

# Chapel Hill Philharmonia

Hill Hall — University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

February 24, 2008

Donald L. Oehler, Music Director

**Wolfgang Amadè Mozart** (1756 - 1791)

***Overture to Die Entführung aus dem Serail***  
***(The Abduction from the Seraglio), K. 384***

**Claude Debussy** (1862 - 1918)

***Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune***  
***(Afternoon of a Faun), 1894***

*Intermission*

**Max Bruch** (1838 - 1920)

***Scottish Fantasy for Violin with Orchestra and Harp***  
***(Fantasia Making Free Use of Scottish Folk Melodies), Op. 46***

*Prelude: Grave—Adagio cantabile*

*Scherzo: Allegro*

*Andante sostenuto*

*Finale: Allegro guerriero*

**Mark Furth, violin**      **Laura Byrne, harp**

**Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835 - 1921)

***Danse Bacchanale from Samson et Delila, Op. 67***

## Exotic Inspiration

"Write what you know" instructs the clichéd title of a pop song. Yet an artist's mind can roam freely in time and space to 'know' foreign places, strange creatures, and legendary characters. Today's program features four **exotic** works portraying myth, erotic fantasy, and fabled locales. Each was composed by a former prodigy seeking commercial success. Fine craft and scintillating subject matter have maintained them in the repertoire. The program also contrasts two path breakers who died young with two musical conservatives who outlived their time.

In 1781 **Wolfgang Amadè Mozart** provoked his employer, the autocratic Prince-Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo, to boot him (via a steward's kick) from his native Salzburg. Mozart, age 24, moved to Vienna which, under Emperor Joseph II, had become "the freest, most open, liberal and tolerant city in Europe" and "the seat of a renewed German culture in



Basil Rathbone as Pasha Selim

which theater and opera played a central role." [Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, 1993] Seeking independence as a freelance composer, Mozart jumped at an offer to create a *singspiel* (opera with spoken dialog) for the new German Opera. ***Die Entführung aus dem Serail (The Abduction from the Seraglio)*** was first performed at Vienna's Burg Theater in July, 1782. It met with popular acclaim, despite the Emperor's alleged critique, made memorable in the film *Amadeus* (1984): "My dear young man, don't take it too hard. Your work is ingenious. It's quality work. And there are simply too many notes, that's all. Just cut a few and it will be perfect." The cinematic Mozart responds, "Which few did you have in mind, Majesty?"

*The Abduction's* Turkish setting reflects Austria's preoccupation with the adjacent Ottoman Empire, an historical enemy. The opera's heroine Constanze is kidnapped by Turkish pirates and imprisoned in the cruel Pasha Selim's Seraglio (Harem). Selim seeks to bed her, while Osmin, the grotesque eunuch harem-keeper (sung incongruously by a *basso profundo*), woos her English maid Blonde. Constanze's lover Belmonte, a Spanish nobleman, infiltrates the Seraglio to rescue her. Their escape is foiled, and Selim spots Belmonte as the son of a mortal enemy. All seems lost. Amazingly, the Pasha is moved by the couple's love for each other, as well as by a

pragmatic concern to avoid antagonizing a powerful foe. He grants the couple's freedom. Despite the apparent redemption of Selim, Till argues that "*Die Entführung* was almost certainly not chosen...as an expression of the bourgeois Enlightenment's more liberal vision of universal humanity and tolerance, but as a story that would serve the emperor's propagandist campaign against the Turks." He notes that the Viennese audience would hear jangling echoes of Janissary (Turkish military) bands as "comic, yes, but nonetheless crude and barbaric." Mozart used '*turqueries*' – clashes of bass drums, triangles, and cymbals – to great effect. He described the opera's Overture in a letter to his father: "[It] is quite short, and changes from *forte* [loud] to *piano* [soft] all the time; all the *forte* passages contain the Turkish music. It modulates continually through various keys, and I don't think [the audience] will be able to sleep through it, even if they haven't slept the night before."

**Claude Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune*** represents a different kind of wake-up call – nothing less than a musical revolution. Debussy was born in 1862 in the Paris suburbs to a family of humble means, and entered the Paris



Nijinsky as the Faun,

Conservatory at age 11. At 18 he took a summer job as house musician to Nadezhda von Meck, a wealthy Russian widow and the enigmatic patroness of Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. This association allowed the introverted Debussy to visit Europe's musical capitals. Composition captured his main attention. In 1884 he won the *Prix de Rome* and spent two years in Italy. Back in Paris he adopted a bohemian life and attended weekly Salons hosted by Stéphane Mallarmé. This outspoken writer, along with Paul Valéry and André Gide, led the Symbolists who sought to liberate poetry from traditional meter, logic, and descriptive reality, while emphasizing internal thoughts and feelings. Debussy embraced their spirit in stunningly original music, including *The Afternoon of a Faun*, the *String Quartet in G minor*, and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Many scholars credit him with giving birth to modern composition. Debussy continued to extend his novel approach, though his later years were marred by personal and global (World War I) turmoil. Diagnosed with cancer in 1910, he died in 1918.

In 1892 Debussy began a piece based on Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* (1865), suggested by Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev, who sought a vehicle for famed dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. The ballet only materialized twenty years later, but the work stood as Debussy's first major orchestral composition. Mallarmé's poem depicts a mythical creature, half-man, half-goat, drifting through a languid summer afternoon in an erotic reverie between sleep and wakefulness: "These nymphs I would perpetuate/ So clear/ Their light carnation, that it floats in the air/ Heavy with

tufted slumbers/ Was it a dream I loved?/ My doubt, a heap of ancient night, is finishing/ In many a subtle branch, which, left the true/ Wood itself, proves, alas! that all alone I gave/ Myself for triumph the ideal sin of roses/ Let me reflect....” [translation by Roger Fry] Like the Symbolist poets, Debussy broke with conventional form. From the famous opening flute solo, “The music ingeniously evokes a dream state of being held captive by utter beauty and sensuality. The harmonies seem to float. Rarely does Debussy write a direct musical cadence. Instead, he molds a soundscape intuited by the senses, reacting, allowing memories and half-memories to emerge from deep inside the listener.” [Dr. Max Derrickson, program notes, Johns Hopkins University SO] The piece won instant public approval, and was encored at its premiere in 1894. Critics took longer to come around, but eventually recognized the work’s importance. As described by conductor/scholar Leon Botstein [“Memory and Nostalgia as Music-Historical Categories.” (2000). *Musical Quarterly* 84: 531-6], “The purpose of music for Debussy was clearly derived from but beyond the Wagnerian: to emancipate the listener from the mundane and the everyday...Debussy succeeded. His music...evokes in some listeners specific memories of place, light, and feeling of past experiences unintentionally linked to any presumed logic of the composition.”

Born in Cologne, Prussia in 1838, **Max Bruch** lived until 1920, but never embraced the changes that in his day shook the foundations of music. The young Bruch became the star pupil of Ferdinand Hiller, a pianist and prolific composer whose ‘conservative’ brand of Romanticism aligned with that of Felix Mendelssohn, his boyhood friend, and Robert Schumann. At age 14 a promising symphony won Bruch a prize from the Mozart Foundation of Frankfurt, funding four years of advanced study. He later supported himself mainly by teaching and conducting, moving through posts in Coblenz, Sonderhausen, Bonn, Berlin, Liverpool (as conductor of the city’s Philharmonic Society, 1880-83), and Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). Just before his British sojourn, the middle-aged Bruch married Clara Tucek, a 16 year-old soprano who continued singing, despite his initial opposition. The marriage lasted and the couple had four children. In 1890 Bruch returned to Berlin as professor of composition at the *Hochschule für Musik*. In 1893 he received an honorary Doctor of Music degree at Cambridge University, together with Tchaikovsky and Camille Saint-Saëns. He retired in 1910 but composed until his final year.

Bruch excelled in writing for large choral groups. Oratorios such as *Frithjof* (1864), based on a 13<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic sage, and *Odysseus* (1872), based on the Homeric ode, became extremely popular. Musicologist Celia Applegate notes how Bruch’s work resonated with his community. “[It] was embraced in a musical culture that had no Paris but dozens of smaller cities, each with their orchestras and opera societies and above all their amateur music associations, starting with the enormous mixed-voice choirs and blossoming out into dozens of active...practicing groups of musical enthusiasts in every city and town.” Despite his skill as a pianist, for instrumental works Bruch preferred the violin. He explained “the violin can sing a melody better than the piano can, and melody is the soul of music.” The Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, completed in 1868, stands by far as the composition, among over 100 published, for which Bruch is remembered best. He had a gift for creating beautiful melodies, yet his lack of daring in a dynamic era undermined critical assessment of his work. Comparing himself to his rival Johannes Brahms, Bruch accurately predicted “most of my works will be more and more neglected. [While] fifty years hence [Brahms] will loom up as one of the supremely great composers of all time...he was much more original.” Bruch rationalized his own conservatism: “[Brahms] cared not at all about the public reaction or what the critics wrote. I had a wife and children to support and educate...I was compelled to earn money with my compositions. Therefore, I had to write works that were pleasing and easily understood.”



Pablo de Sarasate, 1874

Bruch, like composers such as Ralph Vaughn Williams and Béla Bartók, had a deep affinity for folk music. Scotland’s indigenous music held special appeal for him. The publication of James MacPherson’s *Ossian* poetry in 1760, purportedly rediscovered from a 3<sup>rd</sup> century Scottish bard, broadly influenced European culture. German writers, especially, “embraced the [Ossian] poems because of their depiction of the ancient people of Northern Europe as fierce, noble, and yet tender.” [P.F. Moulton. (2005). PhD Thesis, Florida State University]. This image of the Scots, reminiscent of the view of Native Americans as ‘noble savages,’ also influenced music. Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, and Mendelssohn (*Fingal’s Cave* and Symphony No. 3, ‘*Scottish*’), were among those who drew on Scottish themes. Bruch prized a folk collection compiled by James Johnson, *The Scots Musical Museum* (Edinburgh 1787-1803). It served as a source for *Twelve Scottish Folksongs* (1863) and for the ***Scottish Fantasy for Violin with Orchestra and Harp*** (1880). Bruch labeled the work a “*Fantasia, Making Free Use of Scottish Folk Melodies.*”

Today the *Scottish Fantasy* might be labeled a ‘crossover’ concerto. The harp emphasizes the connection to Celtic tradition, and the folk melodies, in Botstein’s terms, evoke memory and nostalgia. The contemporary musicologist Wilhelm Altmann reported that Bruch was inspired by the historical novels of Walter Scott (1771-1832),

and that he intended the dark *Prelude*, featuring bassoons, low brass, timpani, bass drum, and brushed cymbals, to depict “an old bard, who contemplates a ruined castle, and laments the glorious times of old.” It flows without pause into an *Adagio cantabile* (slow, singing) based on the tune ‘*Auld Rob Morris*’. Lyrics penned by Scotland’s great poet Robert Burns (1759-96), tell of a poor young man who adores a ‘bonnie lass’ far above his station, an heiress bound to a rich old laird. The lad despairs: “The day comes to me, but delight brings me nane [none]/ The night comes to me but my rest it is gane [gone]/ I wander my lane like a night troubled ghaist [ghost]/ And I sigh as my heart it wad burst in my breast.” The lively *Scherzo* is based on ‘*The Dusty Miller*’, in which (as told by Burns) a lusty fellow bestows considerably more than a ‘dusty kiss’ on his beloved to make the ‘bread’ rise. Bruch supports the jig-like dance with pedal-point open fifths in the bass, imitating highland bagpipes. The mood then shifts into a lyrical *Andante* based on ‘*I’m Down for Lack of Johnnie*’, a woman’s lament for her departed lover. Bruch designates the last movement *Allegro guerriero* (war-like), a marking borrowed from Mendelssohn’s ‘*Scottish*’ Symphony. Legend has it that the ancient folk tune forming the subject of the finale, *Hey Tuttie Tatie*, was played by the Scots when their army, led by Robert the Bruce, defeated a far larger English force at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. In 1793 Robert Burns set words in the form of an imagined speech by Bruce, exhorting his fellows to fight for freedom. The concluding verses of the song, now known as *Scots Wha Hae*, have a fine ring: “By Oppression’s woes and pains/ By your sons in servile chains/ We will drain our dearest veins/ But they shall be free!/ Lay the proud usurpers low!/ Tyrants fall in every foe!/ Liberty’s in every blow!/ Let us do or dee [die]!”

The respected Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim was soloist for the premiere of *Scottish Fantasy* in Liverpool in 1881, with Bruch conducting. Joachim advised on details of the violin part, as he had done for the *Violin Concerto* of his close friend Brahms. However, Bruch complained that Joachim did not perform it well, in part due to jealousy over the work’s dedication to a rival violinist/composer, Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908). A famously accurate and lyrical player, Sarasate shared Bruch’s devotion to Scottish folksong. A Spaniard, he performed frequently in the United Kingdom, was reportedly an accomplished folk fiddler, and championed Bruch’s *Fantasy* and other ‘Scottish’ works such as the *Pibroch Suite* of Alexander Mackenzie. Musicologists and critics may judge Bruch and Sarasate as relics of a bygone era, but their love for beautiful melodies and exotic places can still find a place in the hearts of today’s music community.

**Camille Saint-Saëns** was born in Paris in 1835, three years before Bruch, and outlived him by a year. Saint-Saëns’s musical gifts were said to resemble those of Mozart and Mendelssohn. His debut recital at age ten, featuring Mozart’s Piano Concerto in B-flat (K. 450), received international notice. By this time he also had memorized Beethoven’s 32 piano sonatas. Saint-Saëns developed into Europe’s leading organist; the flamboyant Franz Liszt considered him an equal as a keyboard artist and became an important friend. Saint-Saëns showed similar precocity as a composer. He began to write simple piano pieces at age three, and in his teens completed two widely admired symphonies. He continued to compose for eighty years, including abundant chamber music, concertos (violin, cello, piano), symphonies and symphonic poems, choral works, and thirteen operas. Saint-Saëns also published three scholarly books and a volume of poetry, and was a serious amateur anthropologist and astronomer. Though increasingly antisocial, especially after the death of two young sons in 1878, he could be generous, and taught many composers of the next generation. He also was famed as a world traveler, and his death came during a trip to Algiers, a favorite refuge, in 1921. Yet despite these accomplishments, Saint-



Samson & Delilah, Gustav Doré

Saëns, since his own times, has been damned with the faint praise of being a second tier composer [e.g., D.C. Parker. (1919). *Musical Quarterly* 5: 561-77] He supported the radicals of the Romantic era, Liszt and Richard Wagner, and the ‘modernists’ led by Debussy. However, Saint-Saëns was not in the vanguard of the revolution in music (he joined those who walked out at the riotous premiere of Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* in 1913), and his sensibility was closer to that of his classical antecedents, Joseph Haydn and Mozart. Parker, like most musicologists, applauds Saint-Saëns for “versatility...the plasticity of his mind and the eclecticism of his nature.” Yet he concludes that “The divine task of creating an imaginary universe out of chaos is reserved for the few,” implying Saint-Saëns fell short of that elite rank.

Saint-Saëns was able to evoke vivid images of exotic corners of the world. ***Samson et Dalila (Samson and Delilah)***, like Mozart’s *Abduction from the Seraglio*, joined a tradition of operas that “construct visions of the non-Western world and its inhabitants”, representing “what recent critical theory calls ‘the [Oriental] Other.’” [R. Locke (1991) *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 3: 261-302] Saint-Saëns began the opera in 1868, using a libretto from Ferdinand Lemaire, but was checked by the reluctance of French theater managers to show biblical characters on the secular stage. Liszt encouraged him to complete the work and mounted its first production (in German) in 1877 at the court of the Grand Duke Karl Alexander in Weimar. Tightly constructed in three acts, the opera tells the

familiar tale of the supernaturally strong Samson. As the Israelites suffer exile in Gaza, Samson leads an uprising against their Philistine captors, only to succumb to the treacherous seduction of Delilah, his erstwhile lover. Shorn of his hair and thereby his strength, blinded, and bound, Samson is led by a child into the temple of the god Dagon, as the Philistines celebrate erotic pagan rites in the **Danse Bacchanale** (Act III). Saint-Saëns co-opts the traditional ballet in French opera to depict an orgiastic scene. As Locke describes, “The music...gestures...plainly towards local color, in a quasi-ethnographic sense. In this ballet, the Philistine princes and maidens prolong their debauched revels beyond daybreak, urged on by hypnotic rhythms in the castanets, timpani and low strings...and by florid melodies and garish harmonies based on the Arab Hijiz mode, which Saint-Saëns doubtless chose for its strikingly ‘foreign’ augmented second...The rhapsodic oboe solo that opens the number...captures something of the improvisatory freedom that Westerners find so remarkable in much Middle Eastern music, and its opening bears an uncanny resemblance to...the muezzin’s call to prayer.” Locke amplifies on the *Bacchanale*’s exoticism: “[It] is sensuously (and, at its close, powerfully) orchestrated, and features many other surprising touches that, however fantastic their origin, add further strangeness – clear instances of the ‘distant Other’ as at once ‘monstrous’ (or ‘frightful’) and ‘attractive’.” The captive Samson’s prayers for renewed strength are then answered. At the opera’s end he pulls on the pillars to which he is shackled and literally brings down the house, upon the Philistines’ heads and his own.

– **Mark Furth**

**Mark Furth** does stem cell research at the Institute for Regenerative Medicine, Wake Forest University. He has studied violin as an adult with Martha Blum, Lewis Kaplan, and Eric Pritchard. Mark joined the Chapel Hill Philharmonia in 1993 and is principal first violin. He also was concertmaster of the NIH Chamber Orchestra, and played with the Broadway Bach Ensemble, and the Cambridge Symphony (UK). A ‘chamber music junkie,’ Mark participates in the Chapel Hill Chamber Music Workshop on violin and viola, helped found the September Prelude Festival, and serves on the board of the Amateur Chamber Music Players. Mark dedicates his first public performance of a violin concerto to his wife, Prof. Lola Reid, UNC-Chapel Hill, on the occasion of their twenty-fifth anniversary, and to her identical twin, Anna Reid Jhirad, in honor of the sisters’ Scottish heritage and genetic predilection for the music of Max Bruch.

**Laura Smithburg Byrne** received her Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Cleveland Institute of Music where she studied with renowned harpist Alice Chalifoux. Laura has performed with many fine orchestras including the Minnesota Orchestra, the Joffrey Ballet, the San Francisco Ballet, the North Carolina Symphony, the North Carolina Ballet and the Opera Company of North Carolina. As a chamber musician, she recorded with members of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in the “Arts over Aids” quilt songbook. She also recorded for composer Libby Larson in a Clarion award winning documentary film, *Leading from Beijing – Voices of Global Women*. Locally, Laura performs chamber music with fellow faculty members from UNC and Duke where she is the harp instructor. In recent reviews Laura has been praised for “her command of the harp...” and “the ethereal atmosphere she creates...” “A graceful performer, she is known for her spirited collaborations with many of the regions finest musicians.” She lives in Raleigh with her husband and three children.