

HARRISBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, April 13, 2019 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 14, 2019 at 3:00 p.m.

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Overture from the Incidental Music to *Much Ado About Nothing*, Op. 11 (1918) Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957)

Gustav Mahler called him “a genius”; Karl Goldmark proclaimed his music to be “a miracle”; Giacomo Puccini said, “That boy’s talent is so great, he could easily give us half and still have enough left for himself”; and Richard Strauss observed, “One’s first reaction, that these compositions are by an adolescent boy, is one of awe and fear: this firmness of style, this sovereignty of form, this individuality of expression, this harmonic structure – it is truly amazing.” The object of this cascade of encomiums was a teenage boy whose prodigality invited comparison with such pre-pubescent *Wunderkinder* as Mozart, Mendelssohn and Schubert: Erich Wolfgang Korngold.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (his middle name honored Mozart), born on May 29, 1897 in Brünn, Austria (now Brno, Czech Republic), was the younger son of Julius Korngold, a protégé of Eduard Hanslick and one of Vienna’s most influential music critics at the turn of the century. By age five, Erich was playing piano duets with his father; two years later he began composing; at nine, he produced a cantata (*Gold*) that convinced his father to enroll him as a student of Robert Fuchs at the Vienna Conservatory. When Mahler heard Erich play his cantata the following year, he proclaimed the boy “a genius” and arranged for him to take lessons with Alexander Zemlinsky. Korngold made remarkable progress under Zemlinsky – his Piano Sonata No. 1 was published in 1908, when he had ripened to the age of eleven. The following year he wrote a ballet, *Der Schneemann* (“*The Snowman*”), orchestrated by Zemlinsky, which was staged at the Vienna Royal Opera at the command of Emperor Franz Josef. Next came a piano trio and another piano sonata, both of which Artur Schnabel played all over Europe. For the Gewandhaus concerts, Artur Nikisch commissioned Korngold’s first orchestral work, the *Schauspiel Ouvertüre* (“*Overture to a Play*”), and premiered it in Leipzig in 1911. Later that same year the budding composer gave a concert of his works in Berlin, in which he also appeared as piano soloist. Korngold was an international celebrity at thirteen. “It seems that nature amassed all its gifts in music and laid them in the cradle of this extraordinary child,” marveled Felix Weingartner.

In 1915 and 1916, Korngold wrote the first two of his five operas: *Der Ring des Polykrates*, a comedy, and *Violanta*, a tragedy. Bruno Walter premiered this complementary pair of one-acters in tandem at the Vienna Opera on March 28, 1916. Following a two-year stint in the Austrian army playing piano for the troops during World War I, Korngold composed some incidental music for a production of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Burgtheater in Vienna, and then turned again to opera, producing his dramatic masterpiece, *Die Tote Stadt* (“*The Dead City*”), which was premiered simultaneously in Hamburg (where he served as conductor for three years after the War) and Cologne on December 4, 1920. The work appeared on the stages of 83 opera houses around the world during the following months; it was the first German opera performed at the Met after World War I (November 19, 1921, with Maria Jeritza in her American debut). After Korngold returned to Vienna in 1920, he was appointed professor of opera and composition at the Staatsakademie and served as music consultant for revivals of several of Johann Strauss’ operettas, including one pastiche that reached Broadway in 1934 as *The Great Waltz*. A poll by the *Neue Wiener Tagblatt* (“*New Vienna Daily*”) in 1928 showed that that newspaper’s readers thought Korngold and Arnold Schoenberg were the two greatest living Austrian composers.

In 1934, the Austrian director Max Reinhardt was conscripted by the Warner Brothers Studio in Hollywood to film a version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with Olivia de Havilland, Dick Powell, James

Cagney, Joe E. Brown and Mickey Rooney. Reinhardt chose to use Mendelssohn's incidental music as background, and he took Korngold along to arrange the score. Korngold, who, as a Jew, felt increasingly uneasy in Austria, accepted other offers in Hollywood, and, when the Nazi Anschluss in 1938 prevented him from returning home, he settled permanently in California. (He became a United States citizen in 1943.) For the next seven years, he devoted his talents to creating a body of film music unsurpassed by that of any other composer in the genre, and won two Academy Awards (for *Anthony Adverse* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*). His father's death in 1945, however, caused him to re-evaluate his career, and he returned to writing concert music with concertos for violin (for Heifetz) and cello, and a large symphony that Dmitri Mitropoulos called "one of the most significant works of the century." These new pieces caused little stir among critics and public, however, who by and large felt that such music was merely a warmed-over manifestation of an earlier age. (Romanticism was a badly battered notion during those dodecaphony-dominated post-World War II years.) Korngold went to Vienna for an extended visit, but returned to Hollywood, where he suffered a series of heart attacks. He died on November 29, 1957, and his remains were interred in the Hollywood Cemetery, within a few feet of those of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., D.W. Griffith and Rudolf Valentino.

Korngold's achievement, for both the screen and the concert hall, was sadly undervalued at the time of his death. A reassessment began in 1972, when the composer's son George produced a recording by Charles Gerhardt and a top-flight London studio orchestra of selections from his father's film music (*The Sea Hawk*). The album became a best-seller for RCA, and a sequel (*Elizabeth and Essex*) appeared the following year. New recordings of the Symphony in F-sharp (by Rudolf Kempe), the Violin Concerto (Ulf Hoelscher) and *Die Tote Stadt* (Erich Leinsdorf) in the mid-1970s fueled interest in Korngold's concert and operatic music, just as the great Warner Brothers films of the 1930s and 1940s were starting their transformation from kitsch to classics. Brendan Carroll and Konrad Hopkins founded a Korngold Society in England in 1983, the same year Götz Friedrich revived *Die Tote Stadt* at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. All of Korngold's significant compositions have since become available in fine commercial recordings, his works are now given regularly in performance by leading artists, and two biographies of him have recently been published to mark the centenary of his birth: *Erich Wolfgang Korngold* by Jessica Duchen (Phaidon Press, 1996) and *The Last Prodigy* by Brendan G. Carroll (Amadeus Press, 1997).

In June 1959, a memorial concert of Korngold's music was given in Schoenberg Hall at UCLA. Jessica Duchen closed her study of the composer with the following excerpt from a review of that event which appeared in the *Los Angeles Examiner*: "A memorial concert to Erich Wolfgang Korngold ... brought to our attention a musical voice which may be regarded, when the smog of controversy rolls away, as one of the most civilized and gracious of the 20th century. Thirty years ago Korngold's idiom seemed advanced. Then came the schools of atonalism, polytonality and general chaos, and Korngold was suddenly placed in the category of the reactionaries. Among those who discarded him, there are few survivors. Korngold spoke forth last night with a richness of melody and a luxuriance of harmony that marked him for survival. There is no defeatism in Korngold's music. He loved life, he accepted life, and he gave back in music the wonder that he found in it."

Korngold wrote fourteen pieces of incidental music for Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1918 for a production at Vienna's Burgtheater the following year; the 22-year-old composer conducted the premiere. Korngold's music proved popular with audiences, and he was encouraged to extract from the score both a concert suite and an arrangement for violin and piano. In this latter form, the *Much Ado About Nothing* music became one of his most popular works, and found champions in such distinguished sovereigns of fiddledom as Kreisler, Heifetz and Elman. The rollicking *Overture* previews the merriment and high spirits of the comedy to follow. *Maiden in the Bridal Chamber* is a romantic episode for use in Act III, Scene 4. *Dogberry and Verges* is a grotesquely officious march portraying the two comical officers of the watch. *The Garden Scene* (Act III) accompanies Beatrice's realization of her growing love for Benedick. The suite closes with a rousing *Hornpipe* that sounds in response to Benedick's words which conclude the play: "Strike up, pipers!"

Gloria for Soprano, Chorus and Orchestra (1959)

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Poulenc was raised in a home that valued religion deeply. His father was committed to his Catholicism, but, the composer added, "in a very liberal way, without the slightest meanness." When Francis left home for military service in 1918 and later jumped into the heady life of artistic Paris, however, his interest in religion declined. "From 1920 to 1935, I was very little concerned with the faith," he admitted. In 1936, though, he underwent a rejuvenation of his religious belief when his colleague Pierre-Octave Ferroud was killed in an automobile accident. Deeply shaken, he wrote, "The atrocious extinction of this musician so full of vigor left me stupefied. Pondering on the fragility of our human frame, the life of the spirit attracted me anew." He rejoined the Church and thereafter expressed his faith frequently and unashamedly. "I am religious by deepest instinct and heredity," he said. "I feel myself incapable of ardent political conviction, but for me it seems quite natural to believe and practice religion. I am a Catholic. It is my greatest freedom." During the last three decades of his life, a series of wonderful musical works on religious themes, including the *Mass*, the *Stabat Mater*, the *Gloria* and *The Dialogues of the Carmelites*, sprang from his ardently renewed vision.

Poulenc's faith, like the music it engendered, was simple, direct, optimistic and joyous. He once told friends, "I have the faith of a country pastor," and he always preferred quiet meditation or prayer in a rural church to the structured services of the urban cathedral. It was through his music that he shared his devotion. "I want the religious spirit to be expressed clearly, out in the open, with the same realism that we see in Romanesque columns," he said. "I try to create a feeling of fervor and, especially, of humility, for me the most beautiful quality of prayer.... My conception of religious music is essentially direct, and, I dare say, intimate." When an interviewer once commented on the high quality of his choral and sacred works, he replied, "I think I've put the best and most genuine part of me into them.... If people are still interested in my music fifty years from now it'll be more in the *Stabat Mater* than in the *Mouvements perpétuels*."

During his last years, Poulenc became increasingly fatalistic and, consequently, turned more to the Church. Throughout his life, he was subject to attacks of acute depression, and the one he suffered while working on *The Dialogues of the Carmelites* during the mid-1950s resulted in a nervous breakdown. He largely recovered, but he thereafter viewed his existence as fragile. "What shall I write next? Undoubtedly nothing else," he lamented to his biographer Henri Hell in 1961. A year later, however, he wrote to the singer Pierre Bernac, "I now feel completely, happily free, and I can await Providence." The *Gloria* of 1959 naturally reflects some of Poulenc's deeper thoughts, but it also shows the buoyant, confident feelings inherent in his faith and his music. It is a wholly appropriate piece for a man who was once described as "half monk, half boulder."

In the *Gloria*, written on commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky, Poulenc said that he "tried to write a joyous hymn to the glory of God." His text, taken from the second section of the Mass Ordinary, is the set of traditional songs dating from the fifth century sung by the angels on the night of the Nativity in praise of the Christ child. Before beginning composition, Poulenc immersed himself in the ancient words, reciting them over and over to himself, listening, noting breathing places, marking stresses, looking for inner rhythms of the syllables and deeper meanings of the ideas. The *Gloria*, like all great vocal music, grew from the sense and sounds of its text — the words, after all, were there before the music. Poulenc reinterpreted those venerable words and heightened their message by wrapping them in music that again demonstrated his remarkable lyrical gift, which has often been compared to that of Schubert, a composer he greatly admired. Wrote Roger Nichols, "For Poulenc the most important element of all was melody and he found his way to a vast treasury of undiscovered tunes within an area that had, according to the most up-to-date musical maps, been surveyed, worked and exhausted."

The *Gloria* opens with a brilliant fanfare for full orchestra as preparation for the entry of the voices. The sentiment of the movement is one of joy tinged with a *souçon* of nostalgia, one of Poulenc's most characteristic moods. Of the lighthearted *Laudamus te*, Poulenc recalled, "The second movement caused a scandal; I wonder why? I was simply thinking, in writing it, of the Gozzoli frescoes in which the angels stick out their tongues; I was thinking also of the serious Benedictines whom I saw playing soccer one

day." This robust movement also serves to set in relief the following *Domine Deus*, music of profound awe and intense emotion. The bright wit and chuckling insouciance of the *Laudamus te* return in the fourth movement, *Domine fili unigenite*, which, like the earlier movement, is followed by music of a serious and moving nature – the *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei*. The final movement, *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris*, is divided into three sections, each based on the same text. The movement opens with jubilant choral shouts echoed by chords spread across the full orchestra. The celebratory mood continues into the next section, a vibrant rhythmic essay punctuated by the fanfare figure that opened the first movement. Poulenc closes his masterful *Gloria* with the final treatment of the *Qui sedes* text, this last one suffused with prayerful devotion and peaceful benediction.

Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 for Soprano and Eight Cellos (1938, 1945) Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil's greatest composer, had little formal training. He learned the cello from his father and earned a living as a young man playing with popular bands, from which he derived much of his musical background. From his earliest years, Villa-Lobos was enthralled with the indigenous songs and dances of his native land, and he made several trips into the Brazilian interior to study the native music and ceremonies. Beginning with his earliest works, around 1910, his music shows the influence of the melodies, rhythms and sonorities that he discovered. He began to compose prolifically, and, though often ridiculed for his daring new style by other Brazilian musicians, he attracted the attention of the pianist Artur Schnabel, who helped him receive a Brazilian government grant in 1923 that enabled him to spend several years in Paris, where his international reputation was established. Upon his permanent return to Rio de Janeiro in 1930, Villa-Lobos became an important figure in public musical education, urging the cultivation of Brazilian songs and dances in the schools. He made his first visit to the United States in 1944, and spent the remaining years of his life traveling in America and Europe to conduct and promote his own works and those of other Brazilian composers. Villa-Lobos summarized his creative philosophy in an interview with *New York Times* critic Olin Downes by saying that he did not think of music as "culture, or education, or even as a device for quieting the nerves, but as something more potent, mystical and profound in its effect. Music has the power to communicate, to heal, to ennoble, when it is made part of man's life and consciousness."

The set of nine *Bachianas Brasileiras* holds a special place in Villa-Lobos' enormous output of more than 2000 works. These compositions, which Arthur Cohn called "less a musical form than a type of creative principle," combine the melodic and rhythmic characteristics of Brazilian music with the texture and style of Bach. Of this genre, original with him, Villa-Lobos wrote, "This is a special kind of musical composition, based on an intimate knowledge of the great works of Bach and also on the composer's affinity with the harmonic, contrapuntal and melodic atmosphere of the folklore of Brazil. The composer considers Bach a universal and rich folklore source, deeply rooted in the folk music of every country in the world. Thus Bach is a mediator among all races." The *Bachianas Brasileiras* were written for various ensembles: three for orchestra, one for an ensemble of eight cellos, one (No. 5, perhaps the most frequently heard of the set) for cellos and soprano, one for solo piano, one for piano and orchestra, one for flute and bassoon, and one for string orchestra or unaccompanied chorus. These works date from 1930 to 1945, during the years after Villa-Lobos returned to Brazil from Paris, where he was deeply influenced by the music of Milhaud and the neo-classicism of Stravinsky. The resultant blend of French clarity, Bachian counterpoint and Brazilian ethos made for an art distinctly and recognizably that of Villa-Lobos. Of this music, Irving Scherick wrote, "He is a creator of ambiances, of spiritual vistas. Intellectually and emotionally he is alive to the world. In his nature, the qualities of savage races and of exquisitely civilized people meet, and this union is the determining course of a rare sensibility."

The *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* is scored for the unusual combination of soprano voice and eight cellos. The opening movement, *Aria (Cantilena)*, was composed in 1938 and premiered on March 25, 1939 in Rio de Janeiro. Villa-Lobos noted that the Brazilian usage of the word "aria" is as a general designation for "a kind of lyrical song" – his model in the outer sections of the piece, sung without words, may well have

been the famous *Air* from Bach's Third Orchestral Suite. The middle portion of the *Aria*, in the style of a Brazilian folksong, is a setting of a poem by Ruth V. Corrêa evoking the beauties of sunset and evening. According to the composer, the second movement, *Dansa* (subtitled *Martelo*, "Hammered"), from 1945, "represents a persistent and characteristic rhythm much like the strange melodies of the Brazilian hinterland known as *emboladas*. The melody suggests the birds of Brazil." Its text, a verse by Manuel Bandeira, expresses the ancient theme of the wild bird as the messenger of love.

Symphony No. 7, Op. 131 (1952) Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Prokofiev's feverish activity during the years after the Second World War belie the alarming state of his health. He suffered the first of a series of heart attacks in 1941, and a fall early in 1945 resulted in a severe concussion with several painful and continuing complications. Despite his nearly debilitated condition, in 1946 and 1947 alone, he was able to compose the Sixth Symphony, arrange three extensive suites of the music from *Cinderella*, revise the Fourth Symphony, write a cantata for the 30th anniversary of the Russian Revolution and a separate orchestral piece on the same subject, produce a sonata for unaccompanied violins, and devise suites of symphonic excerpts from several of his stage works. He was only able to complete these projects because he persevered with the punctual and concentrated work habits of his earlier years, though at a less intense level. His friend, the composer Dmitri Kabalevsky, wrote, "His whole existence, all his energies, his entire mode of life were directed to the one aim, of saving for his work all the strength he had left. At times it seemed as if he knew his malady would defeat him in the end and he was deliberately hurrying to get all his ideas down on paper before it was too late." During his frequent hospital stays, for example, he was forbidden to work at all. One friend reported, however, that Prokofiev stationed him at his hospital door during a visit so that he could warn the composer of any approaching nurses. While the coast was clear, Prokofiev scribbled a few notes on the pad he kept hidden beneath his pillow.

Late in 1951, Prokofiev projected a whole series of works — sonatas for piano and for cello, a sixth piano concerto, extensive revisions of earlier scores — that he intended to complete in the near future. Among these plans, he told the press, was one for a "simple symphony," intended for young listeners, perhaps to be broadcast by the Children's Division of the national radio. He set to work on the symphony immediately; the short score was finished by March 20, 1952, and the orchestration was done by July 5th. (It was to be the only one of these late projected works that he completed.) The new Symphony, however, his seventh in the genre, had grown beyond his original conception to a full concert hall specimen, though it retained a pronounced simplicity of form, texture and thematic substance. The piece stirred considerable interest even before it was publicly premiered on October 11, 1952 in Moscow: the pianist Anatoly Vedernikov made a four-hand arrangement of the score, which was enthusiastically received at a private concert given for the Composer's Union; Kabalevsky extolled the Symphony in the press; Shostakovich called it "joyful, lyrical and delightful." When the piece was finally heard, the critics and public joined in the praise, making the premiere a virtual farewell to the ailing composer. It was the last time he attended a public performance of his own music; he died of a stroke just five months later. The Symphony was posthumously awarded the Lenin Prize in 1957.

The Seventh Symphony, along with such other works as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Peter and the Wolf*, *Alexander Nevsky* and the Second Violin Concerto that Prokofiev wrote after returning to Russia from the West in 1933, is richly lyrical and immediately ingratiating, the style deemed appropriate by the government to inspire the Soviet masses. "It is the duty of the composer, like the poet, the sculptor or the painter, to serve his fellow men, to beautify human life and show the way to a radiant future," he wrote in his 1946 *Autobiography*. The technical means toward this goal was, to him, obvious: "To achieve a more simple and melodic expression is the inevitable direction for the musical art of the future." This Symphony, his last important completed score, not only made those words manifest, but also showed that Prokofiev was able to create music of surpassing quality under the tightest ideological strictures.

Rather than being dramatic or heroic, the Symphony's opening movement is quiet, lyrical and somewhat nostalgic in expression, a formal technique Prokofiev may have borrowed from Shostakovich. The movement contains three themes: a sad, simple melody initiated by the violins; a sweeping phrase of balletic mien; and a slight, sardonic motive in metronomic rhythm. The compact development section treats each of the three themes before they are fully recapitulated to round out the movement. The second movement is a waltz in the Russian tradition of such pieces by Tchaikovsky, Glinka and Glazunov. There follows an *Andante*, effusively melodious and one of the most unabashedly sentimental pieces that Prokofiev ever created. The finale is fast, excited and joyous, but pauses to recall the first movement's second and third themes in its closing pages.

"The Seventh Symphony is one of those works which are difficult to describe in words," wrote Israel Nestyev in his biography of Prokofiev. "It is so classically simple, so transparent, so finely worked out and so artistically perfect that the workmanship as such is imperceptible."

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