

Mendelssohn & Haydn

Wednesday, October 11 – 7:30 pm

William Eddins, conductor & piano

Sara Davis Buechner, piano

RESPIGHI

Ancient Airs and Dances: Suite I

(15')*

Balletto detto "Il Conte Orlando"

Villanella

Passo mezzo e Mascherada

Gagliarda

MOZART

Concerto for Two Pianos in E-flat Major, K.365/316a

(24')*

Allegro

Andante

Rondo: Allegro

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

MENDELSSOHN

Rondo brillant in E-flat Major, Op.29

(10')*

HAYDN

Symphony No. 49 in F minor "La passione"

(26')*

Adagio

Allegro di molto

Minuet – Trio

Finale: Presto

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Ancient Airs and Dances: Suite I

Ottorino Respighi

(b. Bologna, 1879 / Rome, 1936)

First performed: December 16, 1917 in Rome

Last ESO performance: February 1991

Ottorino Respighi was that great anomaly among turn-of-the-century Italian composers, in that opera was not a nearly exclusive pursuit for him. He wrote many works for the concert hall, and these works divided fairly neatly into one of two categories. Respighi had great admiration for music of the distant past, and was highly influenced by it. But he also wrote many entirely original pieces that demonstrated his own innate romanticism and his deft hand at orchestration. Tonight's suite is very much from the first category, though scored for a small, modern orchestra of pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns, and trumpets, along with timpani, harp, and strings.

Respighi wrote three suites of "airs and dances," based on Italian lute songs of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The first suite, which we hear tonight, was completed in 1917 (around the same time as his popular orchestral score *The Fountains of Rome*), and is in four short movements. The first is a dance taken from Simone Molinaro's set entitled *Il Conte Orlando* ("The Count Orlando"). The second was composed by none other than Galileo's father, Vincenzo Gailei. The final two dances are from anonymous sources: a dance intended for a masquerade, and a final Gagliarda.

Concerto No. 10 for Two Pianos in E-flat Major, K.365/316a

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart

(b. Salzburg, 1756 / d. Vienna, 1791)

First performed: November 23, 1781 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: November 2013

In Mozart's day, performances on multiple keyboards were not uncommon, but works written for such forces were. Mozart's father Leopold said of his son that he had written the first sonata for piano four-hands ever. Wolfgang, of course, had the ideal keyboard partner in his beloved sister, Maria Anna – or "Nannerl" as she was affectionately known. Five years his senior and nearly as talented as Wolfgang, Nannerl had been part of the early tours which had made the young Mozart famous, performing duets of amazing dexterity together. It was his sister who was the intended partner for Mozart's *E-flat Major Concerto for Two Pianos*, but it turned out to be one of his students, Josepha Auernhammer, who joined Wolfgang for the work's premiere.

The obstacles of such a "cooperative concerto" are considerable. Though not as strong or powerful as today's pianos, two keyboards of Mozart's time would still be enough to drown out the classical-sized orchestra. As well, equal thought must be put to the virtuoso considerations of each piano part, so as to put them on equal footing with each other. The word which one reads time after time in descriptions of this concerto is "seamless." The piano parts intermingle and weave around each other with such utter smoothness that it is nearly impossible to tell which piano is playing exactly which part.

The E-flat Major home key lends a sense of strength and verve to the opening orchestral statement, an ambitious one both in terms of its length and the number of musical ideas it puts forth. The pianos enter together, a sparkling new take on the opening theme, with neither piano part overshadowing the other. In fact, the two keyboards have the advantage of some surprising harmonies and unexpected turns of phrase during their extended opening passage. While there are moments of contrast, occasional darker tones, the main material of the opening dominates the long first movement, with Mozart brilliantly finding new ways for both orchestra and pianos to expound on it. A dashing cadenza for both pianos deftly alternates dark and light elements.

The second movement begins as a slow, tender Minuet in the orchestra. The pianos enter rhapsodically, each nudging the other along in an alternating dialog. The orchestra's gentle rhythms join, and the music's hushed, unhurried beauty is beguiling. Listen particularly in the middle section of this eight-minute movement for some unexpectedly dissonant leaps and chords in the pianos' solo flights of fancy (Mozart was 25 when he wrote the work). The work ends on a hushed orchestral cadence.

The finale is a vigorous and excitable Rondo, again with the orchestra given the first say. The music for the pianos is effervescent and marvelously balanced, the contrasting sections in between restatements of the main theme often take surprising twists and turns, mostly stemming from the unusual chord which finishes each statement of the main theme. With the previous *Piano Concerto No. 9 "Jeunehomme"* and *Concerto No. 10 for Two Pianos*, Mozart showed a new maturity and mastery of form that would colour his concerto output from then on.

Rondo brillant in E-flat Major, Op.29

Felix Mendelssohn

(b. Hamburg, 1809 / Leipzig, 1847)

Composed in 1834

This is the ESO premiere of the piece

Like many a great composer, Felix Mendelssohn eschewed virtuosity for its own sake. Though one of the finest keyboardists of his age, the works Mendelssohn wrote for his own talents were no mere display vehicles; difficult they may well be, but works still with substantial musical framework and design. Yet tonight's work is a bit of an exception.

Perhaps a major part of the reason for that is that Mendelssohn did not write the work for himself, but for his former teacher, and unabashed bravura pianist Ignaz Moscheles (1794-1870). The Rondo brilliant is singular among Mendelssohn's concertante works, beginning and ending with sudden alacrity. The piano springs from the orchestra like a horse let loose at the start of a race; indeed, there is very much the feel of a horse's canter to the dominant rhythmic underpinning. The muscular key of E-flat Major takes on the work's merry and brilliant main theme. The piano work is supremely challenging, and while

the pace does slow in places long enough for subsidiary themes to present themselves, the lightness and vivacity does not flag, and the ending is as sudden as the beginning – two final orchestral chords and the horse race is over!

Symphony No. 49 in F minor “La passione”

Franz Josef Haydn

(b. Rohrau, Lower Austria, 1732 / d. Vienna, 1809)

First performed: April 1, 1768 in Esterháza

Last ESO performance: April 1989

Franz Josef Haydn, quite rightly, has a reputation for his boisterous high spirits, his humour, and works full of life and energy. How, then, to explain this dark, sombre, dramatic mid-period symphony? Well, in a number of ways, actually.

The first is the temptation, not without merit, to cast it in the contemporaneous *Sturm und Drang* (“storm and stress”) period in literature, a pre-Romantic experiment in which emotional extremes were explored. Secondly, there was Haydn’s isolation from the German musical centre, Vienna. By 1768, the year this symphony was composed, Haydn’s patron, Nikolaus Esterházy, had completed his grand estate, and moved his court, orchestra, theatre – everything – there. In the relative seclusion of Esterháza, Haydn later said, he was forced to become more individual in his compositional voice (it’s no surprise that the radiant sunshine of his later music would be tied to his retirement from Esterháza, and his return to more cosmopolitan settings).

And thirdly the symphony’s nickname, “Passion,” is certainly apt, but it is not simply because of its darker shades and emotional weight. The symphony is one of several Haydn wrote in a format known as the “church sonata,” with four movements in a slow-fast-slow-fast layout. That tie to the church runs even more deeply, however. It is likely that the true reason for the work’s nickname is that it was written to be performed during Passiontide, that time in the church calendar around the end of Lent, and during which the Passion of Christ (the story of the Crucifixion) is front and centre.

The long, slow opening movement is brooding and meditative – lovely and sad. There is also a gentle but inexorable flow to the music – a river through a dark forest which carries us along. There is relatively little dynamic contrast, and the recapitulation virtually restates the symphony’s opening note for note. The stately and unhurried nature of the opening movement is contrasted sharply by the Allegro di molto second movement. Quick, darting, nervous, and full of unexpected shifts in key, rhythm, and dynamics, this movement has a relentless energy.

The third movement is the Menuet and Trio, begun with a variation of the theme with which the second movement began. It is unhurried but not slow, and has a calm to it which the symphony has lacked to this point. The Trio section lifts the symphony out of its minor-key setting if only briefly, and features the

woodwinds and trumpets more prominently. The final movement is a Presto, but whereas a typical Haydn symphony would be given a rousing, happy ending, this finale is brief, but still dramatically weighty and serious, dominated by a wind-tossed melody for the strings which runs through the course of the movement.

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