

Organ & Violin

Sunday, November 24 – 2 pm

Sara Jobin, conductor

Rashaan Allwood, organ

Robert Uchida, violin

Sunday Prelude, 1:15 pm Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby

Sunday Encore, post-performance Main Lobby with Sara Jobin, Rashaan Allwood & Robert Uchida

McPHERSON

Triune (Grief/Peace/Liberation) (2017 ESO commission) (8')*

DVOŘÁK

Romance in F minor, Op.11 (12')*

GUILMANT

Symphonie No. 1 in D minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op.42a (22')*

Introduction: Allegro – Largo e maestoso – Allegro – Tempo primo

Pastorale: Andante quasi allegretto

Finale: Allegro assai – Andante maestoso – Tempo primo

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

BRAHMS

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op.90 (38')*

Allegro con brio – Un poco sostenuto – Tempo I

Andante

Poco allegretto

Allegro

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Triune (Grief/Peace/Liberation) (2017 ESO commission)

John McPherson

(b. Edmonton, 1958)

Program note by the composer:

It is fascinating how Music appears to be inherent in the human psyche and is able to *move* us in so many ways: physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and more. Perhaps most intriguing is how music itself can be transformational in our selves and how we can be led by Music to a deeper/fuller intimacy with Life.

I'm sure we've all had moments when music literally *changed* us. When we were transported from one state to another and were opened to a more intense experience of the beauty, joy and power of Music.

Our human ability to process the most profound tragedies and life-transitions has always been enhanced by the use of music—whether a requiem mass, dancing around a pyre, or as in that scene from *Love Actually* when Emma Thompson listens to Joni Mitchell. When there are no words, there is always Music.

These thoughts and the short narrative that follows reflect the images I held during the writing of this work:

triune {trī(y)ōōn}:
consisting of three in one

Grief accompanies loss, large or small. It is sticky, relentless and existentially painful. It shatters our ego and lays us bare. But if we are able to 'look it in the eye', 'talk' to it, and even 'dance' with it—however awkwardly—we can pass through the grief and experience a peace that is deep and pure. And through the nurturing of that peace we may find liberation...at least for a time.

Loss and grief will return of course, but by recognizing the patterns and transformative power held within it we may become more graceful and accepting of the pain, and with each episode become a better and better dancer.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the support for this commission given by the Edmonton Arts Council, the Canada Council for the Arts, the City of Edmonton, Rob McAlear, and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

Romance in F minor, Op.11

Antonín Dvořák

(b. Nelahozeves, 1841 / d. Prague, 1904)

First performed: December 9, 1877

Last ESO performance: February 2018

As he toiled away at the start of his career, when his music was not heard beyond the reaches of Prague, Dvořák may have chafed under the constraints of obscurity, but he knew enough not to let a good idea

go unused. So when a string quartet he composed failed to gain any traction (and which was not even published during his lifetime), he kept one of its themes, eventually re-using it to create the *Romance for Violin in F minor*. Marked Andante con moto, it is a sonata form in which two main themes, both similar in mood, are presented, leading to a more emotional central section based on those themes, rising to a passionate episode, and resolving in the gentle state with which it began.

Symphonie No. 1 in D minor for Organ and Orchestra, Op.42a

Alexandre Guilmant

(b. Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1837 / d. Meudon, 1911)

Composed 1874

Last ESO performance: May 2005

As a member of a multi-generational family of organists and organ builders, Alexandre Guilmant had strong opinions regarding the way the organ was thought of. There was a tendency during his time, he noted, to think of organ playing in one of two ways. The first was to treat the organ as a sort of “substitute” for the orchestra. “The other holds that the organ has so noble a tone quality that it need not imitate the orchestra as a servant,” he said, agreeing with Berlioz’ maxim that “the organ is Pope, the orchestra Emperor.”

The melding of the two titanic forces is not easy, and great works uniting organ and orchestra are actually quite rare. This afternoon’s work is one of the finest such examples, yet it began life as a work for organ alone. This symphonie is Guilmant’s own arrangement of his *Op. 42 Sonata No. 1 for Solo Organ*.

Both forces establish themselves in the dramatic slow introduction, which leads to a classically-designed movement established with a strongly melodic idea shared by orchestra and organ. A more gentle theme is spun from this same silk, and while there is often a sense of dialog, there is also masterful orchestration in sections where both forces play without either losing ground.

The slow Pastorale begins on the organ alone, atmospheric and ethereal – a mood continued as the strings of the orchestra complement the organ’s shimmering timbre. The final movement bursts out from the organ in a dazzling fantasia. Again, the organ and orchestra play together as equals in a colourful showcase for both. In the central section, the music slows for an Andante of ruminative reflection, until fanfares in both organ and orchestral brass and percussion bring the work to a blazing and triumphant conclusion.

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op.90

Johannes Brahms

(b. Hamburg, 1833 / d. Vienna, 1897)

First performed: December 2, 1883 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: April 2016

It had taken Brahms nearly two decades to finally feel confident enough to unveil his *First Symphony*, but having done that, he turned around his *Second Symphony* only a year later. Six years would separate the *Second* from the *Third*, during which time Brahms composed some of his greatest orchestral works, including the two overtures (the *Tragic* and the *Academic Festival*), the *Second Piano Concerto*, and the *Violin Concerto*. Now 50, Brahms is at his creative peak, and is regarded as the great guardian of German musical tradition. A new work by Brahms, therefore, is a great occasion.

Symphony No. 3 is the shortest of Brahms' four symphonies, but there is still room for some of his idiosyncratic gestures. The opening measures, for example, feature ambiguous music which could as easily fit into F minor as F Major – a tonic uncertainty common in Brahms' music. Metrically, there is also an argument to be made for three notes of two as much as for two notes of three. A storm-tossed heroic theme is pronounced at the start of the work, and returns in each section of the Sonata-form movement, restated almost exactly each time save for the Recapitulation. At the outset, this strident theme in the strings settles to a calmer section, with a clarinet introducing an important secondary theme. The Development section is relatively brief, but takes us through a series of keys, as if the storm has driven us off course. The Recapitulation anchors us more securely in F Major, though other tonalities are still touched on. In a bold final touch, Brahms concludes the movement with the stormy/heroic theme transformed into a quiet reminiscence, ending the movement in calm and repose.

The second movement is in a Rondo format, begun by a beguilingly restful tune in woodwinds answered by strings. A simple modulation to the dominant brings a similar, but not exact episode. From here, the music broadens out to a lush, rich landscape. An unusual five-bar phrase in clarinet and bassoon, followed by horn and oboe, is offered as a counter-subject, an altogether more unsettled, even dissonantly harmonized section. The main subject returns, though in a more agitated state. The calm of the opening is restored, leading to an impassioned climax before concluding the movement quietly once again. The third movement features the symphony's most famous theme, heard right at the outset in the cellos, then repeated by the violins, then the woodwinds – an elegiac melody in C minor. A contrasting theme, really just a repeated one-bar figure in A-flat, provides a gently-rocking contrast. When the main theme returns, it does so in new orchestral clothes: first a horn, then oboe and bassoon, then bassoon with clarinet. A final version, richly scored for strings, closes the movement, yet again, in quiet and calm.

The finale begins ominously, but portentously, in E minor. The music rises in pitch and moment, leading to a confident, bucolic melody over a steady pulse. There are consistent eddies of drama and tension, but the music is at last unleashed in its mood and drive. The Development section offers a quiet contrast, but the music flares up again – motifs of two, three, or four notes are tossed about the orchestra and pitted against each other in sustained tumult and energy. The earlier bucolic melody returns briefly, engulfed once more by the cascading brief motifs in different keys. Yet as the

Recapitulation begins, the music softens, the mood of repose and even resignation brings this most introspective of Brahms' symphonies to a suiting conclusion – not unhappy, but rather in autumnal content. In the movement's dying embers, that strident motif from the symphony's very opening is made a whisper – the storms have now truly ended.

Program notes © 2019 by D.T. Baker, except as noted