

Chapel Hill

Philharmonia

Sunday, 1 May 2022
7:30 p.m.

Moeser Auditorium
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Donald L. Oehler
Music Director

Ebullience!

Overture to *Die Zauberflöte*

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756-1791)

Carmen Suite #1

Georges Bizet (1838-1875)

Prélude (Overture)

arranged by Ernest Guiraud (1837-1892)

Aragonaise (Prelude to Act IV)

Intermezzo (Prelude to Act III)

Seguedille (Act I)

Les dragons d'Alcala (Prelude to Act II)

Les Toréadors (Overture)

— *Intermission* —

Symphony #7 in A Major, Op. 92

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Poco sostenuto; Vivace

Allegretto

Presto; Assai meno presto

Allegro con brio

Ebullience!

After more than two years, The Chapel Hill Philharmonia is finally able to perform in public again. We are ebulliently happy to be back, and we offer a program of the finest in the classical orchestral repertoire: a splendid overture by Mozart, a beautiful suite of excerpts from what may be the world's favorite opera, and a magnificent symphony by Beethoven.

Mozart: Overture to *Die Zauberflöte*

Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute) is Mozart's most frequently performed opera. In its initial run it was also by far the most commercially successful, although Mozart died before he could get his share of the profits. He conducted the premiere and the first several performances, and attended them until he fell ill. On his deathbed he followed the performances in his mind, looking at his watch to see when the various numbers were being done. He clearly liked what he had created.

Typically, Mozart had put off writing down the overture for the opera until the last minute. But he must have had all the ideas in his head before that, because it is a totally polished and effective work. It begins with three chords played by the full orchestra in slow tempo. These have significance in the opera's plot, three being the number associated with the thinly veiled freemasonry of Sarastro's brotherhood. Three more such chords in the winds are played before the development. The main theme of the *Allegro*, unrelated to anything in the rest of the opera, is six repeated short notes plus a turn — a pattern copied decades later by Rossini in his overture to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. This is passed around the sections of the orchestra in the manner of a fugue. In the development the counterpoint becomes more intricate, showing Mozart's mastery of the style. The work ends happily with a traditional flourish of brasses and drums.

Bizet/Guiraud: *Carmen Suite #1*

For almost a century and a half Georges Bizet's *Carmen* has been one of the most beloved and often performed operas, but Bizet could not have imagined that. He had difficulty getting it mounted in Paris, the reviews were negative, the public was indifferent, and he died of a heart attack at age 36 shortly after its 33rd performance. However, before his death he signed an agreement with the Vienna Court Opera to have it performed there. His friend Ernest Guiraud undertook the task of getting this done. In *Carmen's* original form, the plot was carried between the musical numbers by dialogue, as in Broadway shows. But most opera houses wanted continuous music, so Guiraud wrote recitatives to replace the dialogue. In this form the opera was a smash hit in Vienna. (Brahms, who saw it 20 times, wished he could have met Bizet.) It quickly became an international favorite. It still is.

A few years later Guiraud was able to exploit this popularity by compiling two suites of orchestral pieces based on numbers from the opera. The suite we play was published in 1882. Guiraud uses the opera's overture twice in the suite: the final section of the overture, the "Fate" motif that accompanies Carmen throughout the opera, opens the suite; the first section, representing the procession of the Toreadors, is the suite's finale. The four other numbers in the suite have titles, names of melodies or style names. Three are preludes to acts of the opera. The fourth, the *Seguedille*, is Carmen's seduction aria in Act I, when she persuades Don José to let her escape arrest, with a promise to meet him later at her favorite tavern. The singer's melodic lines are given to various woodwinds.

Beethoven: *Symphony #7 in A Major, Op. 92*

Napoleon Bonaparte was only a bit more than a year older than Ludwig van Beethoven, so their careers were parallel in time. It is likely that by 1800 Napoleon had heard of Beethoven, and certainly Beethoven was aware of Napoleon. He admired the rising star general, then consul, to the point of naming his third symphony after him. When Napoleon betrayed the republican ideals and declared himself emperor, Beethoven scratched his name from the title page and renamed the work *Heroic Symphony [Sinfonia Eroica] composed to celebrate the memory of a great man*.

The intersection of the lives of these two giant figures of the early 19th century did not end there. After conquering much of what is now western Germany, Napoleon installed his brother Jerome as King of Westphalia. Jerome, proud of his title, set about assembling a court of appropriate grandeur, in the process making an offer to Beethoven in 1808 to become *Kapellmeister* at the court. Beethoven, recently rejected for a position at Vienna's *Burgtheater*, was ready to accept. Three musically inclined nobles of Austria combined to make him a counter-offer of an annual stipend if he would stay in Vienna. He accepted this happily.

But Austria's second war with Napoleon intervened. One patron never paid his part, another went bankrupt. French forces bombarded and occupied Vienna, sending the remaining patron to flight. Having imposed a humiliating peace treaty on the Austrians, the French left, as Napoleon prepared to invade Russia. During this time Beethoven went back, after about five years, to the symphony and wrote his seventh in that form, but there was no specific performance planned.

Meanwhile, Napoleon led his *Grande Armée* into Russia, and was forced to retreat with the dwindling remainder of it. After a major defeat at Leipzig, he hoped to get back to France safely where he might regroup. The Allied forces engaged him at Hanau, failing to stop his retreat and suffering heavy losses. In Vienna a benefit concert was organized for the wounded from that battle, on 8 December 1813. Beethoven supplied most of the music and conducted the orchestra himself.

It was a sort of victory celebration, although Napoleon was by no means finished. Beethoven had earlier written a piece about the British victory in Spain at Vittoria, commissioned by the inventor of the metronome and intended for a kind of mechanical band he had devised. For the concert Beethoven arranged it for orchestra. Known as the *Battle Symphony*, it was a hit with the audience (but not the critics). The major feature of the program, however, was the premiere of the seventh symphony.

Every musician of note then in Vienna was recruited to play in the orchestra. Beethoven's old friend Schuppanzigh — whose group gave the first performances of most of the composer's string quartets — was the concertmaster. Others included Spohr, Salieri (yes, that one) and Meyerbeer. Beethoven, approaching deafness, conducted with a technique that, from accounts by the participants, must have been a bit like the young Leonard Bernstein.

The symphony was quite well received. The second movement was applauded to the point of being repeated. Later a similar concert was given, this time for the benefit of the composer, who certainly needed the money. Beethoven uncharacteristically offered his opinion that this symphony was one of his best works. The test of time has shown it to be just that.

The first movement begins with an extended introduction, the last time Beethoven started a symphony that way. This ends with many repetitions of the note E, implying the dominant of A. One waits and waits for the resolution to A, as the flute starts the rapid 6/8 of the *Vivace*, still



Beethoven in 1815

playing only E. Finally the rest of the orchestra plays the tonic A chord, the flute reveals the first theme, and the movement is off and running. The dotted rhythmic pattern of the flute's repeated notes permeates almost every measure, producing a hypnotic effect on the listener. In the coda, a sostenuto bass line supports a long crescendo, leading to an exultant climax in the winds.

A favorite from the first performance, the *Allegretto* is a set of variations in A minor. It starts with a simple theme in the low strings, adds a yearning melody over that, and varies the instrumentation in a long crescendo. A brief section in the major leads to a fugal treatment of the first theme. The major section returns, then the first theme dies away until only soft pizzicato notes remain. At the very end the strings play a staggered dissonant cadence, a master stroke.

The scherzo is *Presto* in F major, with a two-bar rhythm like a galloping horse. For the trio section, the tempo reduces to a walk, and a tune said to be from an Austrian pilgrim hymn is played by the winds. Then the fast section returns, its repeat played *pianissimo*. Perhaps because the tempo is so fast, Beethoven decided to repeat the trio again. And it appears that he intends to do it a third time; but no, five abrupt chords end the romp.

Wagner famously described this symphony as "the apotheosis of the dance". Indeed, rhythm is a main element in all of the movements, but especially so in the finale. The main theme is like a fast Irish dance; its melodic line is identical to one Beethoven had used (at a much slower tempo) in a setting of an Irish song. There is some victorious martial music too, based on the drum beat rhythm of the very first bars. But the whirling music of the main theme dominates, never letting the intensity wane, until at the end one feels almost dizzy — but happily so.

Lawrence Evans