Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Sunday, 10 March 2019
3:00 p.m.

Moeser Auditorium
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Donald L. Oehler, Music Director

Finale

Overture to *Donna Diana* — Emil von Reznicek (1860-1945)

Concerto for Viola — Béla Bartók (1881-1945) (completed by Tibor Serly)

Moderato
Adagio religioso
Allegro vivace

George Taylor, Viola

—Intermission—

Symphony in C, K 551 — Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro vivace
Andante cantabile
Menuetto
Molto allegro

Please join us in the foyer after the concert for a reception.

This program is supported by the Orange County Arts Commission.

ORANGE COUNTY ARTS COMMISSION

Finale

Our concert presents two works that were finales for their composers: the viola concerto left unfinished by Bartók at his death; and the final symphony of Mozart, the fourth movement of which — its finale — will long stand as a landmark of sheer compositional genius.

Reznicek: Overture to *Donna Diana*

Emil von Reznicek was the son of an Austrian military officer who earned the title of *Freiherr* (Baron) and the right to put *von* before his last name. Born in Vienna, Emil studied in Graz and Leipzig, then embarked on a career that took him to many places in Central Europe, but not much elsewhere.

During his long life (1860-1945) he saw momentous changes where he was living: the establishment of a unified Germany led by Prussia, the fall of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires in World War I, the turbulence of the 1920s, the rise of the Nazis, and finally World War II. Reznicek and his family were not immune from these events. His first wife was from the Austrian nobility; his second was part Jewish, which caused serious problems in the 1930s. His daughter, a courageous spirit, was an informer from Berlin for the British during World War II, and was granted British citizenship after the war. But one of his sons was a Nazi before 1933 and joined the SS corps. Reznicek tried to stay out of politics, but near the end his manuscripts were confiscated by the Nazis and many were lost in the destruction of Berlin.

He mostly worked in the tradition of his time and place. He was a friend of his contemporary Richard Strauss. He wrote 14 operas, mostly on themes familiar to people of his area, plus symphonies, string quartets, and choral works. But in 1894 he set to music a libretto based on a 17th century Spanish play, a farce entitled *El Desdén con el Desdén* — roughly, *Meet Disdain with Disdain*. This is the advice given by a court jester to the hero, Don Cesar, as the way to approach Donna Diana, who has openly disdained men, love, and marriage. Don Cesar follows the advice for three acts, and at the end Donna Diana falls defeated into his arms. A plot no sillier than many in opera, but decidedly outside the Central European tradition.

In its time the opera made a mark; Mahler conducted it at the Vienna Opera. But by the end of his life Reznicek knew that, of all his works, only the overture to this opera had really obtained wide public popularity. And so it has remained. In the late 1940s, kids who listened to radio in the USA learned this music, as the theme for the adventure show "Challenge of the Yukon". It may be just as well that Reznicek was gone by then.

After a brief introduction with upward sweeping scales, the violins start the main theme, in a fast galloping triple rhythm that continues throughout. The lyrical second theme, one note to a bar, floats above the persistent triplets. The strings are sometimes required to play the fast notes pizzicato, a challenge to the right hand fingers. The development features the wind players, accompanied by the triple rhythm only in the violas. After a conventional recapitulation, a brief coda beings the happy work to a pleasing close. Not a cloud in the sky.

Bartók: Viola Concerto

Béla Bartók was born in a small Hungarian town, now within western Romania. His father died young, and his mother migrated around Eastern Europe to find suitable teaching positions, eventually settling in Pozsony (now Bratislava). At age 18 Bartók accepted a place at the Royal Hungarian Academy of Music in Budapest. He graduated in 1903, expected to excel as a concert pianist.

Temperamentally and physically, however, Bartók was better suited to life as an educator than a touring virtuoso. He joined the piano teaching staff of the Academy of Music. A greater passion emerged as he explored peasant music, an interest triggered by hearing a nanny from Transylvania sing to the children in her care. Bartók became a pioneer in ethnomusicology—the study of the music of different cultures. In this field he found an outstanding partner and friend in fellow Hungarian Zoltán Kodály. The two collaborated as song collectors and championed each other's compositions. They eschewed "Gypsy" music popularized by Romani bands in urban centers, instead seeking authentic Magyar folk songs that often resembled the indigenous music of Central and Eastern Asia.

Bartók's own compositions drew increasingly from the ancient native folk songs he discovered around Eastern Europe and in Turkey and North Africa. He synthesized their distinctive rhythms and harmonies with modern European art music, from Claude Debussy forward, and also with classical and baroque forms. As he neared the end of his sixth decade, Bartók could count among his achievements six remarkable string quartets and other fine chamber music, numerous pieces for solo piano, the opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* and other stage works, and violin and piano concertos.

As opponents of Nazism and Hungary's fascist government, Bartók and his wife Ditta, once his piano student, decided to emigrate to the United States in 1940, after the outbreak of World War II in Europe. The transition to American life proved difficult. Despite receiving an honorary degree from Columbia University and a fellowship to support research on a collection of Serbo-Croatian songs, Bartók struggled financially. He was neither well-known nor appreciated in this country, and he found little audience interest in concerts of his music. Moreover, the tuberculosis symptoms that had handicapped Bartók as a young man returned, and he developed blood abnormalities that progressed eventually into a fatal leukemia. The deterioration of his health undermined Bartók's ability and motivation to compose new music.

Aid came from several quarters. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) helped pay Bartók's medical costs and underwrote stays at health spas in Saranac Lake, NY and Asheville, NC, where he could work in reasonable comfort. A commission from the conductor Serge Koussevitzky rekindled Bartok's creative spirit. He produced *The Concerto for Orchestra*, "a joyous and brilliant piece universally acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of the 20th Century." (Conductor Kenneth Woods) The Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered it in December 1944. Commissions also came from two world-famous string players—Yehudi Menuhin for the *Sonata for Solo Violin* and William Primrose for the *Viola Concerto*. In addition, Bartók undertook a

new piano concerto as a 42nd birthday gift for Ditta, intended to guarantee her future income from concert bookings.

Inevitably, time ran out. Upon Bartók's death in September 1945, the *Third Piano Concerto* required only 17 further bars of orchestration. Tibor Serly, a friend and musical disciple, readily accomplished this task. The *Viola Concerto*, however, proved a more daunting project. Serly, a violist himself, worked from loose manuscript sheets that contained a nearly finished virtuosic solo part but only sketchy orchestration. He devoted three years to prepare a complete version. Primrose embraced the work, performing it over 100 times and establishing it as a bedrock of the viola repertoire. Bartók's concerto transcends the poverty, neglect and illness that shadowed the composer's final days. It "is a profoundly lyrical, spiritual and life affirming work," writes Woods, [revealing a] "capacity for joy that listeners continue to marvel at."

The *Viola Concerto* comprises three movements played without break. For the first movement, the work's longest, Bartók employs classical sonata form. The viola enters over a softly plucked accompaniment in the low strings. The opening theme uses an octatonic scale—that is, a symmetrical eight note scale with alternating half and whole steps. The pace quickens in an extended conversation between the viola and woodwinds, with the soloist navigating an extended section of arpeggios (broken chords). A lightly accompanied cadenza leads into the recapitulation.

The transition to the second movement is marked *Lento parlando*, a reference to a speech-like declamatory style in slower folk melodies, with accents characteristic of the Hungarian language. A bassoon solo links to the slow movement proper, marked *Adagio religioso*, in which the solo viola weaves an introspective line over a chorale-like accompaniment. The work concludes with an energetic folk dance with hints of droning bagpipes, perhaps honoring Primrose's Scottish heritage.

Leon Botstein, a respected conductor and musicologist, and the President of Bard College, points to a vision that, in the end, may be Bartók's greatest legacy. "Whether it is debates in the United States...about immigrants...assimilation, and ethnic pride, or in propaganda within the former Communist bloc countries about foreigners, Jews, and cosmopolitans as opposed to loyal nationalists...we need to find ways to use group identity as a basis for human solidarity, not human conflict...Bartók sought through his work and study of folk musics the common thread among ethnic groups and diverse cultures." [*Musical Quarterly* (1995) **79**: 423-8]

Our soloist, **George Taylor**, is Professor of Viola at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. Previously, he was a member of the Ciompi Quartet at Duke University. A dedicated, sought-after and beloved teacher, he has served on the artist faculties of The Castleman Quartet Program, *Le Dormaine Forget*, the Chautauqua Institution, Musicorda, The Encore School for Strings, the Meadowmount School, the Manchester Music Festival, and the Elan International Music Festival, among others. Mr. Taylor has performed in solo recitals and chamber music concerts throughout the United States and in Taiwan. He collaborates frequently with the Ritz Chamber Players and with ensembles such as the Triple Helix Trio and the Ying Quartet. His recordings include "Night Strings" with guitarist Nicholas Goluses and the complete chamber music of the African/American composer William Grant Still with the Videmus Ensemble. Mr. Taylor co-founded and conducted the St. Stephens Chamber Orchestra (Durham, NC). In 1983 he served as the first conductor of the Village Orchestra, now the Chapel Hill Philharmonia.

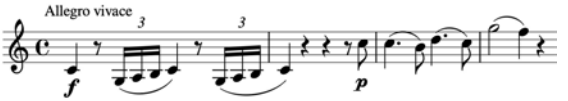
Mozart: Symphony in C, K 551*

This majestic work, Mozart's last in the genre, was composed more or less simultaneously with two other symphonies, in E-flat (K 543), and in G minor (K 550). All three were written in a very short time in the summer of 1788. Music historians have been utterly unable to give a convincing reason why Mozart undertook this remarkable outburst of creativity at that time. Nor have they been able to say definitely when or whether Mozart heard or participated in a performance of any of the three. There were occasions, after the works were written, when he was present at a performance of a symphony by him, but programs in those days did not specify which one was being played.

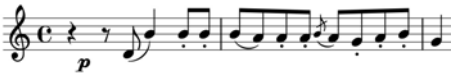
In any case, they were being performed not long after they were composed. H.C. Robbins Landon, who edited these three symphonies for the New Mozart Edition in 1957, had among the sources for K 551 a set of printed parts published in 1793, snd several handwritten copies of the parts, some probably dating from during Mozart's life. By 1800 these works were well known among musicians in Central Europe.

Much has been written about Mozart's sensitive use of the wind choir in his orchestral works. (Joseph Haydn confessed that he only learned as an old man how to write for winds; perhaps he gained insight from his younger friend.) For K 543, Mozart replaced oboes with clarinets, giving the winds a gentler sound. K 550 originally had oboes but no clarinets; later he revised it — perhaps for a performance he heard? — to include clarinets. In K 551 there are only oboes. In all three there is one flute and pairs of bassoons and horns. In K 543 and K 551 trumpets and tympani help make the appropriate moments grand and stately; they are absent in the more introspective K 550.

The first movement of K 551 starts abruptly with two main motives: a brusque outburst of rapid ornamental notes running up (or down) the scale to a main note, and a soft, flowing response.



These fragments permeate the whole movement. After they combine to form a festive first subject, a gentle second subject enters. Then at the end of the exposition Mozart turns to opera, quoting the melody of an aria he wrote earlier in the year, to be inserted into someone else's work; it is entitled *Un bacio di mano* (*A kiss on the hand*):



The final bars of this cheerful tune provide an important element in the development section. Soft echoes of the opening bars begin a false recapitulation. The actual recapitulation, when it comes later, is quite straightforward.

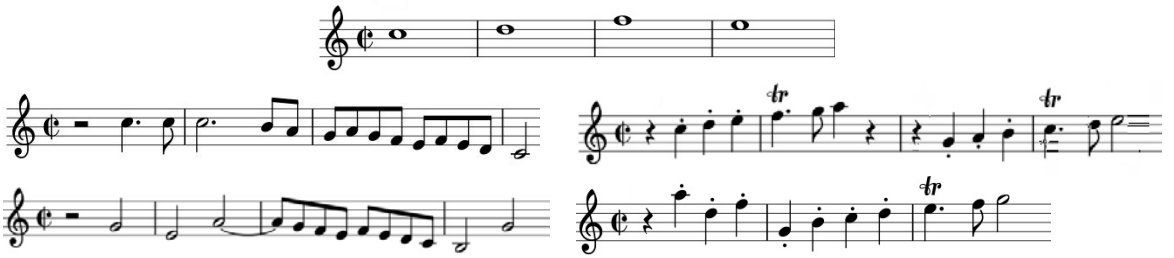
*We identify this symphony only by its key and Köchel catalog number. The popular list in which it is #41 omits authentic early works, and includes spurious ones such as #37, which is by Michael Haydn. The nickname "Jupiter" seems to have been the invention of Johann Peter Salomon, better known as the impresario for Joseph Haydn's two lucrative sojourns in London. Tovey dismisses it as "among the silliest injuries ever inflicted on great works of art." A bit severe, perhaps.

For the *Andante cantabile* second moment, the violins are told to use mutes. (These are small devices that add mass to the bridge of the instrument, impeding the transfer of energy from the strings to the sounding boards, especially at the higher frequencies.) In this too, Mozart was a pioneer. He had written muted orchestral movements before, in the Salzburg period symphony, K 201, and the more recent piano concerto, K 467. Besides these, in two splendid chamber works, the string quintet, K 516, and the clarinet quintet, K 581, the strings are muted in the slow movements. Muted strings became a common orchestral device for composers (especially French) in the 19th century, but Mozart was pretty much alone in the 18th.

The movement is a sonata form sarabande, a slow dance in triple rhythm, much used by Bach in his solo instrumental suites. The violins carry most of the melodic burden, sometimes accompanied, sometimes answered by the winds. A second subject, syncopated and in the minor mode, offers dramatic contrast. Of special note is the way Mozart uses the pairs of bassoons and horns. At the end of the recapitulation, when one thinks it is over, Mozart adds one more statement of the beginning of the opening theme, embroidered by the winds, in a short coda.

The third movement, labeled *Menuetto*, is more like the Austrian folk dance called *Ländler*, a forerunner of the Viennese waltz. It flows smoothly along, punctuated by horns, trumpets, and tympani. In the trio a dramatic forte section foretells the theme that opens the finale.

The finale! Thirteen minutes of orchestral music like no other. It is in sonata form, with both sections repeated and an extensive coda. But that hardly begins to describe what one hears. There are five thematic ideas, all short:



The first of these underlies all the others, as Mozart weaves a contrapuntal tapestry that astonishes the sophisticated listener while sounding beautiful and natural to everyone. In the famous coda all five motives are subjected simultaneously to fugal treatment, a *tour de force* that shows Mozart as a master of polyphony comparable to Bach and Handel. Indeed, European musicians in the 19th century, such as Schumann, referred admiringly to this work as "the symphony with the fugue finale." But the counterpoint never gives the impression of academic formalism. On the contrary, the mood of the finale is always festive, exhilarating, and celebratory. Appropriately, Mozart's last major work for orchestra alone ends with a heroic flourish featuring trumpets and drums.

Notes on the Bartók concerto by Mark Furth; other notes by Lawrence Evans