

SoNA Opening Concert

Monday, September 19, 2011, 7:30 p.m.
Walton Arts Center
Paul Haas, Conductor

Overture to *Le nozze di Figaro*, KV 492

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-1791)

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 85

Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

- I. Adagio—Moderato
- II. Lento—Allegro Molto
- III. Adagio
- IV. Allegro—Moderato—Allegro, ma non troppo—Poco più lento—Adagio

Sebastian Bäverstam, Cello

Intermission

Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op. 74 “Pathétique”

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

- I. Adagio—Allegro non troppo—Andante—Moderato Mosso—Andante—Moderato assai—Allegro vivo—Andante come prima—Andante mosso
- II. Allegro con grazia
- III. Allegro molto vivace
- IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

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Program Notes

Is it possible that **Mozart** was born more than a quarter of a millennium ago? Two hundred fifty-five years is a long time, yet the music of this Austrian genius remains as fresh and immediate as anything in Western art. Many listeners believe Mozart to have been the greatest composer who ever lived. No one disputes his mastery of wit and charm, intimacy, refinement, balance, clarity, and sheer beauty.

Maestro Haas has chosen to open this inaugural season with one of Mozart's zesty overtures. His ***Le nozze di Figaro* [The Marriage of Figaro]** Overture is a flawless jewel of a curtain raiser, whether performed with the opera or independent of it. In a scant four minutes, Mozart distills the madcap energy and wit of his comic masterpiece.

Haas then welcomes the impressive young cellist Sebastian Bäverstam for **Sir Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor**. This work figured prominently in the soundtrack to Anand Tucker's 1998 film *Hilary and Jackie*, a biopic about the legendary cellist Jacqueline du Pré and her fraught relationship with her sister. Elgar's eloquent music is nostalgic, passionate, and deeply felt.

Following intermission, Maestro Haas and the orchestra present **Tchaikovsky's valedictory Symphony No. 6 in B minor, known as the Pathétique**. He conducted the premiere in St. Petersburg in late 1893, just days before he died. That circumstance has added to the renown of the Sixth Symphony. Audiences and musicians have always loved this work, which seems a fitting, if sad, conclusion to a tormented life. It boasts splendid, imaginative orchestration; drama; memorable themes; and sweeping emotive power.

"This concert is about life and the human condition for me," observes Maestro Haas. "It progresses from the almost giddy,

start-of-life, anything-is-possible feeling in the Mozart, through the whip-crack of a phenomenal soloist in the Elgar to remind us that, indeed, everything *is* possible. Then, an exploration of an entire life, viewed from the end of that life, as Tchaikovsky presents it in his *Pathétique*."

The program is also well balanced in its choice of one masterpiece each from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Eras change; the power of music to move us remains eternal.

OVERTURE TO **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO, KV 492**

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Born 27 January 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died 5 December 1791 in Vienna

⇒ *Virtuoso strings play fast and fleet in this overture*

⇒ *Listen for sudden contrasts of soft and loud*

⇒ *The big crescendo at the end is a precursor to the famous "Rossini crescendo"*

The Marriage of Figaro was the first of Mozart's three collaborations with the Italian poet Lorenzo da Ponte. Da Ponte crafted his superb libretto from Caron de Beaumarchais's French play, *Le mariage de Figaro*, which is actually part II of a Figaro trilogy. Beaumarchais's drama was considered subversive by the Viennese monarchy. In order for the libretto to clear the imperial censors, da Ponte had to make some adjustments. He downplayed the political aspects of the drama and capitalized on its inherent comedy. In his music, Mozart matched and surpassed da Ponte's admirable achievement. Mozart was

at the height of his powers in 1786, and there are many who rank this opera as his supreme masterpiece.

Mozart's overture is remarkable for several reasons. First, it includes no actual themes from the opera; all its music is completely independent of the musical drama, except in the sense that the overture's key of D major is the dominant tonality of the opera. Second, in spite of this thematic independence, the music captures the comic, effervescent atmosphere of the opera with exquisite skill. Third, Mozart – always a master of formal structures – has written a tightly unified sonata form movement without an ounce of pedantry. To the contrary, his overture is brimful of joy and enthusiasm, sounding as spontaneous as if it were jotted down on the spur of the moment.

The music of the overture is so familiar that it requires no introduction. Those who are fortunate enough to be discovering it this evening for the first time will be delighted with Mozart's verve and energy. Others who know it well may smile as they recognize a technique in the coda as Mozart builds toward the decisive final chords. We call it a "Rossini *crescendo*" – but Mozart understood how to create the same excitement and momentum with consummate artistry, in this case six years before Rossini was born.

Mozart scored the overture for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani, and strings.

A Word on Mozart's Name

Mozart was born in Salzburg on 27 January 1756 and died in Vienna 5 December 1791, not quite thirty-six years old. He was baptized with the names Joannes Chrysost[omus] Wolfgangus Theophilus. His parents gave him the names Johann and Chrysostom because he was born on that saint's day. Wolfgang was the first name of Mozart's maternal grandfather. The name 'Theophilus' (Greek for 'beloved of God') came from the godfather, Joannes Theophilus Pergmayr, a Salzburg businessman and local official. Days after the boy's birth, Leopold

referred to his infant son as Gottlieb (the German for Theophilus). 'Amadeus' is the Latin form.

In letters, the composer signed his name variously as 'Mozart,' 'W.A. Mozart,' 'Wolfg. Amad. Mozart,' 'MZT,' 'Wolf. Amadè Mozart' and, most frequently, 'Wolfgang Amadè Mozart.' As a boy in Italy, he occasionally signed in the Italianate spelling: 'Wolfgango Amadeo.' Despite Peter Shaffer's stage play *Amadeus* and Miloš Forman's even more popular film, Mozart did not use the name Amadeus.

In recent years, the spelling 'Wolfgang Amadè Mozart' has supplanted the old-fashioned 'Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart' in common usage and printed programs. The glory of his music remains unchanged.

CONCERTO FOR CELLO AND ORCHESTRA, OP. 85

Sir Edward Elgar

Born 2 June 1857 in Broadheath,

near Worcester, England

Died 23 February 1934 in Worcester

⇒ *Unusual form characterizes this concerto; the first two and the last two movements are paired*

⇒ *The Cello Concerto was Elgar's first work with orchestra after World War I*

⇒ *Operatic recitative is a close relative of this concerto - think of the soloist as a baritone with an enormous range*

⇒ *Listen for a lot of repeated notes in the scherzo, and plenty of surprise rhythms*

The Great War (1914-18) marked the end of Britain's golden age, when her international hegemony had been virtually unassailable. For Edward Elgar, the end of this era was particularly poignant. Before the war, he had close ties and many friends in Germany. Afterward, both his career and his health were faltering, and he found himself beset with the

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simple financial worry of making ends meet.

In this troubled state, Elgar commenced work on his Cello Concerto in spring 1918. His attention was deflected that summer by an intense focus on chamber music. The results, a Violin Sonata, a String Quartet, and a Piano Quintet, were Elgar's first chamber works since his student years.

Felix Salmond was the cellist of the quartet that performed both larger chamber pieces. Salmond worked closely with Elgar as the concerto moved up on his priority list. Because Elgar had considered a career as a concert violinist, he understood string playing. Thus he was both responsive to and appreciative of Salmond's many suggestions to fine-tune the concerto. Elgar conducted Salmond at the premiere, which was unsuccessful largely because of insufficient rehearsal time. The concerto rapidly achieved its place in the repertoire, however, and is now acclaimed as being on a par with Dvorák's magnificent Cello Concerto. Certainly it is the greatest masterpiece of Elgar's maturity.

The Concerto is scored for woodwinds in pairs plus optional piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones (optional tuba doubling bass trombone), timpani, solo cello and strings.

Musicians' Corner

The Elgar Cello Concerto is unusual in form. The first two and last two movements are paired, with formal breaks occurring only between the second (a symphonic scherzo) and third (*Adagio*) movements. The soloist opens the concerto with a bold recitative that is as much in chords as it is in melody. That recitative returns to form a unifying link, first as a bridge to the second movement (thinly disguised as *pizzicato*), then again in the finale. Elgar awards the main theme, a lilting, questioning melody in 9/8 time, to the violas. The entire first movement is filled with elusive, understated gestures. This is no showpiece for the simple sake of virtuosity, but rather a profound and thought-provoking musical statement.

Elgar's mercurial scherzo places extreme technical demands on the soloist. A perpetual motion movement, it is just a little lopsided, with emphasis slightly off the beat. Elgar often sends the cellist scurrying about quite high in its tessitura. The *Adagio* is emotionally central to the Concerto and the only movement in which the opening recitative does not figure prominently. Songful, melancholy and intimate, this is a private lament. Strings dominate the orchestral support.

Larger scale than its predecessors, the finale takes as much time in performance as the three previous movements combined. It recalls the bursting self-confidence of Elgar's 1899 masterpiece, the *Enigma Variations*. His apparently lighthearted gambol incorporates heartfelt reminders of the *Adagio* and a final quotation from the opening recitative. They make a powerful statement, undoing the happy-go-lucky atmosphere established so effectively earlier on. The final impression we have is, as Michael Kennedy has so aptly noted: ... overpoweringly the music of wood smoke and autumn bonfires, of the evening of life; sadness and disillusion are dominant.

SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN B MINOR, OP. 74, "PATHÉTIQUE"

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky

*Born 1840 in Votkinsk, Viatka District, Russia
Died 1893 in St. Petersburg, Russia*

Autobiographical confessional or philosophical meditation?

Alexander Poznansky, in his thought-provoking 1991 biography, *Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man*, outlined two schools of thought concerning Tchaikovsky's sixth and last symphony.

The first seeks to interpret the work in a narrow autobiographical sense, often reducing its meaning to an artistic expression of the homoerotic torment allegedly suffered by the composer. The other takes a reverse

approach, often seeing in the symphony so broad a meditation on the issues of life and death that the entire notion of a "program" becomes meaningless.

Poznansky subscribes to neither view, finding greater significance in Tchaikovsky's dedication of the "Pathétique" to his nephew Vladimir Davydov, known as Bob. Poznansky believes that the subject of the symphony is the composer's suppressed passion for the boy. To Bob he confided in a letter the tantalizing riddle that his new symphony had "such a program that will remain a mystery to everyone – let them guess." With the symphony, Tchaikovsky gave vent to ... an irresistible desire to retell in music the story of his life and his soul and to dedicate it to Bob so that his beloved nephew might be able to share and appreciate all that he himself had gone through.

Sudden death and the scent of scandal

Tchaikovsky composed the "Pathétique" in 1893, the final year of his life. He conducted the premiere of the symphony in St. Petersburg only eight days prior to his sudden death, reportedly from cholera. That circumstance added greatly to the renown of the "Pathétique" Symphony. Its immediate posthumous influence was magnified by Tchaikovsky's widespread popularity during his lifetime and by the scent of scandal surrounding rumors that his sudden death had been a suicide.

Audiences and musicians have always loved this work. All the characteristics that we value most highly in his music are present in the "Pathétique": splendid, imaginative orchestration; drama; memorable, delicious themes; superb development, and sweeping emotive power. If Poznansky's theory is valid, we may think of this work as an analogue to Richard Strauss's massive autobiographical tone poem, *Ein Heldenleben*.

Unlike some of Tchaikovsky's earlier orchestral works, there is no superfluous rhetoric to mar the symphony's equilibrium.

An earlier Tchaikovsky biographer Edward Garden has noted:

In the terse exposition and succinct development section [of the first movement] Tchaikovsky demonstrates that he has learnt how to cut and to prune, and to include only what is essential to the structure.

New concept: an Adagio finale

Tchaikovsky's letters reveal his awareness that the overall form of his new symphony would be unusual. He was particularly taken by the notion of an Adagio finale. It cannot be entirely accidental that Gustav Mahler, who knew and admired Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, also chose to break with tradition barely two years later, and conclude his own monumental Third Symphony with an Adagio finale.

Emotionally the Sixth Symphony is taut throughout. Some relief is provided by the second movement *Valse*, whose unusual meter is a distinctly Russian touch; 5/4 time is fairly common in Russian folk music. The third movement merges scherzo with march. Tchaikovsky's elfin opening has little chance against the forceful militance of the secondary idea. It should be noted that in French, *pathétique* means touching the emotions, full of pathos, rather than the "pathetic" of the direct English cognate. In the final analysis, the "Pathétique" is a deeply moving work, reaching a level of tragedy in its slow finale that places it among the most profound musical utterances.

Tchaikovsky's score calls for three flutes (third doubling piccolo); oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs; four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam and strings.

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