

NOTES ON THE PROGRAMS
SUMMERMUSIC FESTIVAL 2010

■
PROGRAM I

Wednesday, July 21, 2010 ■ 6 PM
Market Square Church

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Oboe Concerto in F Major, BWV 1053

Allegro
Siciliano
Allegro

Gerard Reuter, the oboist in tonight's performance, has described the F Major Oboe Concerto as "a towering masterpiece by the Great One." Indeed it is just that—in whichever version you hear, this one or, perhaps more often, as a harpsichord concerto. Because of the ease with which Bach's music is translated, both by himself and others, don't be surprised if it emerges in a pop rock treatment that somehow does it no harm. In this performance, however, you may be hearing an original version since current scholarship has now identified many of the concertos for Bach's beloved oboe d'amore as the origin of his later harpsichord concertos. The many virtues of this work include some of Bach's best imprints: complex polyphony, elaborate thematic development, startling technical brilliance, and an overall dramatic concerto style.

In the opening *Allegro*, we are immediately thrown into the best of Bach as the strings introduce the motto that we will hear again and again throughout the movement but not in the manner of mindless repetition. Instead, we are reminded of Milan Kundera's beautiful essay from his *Testaments Betrayed* when he speaks of the "melodic importance of repetition." Here we see Bach as a powerful melodist, a characteristic we too often assign only to composers from Mozart to Brahms. The oboe sings forth above the complementary strings and harpsichord continuo. After minor key shifts that darken the mood of the movement momentarily, Bach offers a recapitulation introduced by the strings alone. All come together for a definitive conclusion.

By definition, a *siciliano* is a Sicilian peasant dance with a pastoral sense in a moderately slow tempo and often in a minor key. In Bach it becomes more than that in the beautifully pensive mood of the second movement studded with elaborate soloistic passages for the oboe over a steady throbbing by the cello. In this movement, Bach seems to have found a perfect mode of expression for the oboe.

The sun shines again in the third movement *Allegro*. Here the oboe takes on a role so cheerful that it seems to expand our minds on the oboe's sound and capabilities. The strings and harpsichord, too, join in the fun for a rollicking conclusion to Bach's masterpiece.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

Allegro
Andante
Allegro
Presto

Both history and Beethoven's scrupulously kept notebooks suggest that the D Major Quartet was his first string quartet. That is not to suggest that Beethoven was a beginner in 1798 when he first turned his attention to the genre. He had already published his remarkable piano trios and string trios, his String Quintet, his two cello sonatas, and a number of his piano sonatas (including the famous "Pathétique"). He was well established in Vienna where he had arrived some eight years earlier in the shadow of Mozart's death in 1791. The Viennese aristocracy, who lavishly supported composers, smiled upon Beethoven. He caught the attention of both Count Apponyi who had commissioned Haydn's Op. 71 and 74 and Count Lobkowitz who would commission the Op. 18 quartets.

Beethoven set to work, then, in the best of circumstances but not without a certain anxiety about the task before him, which he approached with great seriousness. Even Beethoven heard the tramp of genius before him in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart. This anxiety, however, took the form of great respect for the string quartet, clearly evident in Op. 18, No. 3. The work has what Joseph Kerman calls "its inner postulates of eloquence and coherence." Add to that its grace and ingenuity and we have a piece that is hardly the work of a beginner.

The eloquence and coherence of which Kerman speaks is immediately evident in the first movement. The first few bars at a slower tempo than the following *Allegro* do not have the drama of the opening of the Op. 59, No. 3 Quartet,

yet they are indicative of genius and pale only because we have that later model. As grace and elegance reign in the first movement, so do charm and warmth hold sway in the second. The *Andante*, says Kerman, is “blessed and obsessed by one of the happiest lyric ideas of Beethoven’s early period.” The third movement *Allegro* Kerman writes off as “a spotlessly groomed little piece whose one interest seems to be in making itself inconspicuous.” Perhaps it is this very “spotlessness,” that makes it a small monument of perfection. The last movement *Presto* is perhaps the most satisfying of the movements if for no other reason than its virtuosic demands and its wonderful counterpoint. It teems with life.

Kerman suggests that certain things in the D Major Quartet might not “work,” but this “failure” in Beethoven becomes a relative matter. What does work so magnificently in the Quartet is what Kerman calls its “chief aesthetic principle” of a main theme “dominating, permeating, or generating” the work. This notion of a kernel idea governing a whole work, as set forth by Beethoven, would shape the course of musical history from his own time through Brahms to what Arnold Schoenberg would call “the developing variation.” In the D Major Quartet, Beethoven proves himself not only master of the sonata form in new explorations but also a daring harmonist, a sumptuous lyricist, a contrapuntist beyond measure, and a master of rhythmic surprise.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Three Romances, Op. 94

Nicht schnell

Einfach, innig

Nicht schnell

Central to Schumann’s music is the reflection of his so-called “split personality,” that is, the free and happy Florestan side and the restrained and pensive Eusebius side. How much this reflects his own mental illness resulting in his attempted suicide in 1854 and his death two years later in a mental institution, we shall leave to the psychiatrists. What we need to study is the glorious result of his compositional efforts despite his sufferings. Of course, we might note that Schumann was subject to the well-known conflict of two artists in a marriage, this time somewhat in reverse of Gustav and Alma Mahler or Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath. On a tour of Russia with his more famous wife, Clara, he was asked whether “he, too, was a musician.”

His *Three Romances, Op. 94* is a superb example of Schumann’s efforts from the particularly productive year of 1849. It is a beautiful work much in the spirit of his earlier *Fantasy Pieces for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 73* but with additional darkness and command. The first movement, *Nicht schnell* (not fast), offers an exquisite lyricism and a fine balance between the two instruments. The second, *Einfach, innig*, lightens momentarily but quickly becomes intense and, as the word *innig* implies: sincere, heartfelt, and intense. While it bears the same tempo marking as the first, the third movement, *Nicht schnell*, is more complex and a clear example of Schumann’s warring personalities. In this case Florestan and Eusebius are closely aligned, and we are constantly and quickly pulled back and forth between the two. After an especially lyrical moment for the piano alone, the oboe returns and all ends gently.

One might look at this work as three separate pieces, but perhaps it can be more wisely viewed as one with Schumann’s particular take on the traditional ABA sonata form, a form that he both transcended and honored.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 80

Allegro vivace assai

Allegro assai

Adagio

Finale: Allegro molto

Stand warned, those of you who associate Mendelssohn with the pleasantries of the “Wedding March” and the *Songs Without Words*, that the F Minor Quartet is another side of this composer. For it, he put aside his Hegelian belief in music of “moderate affections,” and let fly one of the most impassioned and angry statements of certainly his own output and possibly even that of the entire chamber music canon. Generally speaking, Mendelssohn had always used chamber music for his most serious creations, but this, his final statement, is different from all the rest. It came in 1847 after the death of his beloved sister Fanny at the age of forty-one. Beset with grief, Mendelssohn retreated to Switzerland for the summer and by September had produced the F Minor Quartet.

The work is hurled upon us in the tense opening statement of the first movement, *Allegro vivace assai*. Like Beethoven, Mendelssohn employed a motto that will return throughout the quartet. The forward motion is interrupted briefly before a development of the main theme which rises in pitch and dynamic. A coda begins quietly but reaches a high level of tension before the movement concludes.

The *Allegro assai* is a far cry from the gossamered scherzo of Mendelssohn's famous Octet. Here we have the music of despair and anger. Dissonance, syncopated rhythms, and a strange, sad waltz add to the savagery of the movement.

The *Adagio* is the heart of the elegy. It develops from an opening statement by the cello and first violin to a powerful climax and quiet denouement.

There is little solace in the final movement, *Allegro vivace assai*, with its explosions of sound. Sonata form is honored, but it is the emotional content of this movement that is its finest quality.

Mendelssohn subtitled the work "Requiem for Fanny," but it would serve also as his own since he died two months later of a stroke at the age of forty-five.



PROGRAM II

Saturday, July 24, 2010 ■ 8 PM

Glen Allen Mill

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Quartet in F Major for Oboe and Strings, K. 370

Allegro

Adagio

Rondeau: Allegro

The Oboe Quartet is perfect Mozart: gracious, melodic, operatic, structurally integrated. Beyond that, it is a piece that delights and moves us. One is reminded of the American novelist Saul Bellow's comment on Mozart to a *New York Times* reporter: "For many years, Mozart was a kind of idol to me—this rapturous singing that's always on the edge of sadness and melancholy and disappointment and heartbreak, but always ready for an outburst of the most delicious music."

On a visit to Munich in 1781, Mozart composed the Quartet for oboist Frederick Ramm. The predominance of the oboe part obviously reflects Mozart's admiration for Ramm's playing, but it also says something about the strength of the oboe sound, a source of many musical jokes including Sir Thomas Beecham's comment that the oboe can "obviate the eruption of sounds that would arouse attention in a circus."

Despite all its gracious and sparkling good humor, the first movement is still not without a suggestion of darker things to come. They do come in the *Adagio*, one of the most poignant moments in musical history. The emotion expressed in this second movement seems almost to eclipse Classical style. We are driven to the depths of despair and then fully restored in the joyful *Rondeau*. Here Mozart sends the oboe to a heavenly ascent of its highest range in this "outburst of the most delicious music."

Ernst von Dohnányi (1877-1960)

Serenade in C Major for String Trio, Op. 10

Marcia

Romanza

Scherzo

Tema Con Variazioni

Ronda (Finale)

The towering influence of Dohnányi as a composer is often mitigated by accusations inferring a lack of originality. As a conductor, teacher, and administrator, he would seem without question except that he was plagued with criticism, both from the left and the right, for almost everything he did except for his pianism. The explanation, Grove suggests, may be found "in his unassailability on musical or ethical grounds." Indeed, he was a culminator of the Romantic spirit expressed in Classical form, a champion of musical taste in his native Hungary where, as conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Budapest he would program as many as 120 concerts a year, and he was teacher of such musical figures as Georg Solti and Géza Anda. Furthermore, despite his own Romantic leanings, he championed the music of his fellow countrymen Zoltán Kodály, Bela Bartók, and Leó Weiner. Politically he was indisputable in his anti-Nazi activities between 1939 and 1941 when he retained Jewish members of the Budapest Philharmonic despite the German occupation of Hungary.

Dohnányi's critics may call him "a poor man's Brahms," but as composer and writer Arthur Cohn aptly puts it, his "second-hand aesthetic is made of first-class means." Sir Donald Tovey in the venerable *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, offers pages of defense not only for Dohnányi's genius but also for his originality. "The influence of

Brahms,” says Tovey, “is neither in form nor in style the dominating feature of Dohnányi’s work.” In fact, Tovey speaks of the “easy fluency” of Dohnányi as compared to the struggles of Brahms. Furthermore, Tovey argues that Dohnányi’s music “shuns boredom absolutely.”

Certainly we cannot close this discussion without mentioning the nationalistic influences on Dohnányi. While there is an inherent and glowing rhythmic vigor to his work, once again the threat of imitation looms over him. This time, however the threat is ironic. We must remind ourselves that Brahms was no Hungarian although he often favored the *All’ogarese* or Gypsy style, particularly in his chamber music. Dohnányi, on the other hand, was native to Hungary but makes few nationalistic references in his music. Thus we have the strange notion that Brahms borrowed from Hungary and Dohnányi borrowed from Brahms.

Probably Dohnányi’s greatest debt to Brahms is the combination of Classical form and Romantic spirit. This is evident in the Serenade of 1902, which honors the eighteenth century serenade form of three movements flanked by an opening and closing march (presumably the processional and recessional for the players). The scoring for string trio is another salute to Classical tradition as developed by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Yet the feeling of the piece is distinctly Late Romantic. One needs to be reminded that its date of composition corresponds to that of Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* and the beginning of the end of Romanticism. Only six years later Schoenberg would produce his Second String Quartet that would end forever the traditional concept of tonality and, certainly, the Romantic period.

The brief opening march employs a riveting four-note motto and a sensuous Gypsy second theme. The passionate *Romanza* that follows opens with a solo for viola which is then taken up by the violin. Things grow dark in this movement as Dohnányi turns from C major to D minor. The demanding and full-blown *Scherzo* is a fine example of Dohnányi’s skill at counterpoint. The fourth movement, with its five variations on a poignant theme, is also highly skilled. We are reminded here of the easy genius of Dvořák. The final *Rondo* is a romp of a march with a surprise return of the Gypsy melody from the first movement.

The work had its premier in Vienna in 1904 by members of the Fitzner Quartet.

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Sextet in D Minor, Op. 70 “Souvenir de Florence”

Allegro con spirito

Adagio cantabile e con moto

Allegretto moderato

Allegro vivace

Contradiction pervades Tchaikovsky’s life and work. His homosexuality he called both a “natural tendency” and a “vice.” His nine-week marriage was loveless, but his attachment to his patroness Nadezhda von Meck was profound. That relationship, though they agreed never to meet, resulted in her financial support of him between 1876 and 1890 and a collection of 500 passionate love letters. Even his death – suicide or cholera – remains in question, although there is much to support suicide since that fate was assigned to him, according to 1970 scholarship, by a so-called “court of honor” when he was caught *en flagrante* with the nephew of a high-ranking Russian official.

He sought and received the musical favor of Europe but remained deeply rooted in his native Russia. Despite this attachment to his homeland, the famous Mighty Five (Balakirev, Mussorgsky, Borodin, Cui, and Rimsky-Korsakov) eschewed his academic associations as an insult to their interest in Russian folk traditions. Yet in the West he was viewed as one of the prominent “young Russians.”

In his chamber music Tchaikovsky is his least “Russian,” or, that is to say, his most “German” in the sense of his indebtedness to Brahms and the great Classical tradition that sprang out of Germany, a notion that in itself is confusing in light of the “Russianness” that we still associate with his music. Like other nationalistic composers when they turn to chamber music, Tchaikovsky was, in that genre, his most intimate and universal. At the same time, an identifiable Russian spirit remains in his three string quartets and his sextet, “Souvenir de Florence.” As Stravinsky said of him, “Tchaikovsky understood the art of wearing a top hat and at the same time, of wearing a Russian shirt and belt.”

The “Souvenir de Florence” was inspired by Tchaikovsky’s love of Florence where he had spent time in the fall of 1878 working on his opera, *The Maid of Orleans*. His legendary patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, had been in the city at the same time but, honoring their mutual agreement, they never met. Tchaikovsky complained that her presence disturbed him, but when she left he suffered a major depression. Memories of that situation produced the *String Sextet in D Minor, Op. 70 “Souvenir de Florence.”* The work was first performed in 1890 but revised in 1891 and again in 1892 by a dissatisfied Tchaikovsky. He seemed to struggle with the work but spoke of his ultimate satisfaction with it in a letter to his brother Modest: “What a Sextet— what a fugue at the end— it’s a pleasure! It is awful how pleased I am with myself; I am embarrassed not by any lack of ideas but by the novelty of the form.”

Like Mendelssohn's famous Octet, the Sextet opens boldly but is followed, in the second movement *Adagio*, by a moving duet for violin and cello suggestive of the somber quality of Tchaikovsky's late works. The third movement *Allegretto* is an elegy but with sharp dynamic contrasts. The final movement is an energetic fugue well deserving the composer's own description. These last two movements, with their folk themes, reflect a "Russianness" that we might also associate with Borodin.

As scholar Alice Dampman Humel said in her contribution to the volume, *Tchaikovsky and His World*, accompanying the 1998 Bard Festival's impressive treatment of Tchaikovsky: "This is the music of paradox – the looming specter of death and the uplifting abandon of dance, the constraints of counterpoint and fugue and the wild flights of imagination."



PROGRAM III
Sunday, July 25, 2010 ■ 4 PM
Glen Allen Mill

Ludwig van Beethoven (1710-1827)

Trio in C Minor, Op. 1, No. 3

Allegro con brio

Andante cantabile con variazione

Menuetto: Quasi allegro

Finale: Prestissimo

Although Beethoven inherited the piano trio from Haydn and Mozart, he lent it his own special spin. The form began as a keyboard sonata with optional violin and cello parts. In Haydn's hands it grew to a true trio form with the strings having an integral role with the violin often soloistic. The cello parts became more significant with Mozart's piano trios, but it was Beethoven who brought a complete balance of instruments to the form, but still, like his predecessors, with an extra edge for the big piano part. In fact, the virtuosic demands he made on all three players took the piano trio out of the amateur realm in which it had existed. Perhaps it is important to say, however, that this "development" did not negate its beauty. Beethoven's comment that he had "learned nothing" from Haydn seems only ironic irascibility in light of the development of the piano trio. This development was not to a better form but simply to a new one coinciding also with the technical development of the modern piano.

Haydn discouraged Beethoven from including this third trio in his first "official" opus, the reasons being unclear since it is undoubtedly the strongest and most dramatic of the three and certainly a harbinger of what was to come. Even the trio's key of C minor was to become Beethoven's "fate" key, that is, the key in which he wrote some of his most powerful works, namely: the "Pathétique" sonata, the Fifth Symphony, the Third Piano Concerto, the Op. 18, No. 4 String Quartet, and, of course, his final piano sonata, Opus 111.

The remarkable opening statement of the trio establishes the dramatic restlessness which marks the work. We are continuously pulled back and forth between the stormiest and sunniest moods. The movement ends with a coda, a device we take for granted but which, in its larger form, was almost invented by Beethoven. The second movement is a return to utter simplicity before it becomes an intricate and fascinating set of variations, another musical form which Beethoven would develop to its fullest in works such as his "Eroica" Variations. C minor gives way to a capricious C major in the *scherzo*-like third movement. In the final movement we return to the dramatic and dark restlessness introduced in the first movement.

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Sonata for Oboe and Piano, Op. 166

Andantino

Ad libitum; Allegretto; Ad libitum

Molto allegro

Saint-Saëns' brilliance as a composer sometimes overwhelms all other aspects of his music. He could compose as easily, he said, "as an apple tree produces apples." His comment on Georges Bizet is probably more telling about himself than his contemporary: "We pursued a different ideal, he (Bizet) seeking passion and life above all things, I running after the chimera of purity of style and perfection of form." Certainly these qualities are reflected in the Sonata for Oboe and Piano completed early in 1921 before his death on December 16th of the same year. Like his compatriot, Francis Poulenc, he composed three sonatas for winds in his final year, the Oboe Sonata being the first. It was dedicated to Louis Bas, a brilliant oboist and friend.

The brief gem of a work opens with a lyrical *Andantino* movement reminiscent of a pastoral walk. Complexity grows for both instruments with the piano part offering much more than simple accompaniment. Ascending and descending scales and arpeggios lead to a final extended trill that ends quietly.

The second movement begins with the suggestion of a horn call. Again the mood is lyrical but this time with a darker note. The oboe is soloistic over rolled chords by the piano. This leads to a gently merry section where the piano goes to work and the oboe performs remarkable twists and turns. There is a return to the opening statement before a quiet conclusion. The *Ad libitum* markings indicate that the performers are free to choose their tempo.

In the third movement, *Molto allegro*, the mood is unquestionably jolly—despite the many musical quips about the oboe's solemn tone. Jolliness, however, does not thwart virtuosic display and a lyricism typical of Saint-Saëns. Another long trill leads to a brilliant conclusion. We stand reminded that Sir Thomas Beecham once said of the oboe, "It is a cause of astonishment and risibility in the audience."

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Quintet in E-Flat Major, Op. 44

Allegro brillante

In modo d'una marcia; un poco largamente; agitato

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Allegro ma non troppo

Schumann was preoccupied with chamber music between 1841 and 1843. This period, following his marriage to Clara Wieck in September of 1841, was marked by the extremes of happiness and pain that beset Schumann all his life. He was aware of being in Clara's shadow but suffered much from any separation from her as she pursued her active career. When she returned from a month-long trip to Copenhagen in April 1841, he set to work on three string quartets followed in the fall by the Piano Quartet, the Andante and Variations for two pianos, two cellos and horn, the Piano Trio in A Minor, and the wonderful Piano Quintet.

The direct route Schumann's music takes to our hearts is no better demonstrated than in his Piano Quintet composed in September of 1842 in just five days. It was dedicated to Clara Schumann who was pianist in the first reading of the work at the Schumann home. For a private performance the following December, no less than Felix Mendelssohn filled in for an ailing Clara.

The work seems amazingly free from the effects of the mental illness that plagued Schumann, reminding us that he wrote in spite of his illness, not because of it. The first movement bears his familiar imprint with its bold, heroic opening followed by a lovely song. The cello and viola hold sway in the second theme while the piano takes center stage with virtuosic runs in the development section. All join forces for the thrilling recapitulation.

The second movement is, as the tempo marking indicates, "in the manner of a march." In this case, we have a kind of universal funeral march not intended as a tribute to an individual but one for humanity itself and its frailties. A lyrical section intervenes and lifts the mood before a return to the solemn march. A forceful and faster section follows which, in turn, becomes lyrical before it, too, returns to the spirit of the opening march. A simple, unadorned moment concludes this movement that seems to be almost a war between the happy and the sad—a true reflection of Schumann's own personal battle between his opposing personalities, the so-called light-hearted Florestan and the pensive Eusebius.

The third movement *Scherzo* is a thorough exploration of scale patterns underscored by interesting and irregular rhythmic patterns. Two trio sections interrupt the scales, the second one a brilliant revision suggested by Mendelssohn when he played the piano part.

In the last movement, Schumann returns to the heroic vigor and song-like quality of the first movement but adds to that an astounding three-voiced fugue. It is especially interesting, in this movement, to note Schumann's honoring of Classical form despite his attempt to free music from those confines in the name of Romanticism.

Having no real precedent, the work was a pioneer for the great quintets of Brahms, Franck, and Dvořák. It seems especially suitable to mark this 200th anniversary year of Schumann's birth with the Piano Quintet.

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