig (1841-1871) See Wagner, Richard

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893) 'Cantabile' from String Quartet No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11

Few composers have the capacity to hit right at the heart of the listener as can Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Just consider the emotions in the music of his 4th, 5th and 6th symphonies, his Romeo and Juliet Fantasy, the glorious First Piano Concerto and his only Violin Concerto. I agree with David Ewen who wrote: "For Tchaikovsky is above all a sensitive poet who unashamedly spoke his heart."

But his beginnings were not auspicious. Though he showed musical prowess as a young pianist, he had to follow the Moscow family's demand to study law to earn money as a civil servant. He served that role, but also began further musical studies ultimately to teach at the Moscow Conservatory. He was as poor as any teacher and at a suggestion by the head of the conservatory, he prepared a concert of his works to make some extra money. For that concert, he used some of his piano pieces and songs from his first ten published works, but he needed something original, so he took a big leap and wrote his first chamber work, Opus 11, which would also prove to be the first important string quartet by a Russian composer.

The quartet's second movement, Andante Cantabile , was his first musical "home run." Featuring two themes, the beautiful, poignant first theme came from a Ukrainian folk song he had heard visiting his sister years before. The contrasting theme is of Tchaikovsky's invention.

So successful was this movement that the composer himself arranged it for cello and orchestra. The Andante Cantabile proved to be an early calling card to the greatness that was to follow in his symphonies, ballets and operas.

Daedalus Quartet May 12, 2019

Georg Telemann (1681-1767) Concerto in G Major for Viola and Strings

For a young man with no musical training and a family who attempted to force him into legal studies to keep him away from music, Telemann did O. K. Once his musical talents were allowed to blossom at Leipzig University, he was off and running, leading to positions as a court Kapellmeister, then music director of city churches, such as those in Frankfurt and Hamburg. In these cases, cantatas had to be written for every Sunday, as well as oratorios. Then there was music for special events---political ceremonies, weddings, birthdays, funerals---as well as suites, concertos and on and on. It just means that this most famous of German composers of his time---he preceded J. S. Bach and Handel---had plenty to do. Telemann (he wrote three autobiographies) never fancied writing instrumental concertos. Still, he wrote many including the Concerto in G Major, one of the first concertos ever for the viola. It is in the French style, which begins with a slow, contemplative movement, unlike the Italian style of Vivaldi. (It would seem that the Italians like to cut to the chase right away, while the French want to be initially pensive.) The first movement of the viola concerto utilizes a haunting four-note grouping, which moves about the orchestra, then onto the viola; it is an early highlight of t

French Chamber Orchestra October 28, 2007

Georg Philip Telemann (1681-1767) Don Quixote Suite

Georg Philipp Telemann, as a youth, fought against his parents pushing him toward a law career. Instead he veered off to become a musician and composer, a friend and rival to Johann Sebastian Bach. After many musical assignments throughout Germany, he became the music director of Hamburg's five largest Protestant churches at age 40. There he spent the rest of what must have been a hyperactive life composing 1043 church cantatas, 46 settings of the Passion, 32 operas and countless instrumental works. No shirker he.

One of his operas was *Don Quixote*, utilizing episodes from the great Cervantes novel. The "woeful knight" has inspired numerous works including the tone poem by Richard Strauss, the ballet with music by Ludwig Minkus, and songs by Maurice Ravel. But it is Telemann's *Don Quixote Suite*, music from his opera, that remains the earliest of these musical pictures and an excellent one at that. After a brisk overture in the French style, comes the quiet, pensive "Awakening of Don Quixote." Now comes the musical ferocity of "His Attack on the Windmills," the famed episode when Quixote perceives the rotating arms as attacking giants. In a quiet episode, a repetitive two-note "Sighs of Love" evidences Quixote's infatuation with his "princess" Dulcinea, the farm-girl who is his imagined mistress. Next "Sancho Panza is swindled," as the knight's squire is the recipient of roughing-up by the owners of the inn that Quixote had left without paying. (Does one hear the braying of Panza's donkey?) The pair's departure for new adventures is heard with "Quixote galloping on his steed Rosinante" interspersed with the "Galloping of Panza's donkey. The suite ends with "Quixote at Rest," though it appears that the "knight" reflects first on his frantic life before nodding off to sleep.

The String Orchestra of New York City May 2, 2015

Ludwig Thuille (1861-1907) **Sextet for Piano and Winds, Op. 6**

In Innsbruck, Austria, in 1874, two teenagers met through family connections. Their love of music and talent led to their becoming composers and life-long friends. One of the two became world famous: Richard Strauss (1864-1949). The other, Ludwig Thuille, remains remembered mainly because of several chamber works, especially his Sextet for Piano and Winds. Thuille, an orphan at five years of age, first lived with relatives in Innsbruck where his musical studies began and where he met young Strauss. The friendship clearly flowered as they moved into composition mode because Strauss dedicated Don Juan, one of his first orchestral masterpieces, to Thuille.

Aided in finances by a rich widowed cousin, Thuille studied theory, piano and organ in Munich and though his strength was in composing chamber music, he also gained fame as an excellent pianist and a professor of music and a conductor. Plus he came under the influence of Alexander Ritter, a forceful relative of Richard Wagner, who influenced both he and Strauss into becoming orchestral colourists and opera composers. One of Thuille's three operas, Lobetanz, remained popular and, after his death, had five performances at the Metropolitan Opera in the 1911-12 season. Thuille influenced and trained many composers, including Ernest Bloch. Perhaps Thuille's influence in music remains of the subtle, helpful, teaching kind, but certainly his sextet is a beauty. One writer, in commenting on the sextet, called Thuille "the wind players' Brahms" with his "beautiful writing in rich romantic style, with charming melodies and excellent structure." A French horn leads off, as in the Blumer work, but here there is a more heroic quality. Solemnity seems a mainstay of the larghetto second movement, filled with a Brahmsian sense of color and instrumental texture. The dancelike third movement has such charm, led off by the peppy oboe, that its brevity leaves one wanting more. In the finale all instruments provide high spirits, but the piano here plays a major part, indicating something of the composer's own love for that instrument.

Leon Bates, piano, and Borealis Wind Quartet October 24, 2010

RenéTouzet (1916-2003)

Four Cuban Danzas: Siempre en clave; Alegre; Cubanasa; Alterada.

Rene Touzet ("too-zett") lived his early musical life in his native Cuba, then moved to the United States in the mid-1940s and helped link the Cuban rhythms of his homeland to jazz elements. An exceptional pianist, he was briefly with the Desi Arnaz Orchestra. Moving to Hollywood, he organized his own orchestra, wrote over 500 songs (many sung by major popular singers as Crosby and Sinatra), and arranged hundreds of standards with a Cuban pulse, playing through the years of the "cha-cha-cha" and "salsa." On one Stan Kenton recording, he's the shaker of the maracas! His talents as composer, pianist, orchestra leader, and arranger have been part of our listening lives whether we've realized it or not.

He began the study of piano early in Cuba, and then entered a music conservatory. He composed the first of his Cuban Danzas, Siempre en clave, at fourteen years of age. The Danzas on today's program are part of forty Danzas written over more than sixty years and published in one volume. The Cuban rhythms, a blending of the many cultures that populated the island, have in Touzet their modern day troubador. Here are his descriptions of the four Danzas:

Siempre en clave (1930). "This was my first attempt to write the genre. I played it to Maestro Ernesto Lecuona and he said to me, 'Senor Touzet, continue composing,' and I followed his suggestion."

Alegre (1940). 'The first theme was inspired by my first born, Olivia, when, at the age of two, would run to me in response to my call. The second theme is a typical Cuban melody. By the time I wrote this danza, I had written many songs, music and lyrics.'

Cubanasa (1980). "In this dance, the spice of Cuban womanhood is the inspiration: it is a lyrical piece. The second part contains rhythmic material taken directly from the 'guajeo' rhythm pattern played on the 'tres' (typical guitar) and later on the piano in dance music."

Alterada (1945). "Back in La Habana from my first visit to New York, the city's electric feeling left an impression and 'Alterada' magically came to my fingers. The first part is entirely around the interval of an augmented fifth, an interval of 'restlessness,' thus the use of the Spanish term 'alterada.' The middle part is unbashfully romantic, which is my first manner of music."

(NOTE: Maestro Touzet attended Santiago Rodriguez's concert in Hartford last month when the pianist programmed the Danzas for the first time. This writer had the wonderful experience of meeting this extraordinary musician, tall and elegant of stature. When Touzet saw the position his Danzas were placed on the program, he spoke !") quite simply: "Between Debussy and Stravinsky. Not bad***!*** ***Santiago Rodriguez, piano*** ***October 15, 2000***

VIENNA—City of Music (For program of Amadeus Virtuosi of New York, May 22, 2004)

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.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Concerto in G Minor, for Flute, Oboe, Violin, Cello and Keyboard, RV 107

Question: What do Antonio Vivaldi and Steve Jobs have in common? If you answer "They both needed keyboards to carry out their ideas" you get a "C." But if you say that they both had groups of highly committed individuals available to test out their ideas, you get an "A"! In the case of Vivaldi, his musical talents as a violinist and a composer were shared by group of excellent young ladies in Venice in the Pio Ospedale della Pieta, a city-funded academy for orphaned girls. For some 30 years he trained and used the fine orchestra of the academy to try out his literally hundreds of compositions, many of the concerto form for a great variety of instruments, as in tonight's concert. The similarity of the structure of these short three-movement concertos---Fast-Slow-Fast---spawned the comment that Vivaldi didn't write 400 concertos; he wrote one concerto four hundred times. Still the results of the pleasant experiences of various instruments each having their time in the musical sun, provides the listener with delicious residual mementos. The pulsating first movement in itself suggests why this is one of Vivaldi's most successful multi-instrument concertos.

New York Chamber Soloists May 18, 2013

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Concerto for Strings in A Major, F. XI, No. 4

Vivaldi, himself a violin virtuoso, composed more than 500 concertos. (He also composed dozens of operas.) Though a composer cannot be in top form for every work, the inevitable energy and tunefulness of Vivaldi is seldom absent. Yes, you might say the sun of Italy shines in these works, though I will admit that both times I was in Venice, it was overcast! For today's A Major Concerto, the typical Vivaldi structure of fast-slow-fast movements is present, with a bright first movement utilizing quick runs up the scale, and more leisurely steps downward. The center movement is longer than the usual Vivaldi concerto, providing more contrast to the outer brightness. And stop me if I'm wrong, but I think I hear some chirping of birds in a few places. (Well, so they aren't seagull sounds, but Vivaldi did also travel through forests, I'm sure.)

French Chamber Orchestra October 28, 2007

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) **Concerto for Flute and Strings in G Minor Opus 10, #2 ("La Notte")**

1) Largo; 2) Presto ("Fantasmi"); 3) Largo; 4) Presto; 5) Largo ("Il Sonno"); 6) Allegro

If there is one word to describe most of Vivaldi's music, it's "lively." Not that he didn't write non-lively music for, after all, he championed the fast-slow-fast structure of concertos. And concertos he did write! Nearly four hundred! For years he was the musical director of La Pieta, a Venetian institution for orphaned girls whose orchestra became famous beyond the barcarollian waters and weekly concerts demanded new music. Though some of these concertos were published in his lifetime (including the six flute concertos of Opus 10), most remained in darkened chambers only to be found years after his death. Vivaldi was one of the first composers to give programattic names to some of his compositions. To the flute concerto, Opus 10, #2, he gave the name *La Notte* (The Night). Its structure is unusual being in six short movements (instead of the usual three), a sort-of fantasia about episodes in a night. The slow-fast alternations of the pieces provides the flautist with many challenges from the vigor of the second movement entitled "Fantasmi" ("The goblins will get you if you don't watch out!") to the lulling strains of the fifth movement "Il sonno," (Ah, sleep at last!) Overall, it's a short night.

The International Sejong Soloists October 3, 1999

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

As popular as Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* 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.

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble May 22, 1999

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) Andante and Rondo Ungarese

Weber wrote some wonderful instrumental works, though his fame rests primarily on his operas, especially *Der Freischütz*. In 1809, the 23 year old Weber composed "Andante and Rondo Ungarese" for his brother, a violist. It's a work of clever contrast. First, the theme is quietly introduced by the viola, followed by several variations. The perky rondo follows seamlessly with a certain Hungarian folksiness. Now for a question: When did a viola turn into a bassoon? (No, this isn't one of those viola jokes.) The answer: when Weber in 1813 took on a commission from a bassoonist friend to transcribe "Andante and Rondo Ungarese" for bassoon and orchestra. Weber was in desperate need of money at the time, but little did he know that centuries later it would be the bassoon version that would supplant that of the viola. As proof, consider that there are now available (according to Amazon.com) nine different recordings of the bassoon version and not one of the viola. Appreciate the treat of hearing Weber's original for the viola..

French Chamber Orchestra October 28, 2007

Earl Wild (1915-2010) Piano Sonata 2000

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, piano April 10, 2016

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) Liebescene und Verklarung from Tristan und Isolde
Transcription by Carl Tausig (1841-1871)

Carl Tausig was a favorite student of Liszt with a pianism of extreme virtuosity like his teacher and a teaching ability that attracted students even from the United States. Amy Fay, a New Englander, studied with Tausig in 1873 and published her experiences. When she finally had her first lesson with the misanthropic Tausig she reported that she played a difficult Chopin scherzo and "...he stood over me and kept calling out all through it in German, "Terrible! Shocking! Dreadful! O Gott! O Gott!" I was really playing it well, too, and I kept on in spite of him...and when I got through and he gave me my music, (he) said, 'Not at all bad.'" Tausig, echoing Liszt his teacher, made effective arrangements of other compositions and today's Love Scene and Transformation provides a sample. Ernest Newman, the eminent Wagner expert, noted that "Of all Wagner's operas, Tristan und Isolde is the most difficult to understand." By that he meant the plot, a Wagnerian synthesis of legends. The music, however, speaks more than clearly for the ultimate strength of love between the tragic figures.

Pamela Mia Paul, piano May 25, 1996

August Walter (1821-1896) Octet for strings and winds, Op. 7

So you also have never heard of August Walter, German composer from Stuttgart. Not surprising, for he doesn't even have an entry in the New Grove Dictionary of Music. What is known is that his first love was the violin, which he mastered after his apprenticeship with his pastry chef father. In Vienna he studied counterpoint with a master teacher, Simon Sechter, but most of his professional years were in Basel, Switzerland where he taught and conducted, certainly away from the mainstream of European music. An avid correspondent, he connected in this way with Johannes Brahms and other composers of the day. Only 20 of his works were published, most of which were songs (lieder). Perhaps this had a connection to the fact that both his wives were well-known sopranos in their day.

Clearly Walter loved the octet instrumentation. In the first movement, the very first four notes (played by strings) become a kind of musical basketball that is tossed from instrument to instrument throughout the movement. A lovely Lieder-like melody is heard twice, but it is the playfulness of instruments that frame the movement. For the second movement, a slow, pulsating Beethovenish-theme, with special emphasis on winds, is the central issue. For the scherzo-allegro movement in minor key, a type of suspense seems to hang in the music, at times almost Hitchcockian. The vivace finale movement releases all the instruments into musical chatter, with

rhythmic changes and pauses that create variety for the listener. Overall a pleasant addition to the octet literature.

Note: There is no known recording of this Octet. If you wish to hear this work again, go to YouTube where a recording from a radio broadcast can be heard. Simply type "August Walter Octet" into the search window.

Frisson, String & Wind Nonet November 11, 2018

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

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.

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

Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) "Italian Serenade"

For a Germanic composer in the Romantic Era, the great lyrical poets (e.g. Goethe, Morike, Eichendorff) provided the poems that could become effective lieder in the right hands. Hugo Wolf, Austrian-born, and of deep musical talent, chose such a compositional path and became a leader of lieder in his day and one of its greatest masters. Due in part to recurring illness from syphilis contracted early in life, his compositional output had fits and starts. As evidence of his mercurial ways, from 1888 to1889 he composed nearly half of all his 300 plus songs. He did at times explore instrumental writing and in 1884 he composed in three days the first movement of a projected suite for string quartet. No other movements ever emerged, so he entitled the lone movement "Italian Serenade," unaware it would become his most famous instrumental work. (He later transcribed it for string orchestra.) Is there a plot line in the "Serenade"? Some believe so because Wolf was at the time entranced with an Eichendorff novella in which a "good-for-nothing" is sent forth from his German home to the sunny climes of Italy. Well, plot or not, the work is wonderfully exhilarating.

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

Ellen Taafe Zwilich (b. 1939) **Trio for Piano and Strings**

This may well be the first exposure of members of the audience to music of Pulitzer Prize winner Zwilich. (The prize was for her Symphony No. 1 in 1983.) The Florida native (she teaches at Florida State University) is one of the most often commissioned American composers and has written concertos for almost every instrument of the orchestra. Her last name provides her the advantage of being quickly found in contemporary musical dictionaries!

Of her piano trio, she has written: "Many of my favorite works for piano trio are, in effect, duos in which the two strings together balance the piano. In the interest of formal and aesthetic balance, I took a somewhat similar approach. I also decided to exploit the difference in the essence of strings and keyboard, allowing some musical material to arise from the nature of the piano and some to be generated by the nature of string instruments." This may help explain the rather percussive, but also "cat chasing his tail" approach to parts of the first movement. The lento movement is somber, but with a gentle beauty.

The McDermott Trio May 21, 2005