Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Hill Hall — University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

7:30 p.m. Sunday, May 4, 2014

Donald L. Oehler, Music Director

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)

Overture to Der Freischütz, Op. 77

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35

Allegro moderato

Carolyn Chang, violin
2014 Young Artist Concerto Competition Winner

Intermission

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra ("Enigma"), Op. 36

Theme (Enigma: *Andante*)

Variations:

- I. (*L'istesso tempo*) "C.A.E."
- II. (*Allegro*) "H.D.S-P."
- III. (*Allegretto*) "R.B.T."
- IV. (*Allegro di molto*) "W.M.B."
- V. (*Moderato*) "R.P.A."
- VI. (*Andantino*) "Ysobel"
- VII. (*Presto*) "Troyte"
- VIII. (*Allegretto*) "W.N."
- IX. (*Adagio*) "Nimrod"
- X. (*Intermezzo: Allegretto*) "Dorabella"
- XI. (*Allegro di molto*) "G.R.S."
- XII. (*Andante*) "B.G.N."
- XIII. (*Romanza: Moderato*) " * * * * "
- XIV. (*Finale: Allegro Presto*) "E.D.U."

You are cordially invited to join the performers in the rotunda for post-concert refreshments.

Please silence your mobile devices. For the performer's safety, no flash photography.
Recordings may not be posted to public web sites.

Hidden Identities

We dance round in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

—Robert Frost

We seek to understand music at many levels. *Music and Meaning*, an online journal, welcomes multidisciplinary contributions from such diverse fields as "philosophy, mathematics, physics, musicology, medicine, acoustics, neurology, theology, literary studies, philosophy of science, music pedagogy, computer science, semiotics, sociology, linguistics, religious studies, anthropology, psychology, biology, education studies, music therapy, culture studies, etc." But the path to find meaning in a musical work may be more linear than implied by this plethoric list. A composer often draws inspiration from a particular person, place or idea, and represents it with a leitmotif (a short recurring phrase) or a larger theme. Musical notation lends itself to codes, so that a motive may even spell out an identity. Scores by J.S. Bach and Dmitry Shostakovich contain cryptograms for their own names (BACH and DSCH, respectively), while Robert Schumann and two younger colleagues (one being Johannes Brahms) used the notes FAE to represent the personal motto "*Frei aber einsam*" ("free but lonely") of their friend Joseph Joachim in a sonata crafted to honor that great Hungarian violinist. Appreciation of music rarely depends on the unraveling of such literal coded messages. Nevertheless, probing for underlying meaning can enhance the musical experience. Before a performance of Edward Elgar's *Enigma Variations* at a London Proms Concert, the conductor Leonard Slatkin reminded his audience, "Some works have become so familiar…that we take them for granted. We don't remember what inspired them, and we just listen to them without thinking how we could get involved in every way." Echoing Slatkin's call for active engagement, we invite you to don your thinking cap (Sherlock Holmes deerstalker preferred) as the Chapel Hill Philharmonia presents this evening's program entitled *Hidden Identities*.

Weber: Overture to *Der Freischütz*

The overarching theme of Carl Maria von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, a pioneering work of German Romanticism first performed in Berlin in 1821, is transparent. The opera lifts a Faustian story from the *Gespensterbuch* (*Ghost Book*), a popular collection of folk tales of the supernatural, to frame a battle between good and evil, set in the musical keys of C major and C minor.

The Overture offers a précis of the opera as a miniature tone poem. The setting is the wild woods in which a hunter's prowess determines his stature in the community. A rich horn theme depicts the nobility of the sylvan forest and the hunting life. The forest ranger Max, a superb shooter, is slated to marry the beautiful Agathe and to succeed her father as the region's head forester. To secure his beloved's hand on his wedding day, Max must win a marksmanship contest against apparently inferior competition. Yet for some weeks his skill has deserted him, leaving him anxious and depressed. Little does Max know that his rival Caspar, embittered after being rejected by Agathe, conspired with the "Black Hunter" Samiel to ensnare him in a spell that has spoiled his aim. In return Caspar contracted to give up his soul to this devil, and his time is near.

Caspar plots to deliver Max to the Black Hunter in his stead. Feigning friendship, he maneuvers the ranger, tipsy from an evening of toasts in a tavern, into taking a seemingly impossible rifle shot that brings down a soaring eagle. The weapon, Caspar explains to the astonished Max, was loaded with a "*Freikügel*," a "free bullet" guaranteed to hit its target. To be an infallible *Freischütz* ("Free-shooter") at the next day's contest, Max must join him at midnight in the haunted Wolf's Glen. There, amidst horrific portents of evil, visions of Max's dead mother and his bride-to-be, and the thunder and lightning of a wild storm, the two men cast seven magic bullets. Samiel

The Wolf's Glen

appears, ready soon to claim his victim. Weber depicts "the rule of demonic powers" with, in his own words, "dark, gloomy colors—the lowest register of the violins, violas, and basses, particularly the lowest register of the clarinet, . . . then the mournful sound of the bassoon, the lowest notes of the horns, the hollow roll of the drums or single hollow strokes on them."

The next morning, using the magic cartridge, Max shoots brilliantly. He retains one bullet for the decisive 'trial by [gun] fire' that will ensure his future happiness. However, he is unaware that Samiel actually will control the final shot. Caspar, hiding in a treetop, anticipates the fiend's arrival to take Max as a victim and exact his revenge over Agathe. The ruling Prince assigns Max his target – a white dove perched on a distant branch – and the ranger takes aim. At this very moment Agathe appears with her bridesmaids, directly in the line of fire. Remembering a warning dream, Agathe calls to her betrothed, "Do not shoot! I am the white dove!" The bird takes off and flies towards Caspar's perch. Max fires, and both Agathe and Caspar shriek and fall to the ground. To the relief of the assembled townspeople, Agathe has merely fainted and quickly recovers from her swoon. But Caspar, bleeding from a fatal shot, has paid for his bargain with the devilish Samiel; his last words are "Heaven has won, my time has come!" The Overture culminates with Agathe's virtuous theme.

Der Freischütz predates Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory by many decades. However, as reviewer David Francis Taylor (University of Toronto) notes, "Of course, [the story] really does beg to be read in Freudian terms: the soon-to-be husband is so overwhelmed by the anxiety of replacing/becoming her father that he can no longer shoot straight; and the soon-to-be wife is terrified by dreams in which her lover's sexual desire – sorry, his skill with a gun – is a dangerous force that threatens her destruction." These subconscious drivers, hidden identities of the protagonists, resonate in Weber's music, accounting for the opera's continued appeal over nearly two centuries.

Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto

We know more than we may wish about Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's hidden persona. Perhaps his country's greatest composer, he has been portrayed, in a phrase from novelist and blogger Jessica Duchen, as "the ultimate gloomy Russian bastard." The perception is linked to Tchaikovsky's 'outing' as an anguished gay man in vehicles such as Kenneth Russell's 1970 film *The Music Lovers*. Duchen notes, "Two thorny issues dominate our consideration of him, overshadowing all else: first, his homosexuality; then his death from cholera, thought to have been an elaborately coerced and concealed suicide." [Some biographers claim that Tchaikovsky publicly drank a glass of unsterilized water during an epidemic to cover up death by poison, a punishment imposed by a secret tribunal for an affair with young nobleman.] "These have been dressed up in a range of books and films that each add another layer to the mystery, often reinforcing the notion of the tortured, self-tormenting genius."

The portrait has a factual core. To his brother Modest, Tchaikovsky confessed, "Cursed buggermania forms an impassable gulf between me and most people. It imparts to my character an estrangement, fear of people, shyness, immoderate bashfulness, mistrust, in a word, a thousand traits from which I am getting ever more

unsociable." In July 1877 at age 37, Tchaikovsky attempted a radical solution. He married Antonina Milyukova, a former conservatory student who had sent him passionate letters. The attempt to "cure" his homosexuality proved a debacle. The marriage was never consummated and Tchaikovsky found his new wife psychologically incompatible. Within weeks he suffered (or faked) a nervous breakdown and fled to Western Europe. By February 1878 he apparently had become reconciled to his biology, writing to another brother, Anatoly, "Only now, especially after the tale of my marriage, have I finally begun to understand that there is nothing more fruitless than not wanting to be that which I am by nature."

Kotek (l) and Tchaikovsky

Soon thereafter Tchaikovsky began the *Violin Concerto in D Major*, one of his enduringly popular pieces. He and Modest, ensconced at a resort by Lake Geneva, received a visit from Iosif Kotek, a 23 year-old violinist who had been his theory pupil at the Moscow Conservatory and a witness at the ill-fated wedding. Tchaikovsky was intimate with Kotek and proclaimed love for him, although it is not known if the relationship was physical. Now Kotek's playing of Edouard Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*, which he had studied with Joachim, inspired Tchaikovsky's own composition for violin and orchestra. He completed the work in less than a month. Kotek played through the score daily, suggested bowings, dynamics and phrasing, and took a major hand in the editing for publication. "There is no denying that without him I could not have done anything," the composer admitted.

Nevertheless, fearing that gossips would infer an illicit sexual liaison, Tchaikovsky chose not to dedicate the score to Kotek, nor did the violinist perform the work for many years. Instead, the dedication went to Leopold Auer, a pupil of Joachim who came to Russia and became concertmaster of the Imperial Orchestra and professor at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg. Best remembered as a violin pedagogue, he taught such greats as Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Nathan Milstein, Efrem Zimbalist, and Oscar Shumsky. However, to Tchaikovsky's chagrin, Auer declined to perform the challenging new concerto, initially deeming it unplayable. He later rationalized that "in various portions [the original version] was quite unviolinistic and not at all written in the idiom of the strings." But eventually, with some cuts and revisions, the work became a staple in the repertoire of many of his students.

Finally, in December 1881, after a single rehearsal with the orchestra, Russian violinist Alfred Brodsky played the premiere of the *Violin Concerto* with Hans Richter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. Tchaikovsky learned of this performance only when he stumbled across a scathing review in an Austrian newspaper. Critic Eduard Hanslick half-heartedly acknowledged Tchaikovsky's musicality, notably in the melancholic middle movement. The virtuosic extremes of the outer movements evoked a different response. Hanslick complained that, after a promising start to the *Allegro moderato* (performed this evening by soloist Carolyn Chang), "soon savagery gains the upper hand, and lords it to the end…The violin is no longer played. It is yanked about, it is torn asunder, it is beaten black and blue." Regarding the driving, virtuosic *Finale*, Hanslick's commentary can be boiled down to "It stinks!"

The *Violin Concerto* was neither the first nor last path-breaking work to be brutalized in initial reviews. For example, the 1875 premiere of Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, arguably the most popular opera ever, shocked its audience with explicit realism and a theme of erotic obsession, and provoked critical damnation as "undramatic," "vulgar" and "contemptible." Likewise, Tchaikovsky's concerto challenged conventional boundaries with its novel form, use of earthy folk rhythms, and technical demands that intimidated violinists of his day much as the four-minute mile daunted runners until the barrier was shattered by Roger Bannister.

Duchen points out that Tchaikovsky heard *Carmen* during its initial season in Paris and that the tragedy "made an indelible impression on him." She asks, "Did he feel himself bound by fate to a terrible, inevitable end, like Carmen? That is suggested all too strongly in his…*Pathétique* [*Symphony*], which ends in an evocation of despair unequalled anywhere in the classical repertoire." Yet, Duchen continues, "We can't fully understand Tchaikovsky if we know only one side of him…[M]uch has been made of the inspiration he found in the fatalistic *Carmen*, but it has been little remarked that the sunny, good-natured main theme of his *Violin Concerto's* first movement bears an extraordinary resemblance to a melody in the final scene of Bizet's opera, where it appears in a minor key and a very different context (an imminent murder). Supposing – just supposing – that what Tchaikovsky loved in *Carmen* was not only its fatalism, but also its sheer melodic mellifluousness?"

Carolyn Chang

The soloist in tonight's performance of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto* is Carolyn Chang, winner of the CHP's 2014 Young Artist Concerto Competition. She also earned an Honorable Mention in this year's Concerto Competition of the Raleigh Symphony Orchestra. Carolyn is a senior at East Chapel Hill High School. She began studying the violin in 2003 with Dorothy Kitchen. Her current teacher is Eric Pritchard of the Ciompi Quartet. Carolyn has played in the Duke University String School, Eastern Regional Orchestra, and North Carolina All-State Honors Orchestra. For two years she was concertmistress of the Mallarmé Youth Chamber Orchestra (MYCO). She particularly enjoys playing chamber music. In the summer of 2012, Carolyn participated in the Instrumental Music program at the Governor's School of North Carolina and the Cary Cross Currents Music Festival. Her extra-musical interests include photography, travel, tennis, and Duke basketball. This fall Carolyn will enter Duke University.

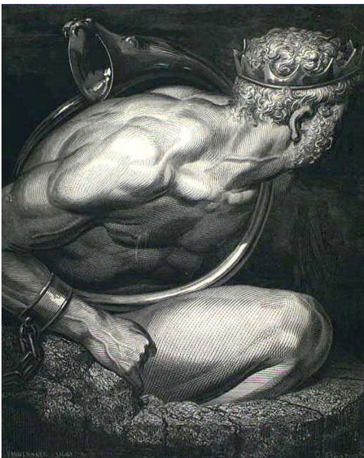
Elgar: *Enigma Variations*

Edward Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme for Orchestra ("Enigma")* were first performed in London on June 19, 1899, conducted by the same Hans Richter who led the premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Violin Concerto*. The work catapulted Elgar to distinction unknown by any native British composer since Henry Purcell more than 200 years earlier. Elgar was a social mutant who achieved a Lincolnesque transformation – rising to stardom as Sir Edward from beginnings as a mere self-educated, lower middle-class musician whose father tuned pianos and managed a music shop in the small village of Lower Broadheath in the West Midlands. "His long struggle to establish himself as a pre-eminent composer of international repute was hard and often bitter. For many years he had to contend with apathy, with the prejudices of the entrenched musical establishment, with religious bigotry (he was a member of the Roman Catholic minority in a Protestant majority England) and with a late Victorian provincial society where class consciousness pervaded everything." (Ian Lace of the Elgar Society) While overcoming these hurdles to personal success, Elgar helped shape his country's modern identity. He contributed, among other things, Britain's unofficial anthem, "Land of Hope and Glory" (for the 1902 coronation of King Edward VII, who knighted Elgar two years later). Leon Botstein, President of Bard College, expounds on his impact: "Elgar helped fashion the markers and substance of the late-Victorian and early-modern English self-image without subordinating his own individuality. His reception as a great composer remains intertwined with his significance and popularity as a representative voice of the spirit and pride of England." To George Bernard Shaw, Elgar eclipsed the established academic musical clique, which mainly snubbed him, to exhibit "what look to me very like…the stigmata of what we call immortality."

As Elgar recounted, work on the *Enigma Variations* "commenced in a spirit of humour & continued in deep seriousness." The piece comprises a theme and fourteen variations dedicated "to my friends pictured within." Elgar explained to August Jaeger: "I've labeled 'em with the [initials or] nicknames of my particular friends – you are Nimrod: That is to say…I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the variation him (or her) self & have written what I think they would have written – if they were asses enough to compose." Some of the portraits display great warmth, while others bear a sarcastic edge. Who did the variations portray? With one exception (Variation XIII), the identity code was cracked with little difficulty long ago. I have amalgamated the following descriptions from program notes by Michael Steinberg (San Francisco Symphony) and John Pickard (BBC), each sometimes quoting Elgar.

1. C. A. E. (Caroline Alice Elgar): a loving and dignified tribute to the composer's wife.
2. H. D. S.-P. (Hew David Steuart-Powell): an amateur pianist, who often played piano trios with Elgar on violin and Basil Nevison (Variation XII) on cello. His characteristic warm-up routines are gently parodied in a manner Elgar described as "chromatic beyond H. D. S.-P.'s liking."
3. R. B. T. (Richard Baxter Townshend): an amateur actor whose portrayal of an old man amused Elgar, "the low voice flying off occasionally into 'soprano' timbre." Townshend rode through Oxford on his bicycle, the bell constantly ringing. The violins' plucked strings and their woodwind doublings represent the bicycle bell.
4. W. M. B. (William Meath Baker): a country squire with an abrupt manner and a tendency to bang doors behind him when leaving a room.
5. R. P. A. (Richard P. Arnold): a music-lover and pianist (son of the poet Matthew Arnold) whose playing had, according to Elgar, a way of "evading difficulties but suggesting in a mysterious way the real feeling. His serious conversation was continually broken up by whimsical and witty remarks."
6. Ysobel (Isabel Fitton): an amateur violinist who, to make up for a local shortage of violists, switched to the deeper instrument. This variation contains one of Elgar's private jokes, the leading viola melody involving a tricky little exercise in crossing from the fourth to the second string without accidentally catching the third.
7. Troyte (Arthur Troyte Griffith): a close friend of the Elgars. This energetic, rhythmically disrupted variation recounts Elgar's desperate, and ultimately abortive, attempt to teach him to play the piano.
8. W.N. (Winifred Norbury): less a portrait of Miss Norbury than of Sherridge, the eighteenth-century house where she lived with her sister Florence. "The gracious personalities of the ladies are sedately shown."
9. Nimrod (August Jaeger): in the Book of Genesis Nimrod is 'the mighty hunter'; the name Jaeger means 'hunter' in German. Jaeger was Elgar's closest musical friend, the man who edited his music and whose judgment he trusted more than anyone else's. Their shared love of Beethoven is enshrined in this profound *Adagio*, the most celebrated of all the Variations.
10. Dorabella (Dora Penny): Elgar's nickname for the attractive young step-niece of Billy Baker (Variation IV) was taken from Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. We hear a suggestion of the stammer with which she spoke in her youth. We also sense an extraordinarily potent though repressed sexuality, to say nothing of Elgar's powerful and repressed response to it.
11. G. R. S. (George Robertson Sinclair): organist of Hereford Cathedral. Sinclair had a bulldog called Dan, of whom Elgar was immensely fond, often writing a musical 'Mood of Dan' in the visitors' book at Sinclair's home. The opening bars recall Dan falling into the river Wye, swimming upstream and scrambling to the bank with a triumphant bark.

12. B. G. N. (Basil G. Nevinson): a fine amateur cellist, "whose scientific and artistic attainments, and the wholehearted way they were put at the disposal of his friends, particularly endeared him to" Elgar [as the same attributes of CHP cello section principal Dr. Richard Clark earn the affection of his colleagues and friends.]
13. * * *: a friend whose identity is concealed mysteriously behind three asterisks. Some think she was Lady Mary Lygon, a society lady who was on a voyage to Australia around the time the Variations were composed. Others identify her as Helen Jessie Weaver, Elgar's first love, to whom he was engaged as a young man. She later emigrated to New Zealand, where she died. In either case an elegiac quotation, played by the clarinet, from Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, above the quiet throb of a ship's engines (conveyed by a strange rocking figure in the violas, with a soft drumroll) is apposite and poetic.
14. E. D. U. ('Edoo' was Alice's pet name for her husband): a dashing self-portrait – accompanied in the middle section by a reference to C. A. E. herself, drawing the musical threads together in a symphonic finale of masterly conception and dynamic energy.



Nimrod with horn in Dante's *Inferno*, by Gustave Doré (1890)

So, why did Elgar select the title "Enigma"? The man loved puzzles and both solved and created some fiendishly difficult cryptograms. If the identities behind all the variations (excepting XIII) are obvious, wherein lies the remaining mystery? Elgar posed the problem in program notes for the premiere performance of the Variations:

"The Enigma I will not explain – its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes' but is not played…So the principal Theme never appears, even as in some late dramas…the chief character is never on the stage."

In other words, as spelled out in the *Musical Times* in 1900, "Mr. Elgar tells us…that it is possible to add another phrase, which is quite familiar, above the original theme that he has written. What that theme is no one knows except the composer. Thereby hangs the Enigma." Thus, Elgar's work contains a riddle; some important, known thing is concealed. And "The [Enigma] theme is a counterpoint on some well-known melody which is never heard."

Despite enormous efforts over 115 years, and numerous proposed solutions, the Enigma remains apparently unsolved. Many suggestions for the "larger" theme, ranging from "Auld Lang Syne" to "Rule, Britannia!" to "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," either were dismissed by Elgar himself or obviously fail to meet the stated criteria. A possibly viable contender is the theme of the second movement of the *Pathétique* Sonata of Beethoven. Some puzzlers have become obsessed with the problem. One Robert Padgett, for example, recently has filled internet sites and published an eBook supporting his identification of the melody as the hymn "*Ein Feste Burg*" ("A Mighty Fortress is our God") by Martin Luther. (For a fascinating musical example pairing this hymn with the 'Nimrod Variation' see https://soundcloud.com/adina-spire/whistling-the-solution-of-the.) What seems certain is that, whatever remains hidden in the identities of its subjects and creator, the composition of the Variations lifted a 42 year-old depressive, who just days earlier confessed in a letter "I tell you I am sick of it all," to unexpected Hope and Glory.

— Program notes by Mark E. Furth, PhD ©2014