Program Notes Written for Concerts by James Pegolotti for the Danbury Concert Association from April 20, 1996 to October 20, 2019. A total of 60 programs.
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Alpha Listing by Composer II : Irving Berlin/Art Tatum to Aaron Copland

Irving Berlin (1888-1989) /Art Tatum (1909-1956) "Blue Skies"
For many piano jazz aficionados, no one tops Art Tatum. A native of Toledo, Ohio, Tatum had perfect pitch and was picking out tunes on the piano at three years of age. His mother learned that once he heard the piano plunking out a song from a piano roll, he could sit down and repeat the song. At 16 and legally blind, he moved to the Columbus School for the Blind, studied music and learned Braille. Tatum appeared on Ohio radio stations providing him with the exposure that led to his first recordings in 1933. His talent was prodigious, his recordings numerous and his arrangements of popular songs were many and difficult. Hearing Tatum on the radio in 1935, pianist Hank Jones remembered thinking: *"Here's something new; they have devised this trick to make people believe that one man is playing the piano, when I know at least three people are playing."*
It's refreshing to have one of Tatum's transcriptions on a "classical" program. And the choice of Irving Berlin's "Blue Skies" makes it very special because this Berlin song is complex in its ambiguity of keys, beginning in a minor key then seemingly floating into the major. "Blue Skies" was written in 1928 honoring the birth of Berlin's first child, Mary Ellin, a happy event. Remember that Berlin wrote both the words and music of his songs. *"Blue days, all of them gone, Nothin' but blue skies from now on."*
Llewellyn Sanchez-Werner, piano November 13, 2016

Theodor Blumer (1881-1964) Sextet, Theme and Variations, Op. 45
Theodor Blumer's music must speak for him because so little can be found about this German composer. Not even Grove's reliable music encyclopedia mentions him, but a few key facts are available from various sources. He grew-up in Dresden where he studied composition and in 1911 his opera "Der Funfuhrthee" ("The Five o'clock Tea," a rather puzzling subject for a German brew lover) was produced there. Remaining in Dresden, he composed various chamber works during the succeeding years. The Sextet, op. 45, was composed in 1921. In 1931, he became the conductor of the Dresden Radio Orchestra, but during WWII he conducted a radio orchestra in Leipzig. After WWII, being in East Germany under Russian control, he was put on a list of "banned composers and conductors" ostensibly due to his having been a member of the Nazi party. He lived the rest of his life in East Berlin with his wife, an opera singer. Three CDs of his chamber works have been produced. That's about it.

Blumer's Sextet seems to have been born of the same romanticism as that of his countryman Richard Strauss, whose special favorite, the French horn, finds pronounced use in this work also. Blumer's theme is lushly announced and of the seven variations the longest two are the Pastorale and Romanz, again suggesting the inner romanticism of Blumer. Still several of the variations indicate a good sense of humor and the Finale is as jolly a romp as could be hoped for.
Borealis Wind Quintet and Leon Bates, piano October 24, 2010

William Bolcom (1938-) Nine New Bagatelles (2006)

Bagatelle (noun): An unimportant or insignificant thing. A short, light piece of verse or music. Don't let the definition fool you. It takes talent, imagination and cleverness to compose such trifles well and Bolcom thrives on these three gifts. Many of us know Bolcom for his recordings of ragtime or recordings with his wife Joan Morris of songs of the Victorian era or even specific songwriters such as Cole Porter. Meanwhile Bolcom has a long catalogue of compostions, including eight symphonies, four operas (including one based on Arthur Miller's drama A View from the Bridge), cabaret songs, and his magnum opus: Songs of Innocence and of Experience, a three-hour orchestral/choral work of 55 songs, setting William Blake's poems to music; that one took him 25 years to complete. Nine New Bagatelles took far less time in 2006. (He had composed Nine Bagatelles---the "Old" ones---years before.) Joel Fan, in the CD notes for his premiere recording of the these new bagatelles, wrote that these are reminiscent of Schumann *"with their individual inscriptions and sharply-etched characters, always drawn with a knowing wink---playful, brutal, plaintive (like birds), ghostly, sweetly innocent, rhythmic, waltzing (but forgetting), omniscient, and finally, a funeral march."* Talk about variety of subjects and musical styles! ***Joel Fan, piano September 18, 2011***

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) Troubled Water (1967)

Few concertgoers could name even one female African-American composer of classical music. To the student of such composers, the names of Margaret Bonds and her teacher Florence Price would come quickly to mind. Margaret Bonds, Chicago-born, was first piano-trained by her mother then later by Price for both piano and composition. During college (Northwestern University) she won a prize for composition, and then became the first black female to solo with the Chicago Symphony. After moving to Harlem, she became a close friend of the "Harlem Renaissance" poet Langston Hughes, later putting many of his poems to music, with particular success for the poem "The Negro Speaks of Music." As many a black composer has done, Bonds turned often to spirituals for thematic material in both choral and piano compositions. "Wade in the Water" was the basis for her Troubled Water.

"Wade in the water; Wade in the water, children; Wade in the water; God's going to trouble the water."

This so-called "coded spiritual" sent a message to escaping slaves to head for a river, wade in the waters and thus throw off the scent for search dogs heading their way. Here Bonds beautifully supports the melody in a variety of contrapuntal ways, including a clear jazz beat at one time. The conclusion pits the "Wade in the water" melodic fragment against that of "God's going to trouble the water" in a powerful conclusion. ***Joel Fan, piano September 18, 2011***

Alexander Borodin (1833 - 1887) 'Notturno' from String Quartet No. 2 in D Major

Alexander Borodin is unlike any other great composer for he was "three-in-one": a composer, a medical doctor and an important organic chemist. In 1953, the beauty of Borodin's music first came to be known to much of the public through the successful Broadway musical, Kismet, all of whose songs used Borodin melodies. Those of us studying college chemistry at the time were also surprised to learn that Borodin was a chemist, balancing his composing talent with a professorship at the St. Petersburg Academy. Trying to balance scientific and musical talents, Borodin joined with four other largely self-trained Russian composers (Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Modest Mussorgsky, Mili Balakirev and Cesar Cui) to establish a Russian style, a nationalistic thrust in music. But with his multiple talents clawing for his time, it is not surprising that the number of works composed by Borodin would be relatively low in number,

but among them are masterpieces, such as his Symphony No. 2, the tone poem In the Steppes of Central Asia, the opera Prince Igor and his two string quartets.
Much of Borodin's chemical training occurred in Heidelberg, Germany, which in the mid-1800s was a center of chemistry in Europe. His friends there included his roommate Dmitri Mendeleev, the man who formulated what is the center of chemistry studies: the Periodic Table of the Elements. And it was in Heidelberg that he met the young pianist Catherine Protopopova, who was recovering from tuberculosis. It was their love of music that brought them together and ultimately to marriage. They would settle in St. Petersburg where he taught and researched at the Academy.
Catherine came to learn that she had married a whirlwind. Rimsky-Korsakov wrote about visiting Borodin: "When I went to see him, I would often find him at work in the laboratory next door to his flat. When he had finished what he was doing, he would come back with me to his flat, and we would play together or talk. Right in the middle he would jump up and rush back into the laboratory to make sure nothing had burnt or boiled over, all the while making the corridor echo with incredible sequences of successive ninths or sevenths; when he came back we used to pick up the music or conversation from where we had left off"
The love shared by the Borodins can be felt in the music of his second string quartet, which he dedicated to Catherine; it was twenty years after their marriage. The emotional center of the quartet is surely the third movement, Notturno, with its opening theme of warmth as in a loving conversation. First it is the cello with the theme (Alexander?) then it is given to the violin (Catherine?) A segment in minor keys leads to a canon-like section and a wistful ending of shared love, carried along on the wings of a great melody. ***Daedalus Quartet May 12, 2019***

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Fantasies, Op. 116, Intermezzos (4, 5, 6), Capriccio (7)

These Fantasies were composed in 1892, the year after Brahms had made his will and resigned himself to simply putting his life together, revising, re-publishing, and cleaning up his affairs. But he gained a burst of energy and returned to the smaller worlds of composition—piano and chamber works.
For those who believe that music bears the stamp of a composer's feelings at the time of inspiration, consider these events the year prior to Brahms writing these Fantasies: the deaths of his sister Elise and Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, one of the many women with whom he shared a strong bond. Besides these funereal episodes, he had broken off with the woman who meant most in his life, Clara Schumann. So listen with these episodes in mind. Certainly the three intermezzos have a placid and reflective beauty. The capriccio, however, exhibits a stormy release. ***Gilles Vonsattel, piano April 21, 2007***

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Piano Quintet, Op. 34

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 "geműtlichkeit." How easy to forget that this aging bachelor had once been a handsome youth. He had loved many a beauty, but ultimately had his greatest love for Clara Schumann, a bravura pianist, a mother of seven and wife to Robert Schumann, the first man to sings the praises of composer Brahms. Musical biographers believe the reason Brahms never married was his inability to achieve a permanent musical position that would guarantee enough money to raise a family. He hungered to be especially connected to his hometown of Hamburg and desired appointments such as becoming the conductor of the Hamburg orchestra, The complexities of the personality of bachelor Brahms---rough-hewn in social gatherings, and easy to anger others---developed over the years as he

never achieved a place to "settle down." Then there was his desire for perfection in all his works. There is a story of a friend who met middle-aged Brahms in a Viennese café and asked how the day had gone: "I was working on my symphony,' Brahms replied. "In the morning I added an eighth note. In the afternoon I took it out." (It would take him twenty years of work to finish his Symphony No. 1.)

Today's work by Brahms is an epitome of his relentless perfectionism. The Piano Quintet, completed in the autumn of 1864, resulted from two earlier attempts with differing instrumental groupings. In 1862, he wrote a String Quartet with two cellos, sending it to his two favorite critics: Clara (now 6 years after the death of Robert) and Joseph Joachim, the violinist for whom Brahms would write his violin concerto. Both had positive, but restrained, opinions. A year later, Brahms recast the string quartet into a Sonata for Two Pianos (remember that Brahms was a master pianist), only to have Clara suggest it didn't work as a sonata, and sought one more remodeling. Her dogged insistence resulted in Brahms' Piano Quintet, Opus 34, considered a masterpiece of romanticism.

In 1858, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann: *"All of you, particularly think me different from what I am. I am never, or very seldom, in the least bit pleased with myself. I never feel quite happy, but fluctuate between complacency and depression."* Perhaps this helps to understand the mix of musical emotions that appear immediately in the Allegro first movement of the Piano Quintet. Piano and strings in the first four measures provide a quiet, pensive theme only to be countered dramatically in the next four measures by a musical idea propelled by fortissimo chords from the strings and a blustering piano's rapid broken chords. For some 15 minutes, Brahms explores a wealth of ideas, often with his signature three beats against two. Musical lines move from instrument to instrument often quite seamlessly, but passionate outbursts are to be expected. Though there is some flirting with major keys, predominantly a minor darkness pervades.

The Andante second movement provides a calm counterpoint to what has come before. There is a horizontalness to the gentle musical ideas of the piano and strings, almost lullaby-like in its swaying quality. There is a bit of "sturm und drang" in the movement's center, but a return to a quiet, contemplative Brahms at the conclusion. This writer cannot help but believe that in this movement the composer was honoring the beauty of his friendship with Clara Schumann.

Similarly, the dramatic Scherzo may well have been a tribute to his champion and idol, Robert Schumann. With martial precision, Brahms pours forth an actual hummable melody of more than a few measures. Some commentators have even used the word "maniacal" for the furiosity of some of the final measures.

With the fortissimo ending to the Scherzo still ringing in the ears, the finale begins with a quiet meshing of notes and rhythm that caused Arnold Schoenberg to refer to Brahms as a "modernist." But quickly follows the body of the movement, strongly suggesting a Gypsy rondo. Brahms never allows the listener's attention to wander, alternating repose and tension until the pulsating coda, notes cascading down from the heavens to a sudden, smashing stop.

Fine Arts Quartet with pianist Alan Goldstein May 21, 2017

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, Opus 8

For 20 year-old Johannes Brahms, who was already a fine pianist, but unpublished as a composer, it may well have been Euterpe, the muse of music, who led him to Robert and Clara Schumann. But the more earthbound reason is this: he had come to know the greatest of violinists of his era, Joseph Joachim, who played some of the sonatas of the young man and was so impressed that he gave him a letter of introduction to Joachim's friend, Robert Schumann. Brahms held back for a visit because he had once sent some of his piano compositions to Schumann, but they were returned unopened, leaving a bitter taste in the shy, young man.

Finally, after others urged him to visit the Schumanns, he knocked upon their door in Düsseldorf on September 30, 1853---and his future became guaranteed. For Robert and wife Clara listened to Brahms play his piano works and saw great potential. So taken were they with the handsome man, much younger than they, that the hosted him for weeks during which a deep friendship arose. During that time Schumann provided the lead to a publisher for Brahms as well as publishing articles that extolled the young man's talents.

Once Brahms returned to his home in Hanover, during the first months of 1854 he began composing what would become his Opus 8. In January, the Schumanns visited Brahms in Hanover with great shared enjoyment. Only a month later, Robert Schumann, who for years had suffered from recurring nervous disorders, developed near unbearable mental exasperations. Hearing voices and demoniacal shrieks, he snuck out of his home and threw himself into the Rhine River. Though recovered and recognized by boatmen and returned to his home, in only a few weeks he was placed in an asylum for the two years remaining in his life. Brahms then became the great support for Clara (and the seven Schumann children.) Though he made clear to Clara of his love for her, it would only be a lifelong friendship.

Brahms' first published work that is not a song or a piano work is his B major piano trio, arguably his first masterwork. One finds in the sequence of the four movements a sense of moving from a world of happiness to a world of sadness. Is that due to its time of construction that went from initial great joy in friendship to a deep unhappiness for both Robert and Clara? Thirty years later, Brahms was asked by his publisher Simrock to consider revising any of his earliest compositions with which he might now be dissatisfied. Brahms indeed did a major revision on this piano trio. What resulted involved additional themes in several of the movements, and some excising in others. The scherzo is the least affected of the four movements, existing as it was in the world of the youthful Schumann. In writing to Clara Schumann, he told her of his rewriting the trio: "[I] can now call it Opus 108 instead of Opus 8. It will not be as wild as it was…." Well, the opus number was never changed. Both versions still exist and today's performance utilizes the revised version.

The first two movements of this work contain some of the most noble and vital music Brahms ever wrote. The first measures alone ---piano first, then strings---have a warmth and distinction that are memorable. And throughout the trio, the cello seems to have a very special role. Then in the second movement scherzo Brahms proves he can certainly match Mendelssohn in scherzo writing, but always with that touch of sadness. In the third movement, solemn piano and strings provide a meditative aspect that leads into a final movement that some have called "a musical battle between hope and despair." Starting in a minor key, there are several elegant bursts of optimistic major key melodies, only to have the sadness of B-minor provide the passionate conclusion.

Andrew Armstrong, piano, Tessa Lark, violin, Raman Ramakrishman, cello Sept. 15, 2019

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Serenade in D Major (original version)

Johannes Brahms felt deeply the need to express a country's roots in music. His Hungarian Dances, based on folk tunes he had collected, are prime examples. Brahms also championed a young Czech composer Antonin Dvorak, whose Slavonic Dances remain at the peak of nationalism in music.

Brahms's Serenade (the first of two) is hardly nationalistic music, but it is full of the youthful passion of the 24-year-old composer who completed it in 1857. He originally meant the

Serenade for nine instruments, but then expanded it to full orchestra, the first of his significant orchestral works. He completed the work at the time of a defining event in his life—the death of his dear friend and champion Robert Schumann. In addition to his admiration for Schumann, Brahms had a deep emotional involvement with Clara Schumann, now the composer's widow. She was not uninterested in Brahms, but they did decide to never marry, but simply remain friends for life.

Though the use of the word "Serenade" as a title might suggest an evening of music for his beloved Clara, the word relates to a musical structure, a divertimento, as used by Mozart and others in bringing together a variety of short pieces for a social occasion. Critics identify in the Serenade homage to Mozart and Beethoven and a youthful demeanor of humor, as well as a "cerebral sensuousness." Philip Hale, the respected Boston critic, noted that the music of Brahms was likened "to a gypsy woman dancing in a tight-fitting corset. [There was] latent heat beneath the formal exterior.'" What is heard today is a 1987 reconstruction of Brahms's chamber version by the English conductor and composer, Alan Boustead. The original composition for nine instruments has been lost. ***The New York Chamber Ensemble April 6, 2002***

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Trio in A minor for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Op. 114

The word "autumnal" for the mood of this clarinet trio seems particularly appropriate. In 1890, the aging Brahms had drawn up his will and seemed determined to retire from composing, which he did for a whole year. Then he heard the playing of the clarinetist Richard Muhlfied. Brahms had never written chamber music for the clarinet and now composed not only this trio but also a clarinet quintet in 1891, followed by two clarinet sonatas. The mellow coloring of the instrument exactly fit Brahms' then reflective mood. Add to the clarinet's warmth the beauty of the cello's deep tones and you have a work in which, according to one of Brahms' friends, "it is as though the instruments were in love with each other."

The four movement work begins with the cello making overtures to the clarinet. Both the first and second movements are filled with the reflections of a good life, while the third movement provides a beautiful Liebeslieder-like waltz. Brahms' piano, with its cascading notes, helps fill the final movement with life and even a touch of bravado. ***Trio Solisti April 5, 2008***

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Trio in E-flat major for Piano, Violin and Horn, Op. 40

Brahms was particularly close to his mother, so with her death in 1865, he found two ways to release his sadness in the year that followed: work to complete his Requiem and begin on a horn trio. No one before him had combined a piano, violin, and horn in a trio before Opus 40. It resulted in the most important horn composition in chamber music in the 19th century. As one of the few major composers to have learned to play the horn, he found it apropos for many musical statements. And it proved to be a unique work honoring the memory of his mother.

One word describes the Horn Trio: contrast. The contrast of the tonal quality of the three instruments keeps the listener alert. Moods contrast in the four movements, the first and third movements being quiet, contemplative, while the second and fourth are mirthful. The horn, ever a symbol for the beauties of nature, gives nobility. Rhythmic and melodic contrasts abound throughout. The first movement is unusual for its slow pace and for not being in sonata form, instead the form is A-B-A-B-A. The "A" theme, immediately announced by piano and taken up by the horn, is melancholy personified. The "B" theme, in its rhythm and sense of urgency, plays up the sadness of the first theme. The second movement's principal theme has a staccato forward thrust, punctuated by horn calls. The horn's principal activity here is the lyrical melody given it

for the slower middle portion of the movement. The third movement, Adagio, is the heart of the Horn Trio. One can easily sense in its funereal feeling a relationship to the death of Brahms' mother. Daniel Mason, in his book The Chamber Music of Brahms, calls this movement "one of the most profoundly felt and one of the most subtly composed of all the slow movements of Brahms." The three themes of the movement are introduced quickly, the first given to the piano, the second to the violin and the third to the solo horn. (It is reported that when Brahms was asked by an effusive socialite, "How do you write such divine adagios?" he answered, "My publisher orders them that way.") Mason likens the ebullient finale to a "little river that winds through the meadows of a gently sloping valley. It bubbles into ever-new rhythms, it pounds with the reiterated notes of the horn...Indeed it hardly forms a single eddy from its careless buoyant beginning to its triumphant close. ***Trio Valtorna November 18, 2012***

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, op. 24

Variations on musical themes had intrigued young Johannes Brahms throughout his early years of composition, years in which he had the support and friendship of the Schumanns--Robert, the composer, and Clara, the exceptional pianist, wife and composer. During the last years of Robert's illness, Brahms was a great help to Clara, a woman for whom the bachelor had great love and respect. In 1854, with Robert now in an asylum after an attempted suicide, Brahms began his Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann. He would bring each new variation to Clara who wrote in her diary that these were comforts to her. Robert died in 1856 and in 1861Brahms brought to Clara as a birthday present his monumental composition of 25 variations and a fugue around an air of Handel. Brahms premiered the work to great acclaim, a result that clearly justified the Schumanns' faith in Brahms. However, it would take the German Requiem (1869) and Symphony No. 1 (1876) to place him firmly on the pedestal of great composers.

Brahms, long a student of the baroque era in music, chose for his variations a simple air from a keyboard suite by Handel. The eight-bar, two-part, melody is in B flat Major, a key that Brahms maintains throughout the variations except for a couple excursions into the tonic minor. This whole work is so rich in imagination and cleverness. While some of the variations are clearly separate from the one that follows, some are paired. For example, the joyful, staccato-filled Variation 1 comes to a firm conclusion, but Variations 2 and 3, quietly lyrical, blend one into the other. At their conclusion, Variation 4, the first of the Brahmsian bravura variations, explodes as octaves fly about in each hand. Here are a few variations to particularly listen for: Variation 7 has the sense of a pulsating fanfare; Variation 13, in a minor key, is the middle variation and is the most solemn of them all, which one critic has called a "Hungarian funeral march; Variation 19 is a "siciliana," a melody in slow 6/8 time long used by composers of the Baroque era; Variation 22 has the sense of a "music box" tune, immediately followed by the final three variations that build to a joyful conclusion. But there is more: a lengthy fugue that builds and builds---a Romantic composer doffing his hat to Baroque masters Bach and Handel.

Roman Rabinovich, piano October 19, 2014

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

Johannes Brahms 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.

Trio Valtorna November 18, 2012

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) Op. 10 Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge (1937)
I: Adagio II: March III: Romance IV: Aria Italiana V: Bouree Classique

VI: Wiener Waltz VII: Moto Perpetuo VIII: Funeral March IX: Chant X: Fugue and Finale

As Aaron Copland was central to American classical music of the 20th century, so was Benjamin Britten to British classical music. From his first opus, a Sinfonietta at age of 18, he wrote music for 45 years, with a special talent for vocal music (such as the well-known Ceremony of Carols), important operas such as Peter Grimes, Billy Budd and Midsummers Night Dream and the masterpiece of anti-war sentiment: War Requiem. The total result of his years is nicely summarized in the appellation: "Great Britain's great Britten."

But it was not vocal music that first brought Britten world-wide attention, but today's Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, a work that would musically link the composer forever to his first important teacher and mentor, Frank Bridge. In the 1920s, Frank Bridge was a well-known progressive British composer whose orchestral suite The Sea "bowled over" a ten-year old Britten at one of the first concerts he ever attended. A few years later, and already setting notes to staves, a teenage Britten was introduced to Bridge who agreed to be his mentor and help develop the youth's compositional talent. Though he would study with other teachers, Britten's appreciation to his longtime mentor is found in the Variations' dedication:
"To F.B.--A tribute with affection and admiration."

Here's how the Variations came to be. From 1935 to 1937, Britten had composed scores for dozens of movies. Boyd Neel, who had established the excellent Boyd Neel Orchestra, was the conductor for some of the film scores written by Britten and was deeply impressed by Britten's music. So when, with short notice, Neel's orchestra was invited to perform at the Salzburg Festival in 1937, he contacted Britten because Salzburg demanded a new work by a British composer be on their program. Britten readily agreed to provide it and in a three-month whirlwind, he produced the Bridge Variations.

The theme that Britten chose came from Bridges' Three Idylls, a string quartet of 1906, and is not of the type that is immediately hummable. At the beginning , It is presented quietly, somewhat mysteriously, after a minute of attention-grabbing fanfare. Then ten variations roll forth. The intention of Britten was for each variation to represent a quality of Bridge's personality. For example, the dark and passionate "Adagio" represents Bridge's "integrity" while the following "March" his "energy." Britten's cleverness in the variations appears in imitation of other composers, such as a Rossini-like charm in "Aria Italiana." And what of the slightly off-kilter Straussian "Wiener Waltz" or the somber, somewhat Wagnerian "Funeral March"? A multi-part fugue brings the work to an end, but not before a strong evocation again of the Bridge theme. Britten seems to know how not to overstay a welcome in each of the variations, but didn't you wish he would have made that "Aria Italiana" a few minutes longer?

A Far Cry with guest artist David Shifrin , clarinet May 20, 2018

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

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 admits it is he suggesting these mental pictures, not the composer.)

Schumann Trio March 18, 2012

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849 Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise, Op. 22
Chopin's Andante Spianato et Grand Polonaise is, like his Sonata No. 2, a combination of pieces written several years apart. The Grand Polonaise was written in Vienna between 1830 and 1831 for piano and orchestra. The young Chopin was then trying to establish himself as a virtuoso, so he concentrated on being sure that what the audience heard proved his technical prowess. The Andante Spianato was composed in 1834 to be paired with the Polonaise (but now without orchestra). From the Andante's leisurely way and melodic beauty, Chopin provided a rhythmic and harmonic contrast to the brilliance of the Polonaise that follows.

Kevin Kenner, piano March 28, 2009

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23
This, the first of the four Chopin Ballades, presents what Schumann referred to as "the most spirited, most daring work" of Chopin's early compositions. Chopin also told Schumann, that he had been "incited to the creation of the Ballades" by the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz. Mickiewicz, like Chopin, was an émigré in Paris from Poland. It doesn't take too much imagination to find a nostalgic sense of longing in this Ballade. After all, a ballad often is a musical tale of the past. For this Ballade, the pensive, slow beginning leads to one of Chopin's most beautiful melodies, a central lyrical theme quietly presented only to return later in heroic fashion. After agitated portions and thematic review, the Ballade appears to end reflectively, only to start-up again and conclude in robust chords

Santiago Rodriguez, piano October 15, 2000 .

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) Nocturne No. 5 in F-sharp Major, Op. 15, No. 2
John Field (1782-1837), an Irish composer who thrived in Russia and died in Moscow, strongly influenced Chopin. Fields concertized throughout Europe and published seventeen piano pieces

entitled "Nocturnes" ("Evening songs.") Their dreamy quality appealed to Chopin and he would compose twenty-one nocturnes throughout his musical life. Franz Liszt said that Chopin's nocturnes have more "pain" than Field's and "give more delight but less calm." The Fifth Nocturne displays a simplicity of theme with harmonic decorations of trills, broken chords, and rapid runs of notes. A central passionate outburst occurs before a return to the quiet contemplation of the beginning. One can almost see the smoke from George Sand's cigar rising effortlessly into the night air. ***Andrew Armstrong, Piano April, 7, 1998***

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) Polonaise in A-flat Major, Opus 53, "Heroic"

For those of us of the "Greatest Generation" (at least in the view of Tom Brokaw), we will always associate the main theme of this "heroic" polonaise with the melody of the song "Till the End of Time." (Ours was also the generation when writers of popular songs took melodies from the likes of Chopin and Tchaikovsky and turned them into hit songs that probably made them more money than the poor dead composers ever made in a lifetime!) The polonaise, a Polish processional dance, has an easily recognizable rhythmic pattern in 3/4 time, with a doubling of the second of six beats: Tum Ta-Ta Tum Tum Tum Tum. The polonaise as a dance rhythm has been around for centuries (note its presence in the French Suite). There is no doubt why the A-flat Major polonaise is one of the best known of all Chopin's compositions. Not only is that first theme a real beauty, but those rapid octaves in the bass (which a critic has called "one of the greatest stunts in piano literature") bring the listener's blood to near boiling. But just when the music seems to be ready to explode, the reflective Chopin comes peeking through.

Orli Shaham, piano April 24, 2004

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 58

I. Allegro Maestoso II. Scherzo: Molto vivace III. Largo IV. Finale: Presto non tanto

Frederic Chopin in 1844 was in a downhill slide. His affair with George Sand was unraveling and his father died. Composing became very difficult, but he managed to assemble his third sonata, his last major work. Five years before he had published his second sonata, with the famed "Funeral March" movement. Critics then and now still fault Chopin on his ability to write a cohesive work with the name "sonata." Robert Schumann had said of the second sonata that Chopin had simply tied together "four of his maddest children." Like them or not, the works of the mature Chopin provide the listener with music of incredible beauty and lightness, but also (as in the beginning of the last movement of the B Minor sonata) power and drama.

With the 150th anniversary of Chopin's death, this writer asked several musically knowledgeable persons the question: "What makes the music of Chopin so quickly recognizable." The answers seemed quite pertinent: (1) Chopin's melody line is always supremely clear and limpid, and (2) a hint of melancholy seems omnipresent. Another clue – his use of chromatic and/or arpeggio runs that add a filigree to the composition (as in the second movement of Sonata No. 3) What do you think gives Chopin's music such identifiable qualities?

The **first movement** of Sonata No. 3 provides a variety of musical ideas, with one of those uniquely Chopin melodies central to it. The short **second movement** seems the most disjointed as the rapid piano fireworks surround a quiet center. The **third movement** might give one a sense of a solemnity with its somewhat slow march rhythm, yet the melodies, though perhaps nostalgic, are not sad. Without question, the **final movement** is the jewel of the Sonata. The

music, from its first dramatic notes, is uplifting and the structure, an ABABA form, provides a satisfying conclusion to this work. ***Anne-Marie McDermott, piano November 21, 1999***

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849) 12 Etudes, op. 10

The piano had come into its own as a powerful instrument of music at the beginning of the 19th century, and etudes (French for "study") were composed as a means for piano students to perfect particular skills. Especially popular were those by Carl Czerny (who was Liszt's teacher) and Muzio Clementi, but these often were repetitive measures hardly of interest as concert pieces. It would be Chopin who would change this. Inspired by Liszt's 1826 "*Étude en douze exercices*," Chopin published his "Etudes de concert," (Op. 10) in 1833, all twelve proving that strengthening of technique could also have highly pleasant musical value for the listener. Chopin dedicated them to Liszt, who recognized them for what they were when he wrote: *"These compositions, which have been given such a modest name, are none the less perfect in their genre, which Chopin created and gave his mark to, as he stamped all his works with his poetic genius."* It should be noted that Liszt was indeed so impressed by Op. 10 that he revised his 1826 etudes to eventually become his famed "Transcendental Etudes." He understood clearly what Chopin had achieved in meshing musicality with technique. Another who recognized Chopin's accomplishment with these etudes was James Gibbon Huneker, an influential early 1900 New York critic and Chopin biographer. He asked the perfect question; "Were ever Beauty and Duty so mated in double harness?"

Chopin was the consummate Romantic. There are emotions of sadness, happiness, and love of country in these twelve etudes. Though his mature years were spent in France, he never forgot his native land of Poland.

Below is a brief comment for each etude and, for a few, the specific technique emphasized is noted.

No. 1 Rippling arpeggios, with a chorale sounding bass. Some call it "Waterfall."
No. 2 Chromatics for strengthening the right hand fingers 2, 3 and 4.
No. 3 "Tristesse," with one of Chopin's most beautiful melodies,
No. 4 Presto, meant to quickly sweep away No. 3's sadness
No. 5 "Black key" etude. The right hand strikes black keys only.
No. 6 Somewhat elegiac, a six-note underpinning to a long melody line.
No. 7 A toccata effect, emphasizing the "touch" on the keys.
No. 8 The right hand sparkles and it all "unfurls like a ribbon in the breeze"
No. 9 Full of emotional content, perhaps anxiety for his native country.
NO. 10 Chopin spoke of this as full of "sweetness and light."
NO. 11 Harp-like effects pervade here.
No. 12 The "Revolutionary Etude," supposedly inspired by the fall of Poland to Tsarist Russia in 1831. ***Cecile Licad, piano Sunday, October 20, 2019***

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) Variations Brillantes in B-Flat Major, Op. 12

The complete title to this seldom heard work is "Introduction and Variations in B Flat Major on 'Je vends des scapulaires' from Heróld's Ludovic." Chopin was only 21 when he arrived in Paris and was gathered to the bosom of Paris society (not to mention that of George Sand's.) It was 1831 and a time when Louis Heróld (now unknown except for the overture to his opera Zampa and the ballet La Fille mal Gardee) was a popular composer for ballet and light opera. Chopin took a theme from Herold's last opera and in 1833 wrote this composition. The great American critic James Huneker referred to these Variations as "Gallic sugar water." Indeed, one can almost

see the Parisienne salon crowd about Chopin as he began the emphatic and embellished introduction, then the simple 6/8 time melody. He followed with four variations: the first rather kinetic and frenetic; the second less so; the third, a quieter, emphatic one with a real Chopinesque feeling. The final variation, a glittering conclusion, seems to utilize every note on the keyboard! The hearts of the Parisienne debutantes could only have been left fluttering!
Andrew Armstrong, piano April 4, 1998

Aaron Copland (1901-1999) Clarinet Concerto (1948)
How fascinating to know that Aaron Copland, the composer that best represents American classical music of the 20th century, lived through the whole century himself. At the time of Copland's death, Anthony Tommasini, chief music critic for the New York Times, wrote: "Before Copland came along, we didn't have an "American" style of classical music -- a kind of music that you heard and knew, immediately, that an American had written it. Copland created that style out of his own imagination. It's an amalgam of the jumpy, angular rhythms of jazz; a "wide-open" style of harmony; a bright, uncluttered instrumental palette; and a remarkable gift for melody ." From his early modernist/dissonant work, Copland's music evolved to represent America's beauty of place and spirit (e.g. ballets such as Appalachian Spring or Rodeo), and film scores of great lyricism and emotion (as those for Our Town and The Heiress). Then there were the works such as the Piano Concerto and the Clarinet Concerto that his early protégé Leonard Bernstein spoke of as having the energy of New York city and of jazz.

The Clarinet Concerto was born because of Benny Goodman. The fame of the "King of Swing" was secured in the 1930s, especially with the famed 1938 Carnegie Hall "swing" concert. Still Goodman had eclectic musical interests and found great interest in extending his abilities. That same year he had recorded Mozart's Clarinet Quintet with the Budapest Quartet and realized his clarinet "jazz" sound needed to be "classicized," so he began further studies with clarinet teachers. Because of a paucity of clarinet works in the classical repertoire, Goodman began commissioning works from famous composers. Goodman's friendship with Hungarian violinist Joseph Szegeti led to Bela Bartok (Szegeti's friend) writing Rhapsody (now titled Contrasts) for clarinet, violin and piano. Goodman was back on the stage of Carnegie Hall in 1939, this time performing the Bartok work. In 1941, Darius Milhaud agreed to write a concerto for Goodman. Once written, Goodman never played it. Mitchell Lurie, famed clarinetist and knowledgeable of the situation, stated: "It was not too hard for Benny, but you know the Milhaud. It's a non-stop piece of music with no place to take a breath, and Benny just didn't like it." Goodman followed with commissions to Paul Hindemith and Alex North, both of whose works did not sit well with critics when performed.

Goodman finally looked to Copland. Perhaps he had been impressed by the premiere of Copland's Third Symphony in 1947, for he contacted him shortly after and an agreement was reached for a clarinet concerto. "I made no demands on what Copland should write," Goodman later wrote. "He had completely free rein, except that I should have a two-year exclusivity on playing the work. I paid two thousand dollars and that's real money." Copland began writing the concerto during a time in 1947 he was in Brazil and thentook over a year to complete it when back in New York. Goodman sought a few changes and delayed the premiere until November 1950, when he played it on a radio broadcast of the NBC Symphony, conducted by Fritz Reiner

The Clarinet Concerto is in the unusual form of only two movements, accented by harp and piano. The concerto expresses the Copland of "bittersweet lyricism" in the first movement (to be played "Slowly and expressively,") and the Copland of jazz elements in the "Rather fast" second movement (including some Latin-jazz as well). A virtuosic clarinet cadenza links the two and initiates the energy for the concertos conclusion. What goes on between the concerto's very first notes, plucked by the harpist, and the final notes, a joyful clarinet glissando, is masterful Copland. ***A Far Cry with guest artist David Shifrin, clarinet Sunday, May 20, 2018***

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) Danzón Cubano

Peripatetic Aaron Copland became intrigued with Latin rhythms after his first visit to Mexico in 1932. After a fruitless trip to Hollywood in 1937, where he attempted to get contracts for film scores, he headed to the Caribbean. In Cuba, everywhere he went he heard the music of the danzón, a stately dance. He tucked the rhythm away in his head until 1942, when he wrote Danzón Cubano, a six-minute piece for two pianos. A few years later Leo Smit made the arrangement heard today for solo piano, then Copland orchestrated it in 1946. Here's what Copland himself has to say about the composition: "The special charm of the [Cuban] danzón is a certain naïve sophistication. Its mood alternates between passages of rhythmic precision and a kind of nonsentimental sweetness….I did not attempt to reproduce an authentic Cuban sound, but felt free to add my own touches of displaced accents and unexpected silent beats."

Orli Shaham, piano April 24, 2004