

SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AUGUSTIN HADELICH RETURNS
A Jacobs Masterworks Concert
Cristian Măcelaru, conductor

February 15, 16 and 17, 2019

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

Suite from *The Cunning Little Vixen*

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53

Allegro; ma non troppo

Adagio; ma non troppo

Finale: Allegro giocoso; ma non troppo

Augustin Hadelich, violin

INTERMISSION

BÉLA BARTÓK

Dance Suite

Moderato

Allegro molto

Allegro vivace

Molto tranquillo

Comodo

Finale: Allegro

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Selections from *Hungarian Dances*

No. 2 in D minor (orch. Andreas Hallén)

No. 4 in F-sharp minor (orch. by Paul Juon)

No. 8 in A minor (orch. Sam Dennison)

No. 16 in F minor (orch. Albert Parlow)

No. 10 in F Major (orch. Johannes Brahms)

CZECH AND HUNGARIAN MUSIC (SORT OF)

All the pieces on this program were composed in or inspired by the regions we know today as the Czech Republic and Hungary. But those countries did not exist when this music was written – Janáček, Dvořák and Bartók all grew up under the fierce rule of the Hapsburg Empire, which suppressed local customs and insisted that German be the official language. All three resisted: Janáček and Dvořák were devout Czech nationalists who longed for independence, while Bartók was so intense in his nationalism that as a young man he wore Hungarian native dress and refused to speak German. Their music reflects their politics: it is full of the folk tunes and speech rhythms of their native regions. The exception on this program, of course, is Brahms, who was a strong German nationalist (he kept a photo of Bismarck on his wall). But Brahms loved gypsy music, and the *Hungarian Dances* that conclude this program remind us of his affection for this region and its peoples, even as they struggled to get out from under Germanic domination.

Suite from *The Cunning Little Vixen*

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

Born July 3, 1854, Hukvaldy, Czechoslovakia

Died August 12, 1928, Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia

Leoš Janáček had what is perhaps the strangest career of any composer. At the time of his sixtieth birthday in 1914 he was known only as a choral conductor and teacher who had achieved modest success with a provincial production of his opera *Jenufa* ten years earlier. Then in 1917 the aging composer's life was transformed. He fell in love with Kamila Stösslová, a 25-year-old married woman and mother of a small child. This one-sided love affair was platonic – Kamila was mystified by all this passionate attention, though she remained an affectionate and understanding friend. But the effect on Janáček was staggering. Over the final decade of his life music poured out of him: four operas, two string quartets, the Sinfonietta, the *Glagolitic Mass* and numerous other works, all in some measure inspired by his love for Kamila.

The four final operas are – in general – grim. *Katya Kabanova* (1921) tells of its heroine's frustrated love and eventual suicide. In *The Makropoulos Affair* (1926) the heroine took a potion in 1585 that has allowed her to live for 300 years, but at the end of the opera she ages suddenly and dies. *From the House of the Dead* (1928) is based on Dostoevsky's account of

life in a Siberian prison camp. The exception to all this bleakness is *The Cunning Little Vixen*, first produced in 1924. This is a fairy-tale opera, inspired by a popular comic strip and based on Janáček's own libretto, and it tells a story that is simultaneously full of shining optimism and painful loss. Its world is populated by humans and animals, all of whom have singing roles. The heroine – a sharp-eared and wily young vixen – is taken captive by a forester and held unwillingly as a pet. She escapes, has many adventures, has baby foxes of her own and is eventually shot and killed by a poacher. But the ending of the opera is by no means unhappy, because the values of freedom and nature and love that she represents appear in a new vixen. The cycle of nature goes on: the vixen's offspring proceed with their lives, the forester accepts life with its joys and sorrows, and the opera glows with Janáček's pantheistic faith in nature. Some of Janáček's operas have proven formidable challenges for audiences, but *The Cunning Little Vixen* was a success right from its premiere; it is frequently produced today, often with imaginative animal costumes that emphasize its fairy-tale atmosphere.

Janáček disliked the idea of drawing orchestral suites from his operas – he felt that an opera was a complete work in itself and should not have its music cut up and moved to the concert hall. But many have felt that the music of *The Cunning Little Vixen* is too good to remain in the opera house, and there have been several concert suites drawn from the opera. The best-known of these was made by the Czech conductor Václav Talich after the composer's death. Talich's suite is essentially Act I of the opera with the voices removed – its two parts are the two scenes of Act I. That act draws us into Janáček's fairy-tale world with warm and glowing music, introduces the forester, shows us the capture of the vixen and her feisty dealings with the other animals at the forester's estate, and concludes vigorously with her escape into the forest. But listeners might do best not to try to make out these incidents and instead take the suite as abstract music suffused with the glowing atmosphere of Janáček's tale. The music is instantly recognizable as the work of Janáček, with its energy, short repeated phrases, clipped rhythms inspired by human speech and soaring melodies. For the 20 minutes of its duration the suite draws us into Janáček's magical world and his faith in nature.

Violin Concerto in A minor, Op. 53

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8, 1841. Muhlhausen, Bohemia

Died May 1, 1904, Prague

Success came slowly for Dvořák. He had labored for years in obscurity, supporting his family as a teacher and an orchestral violist while he tried to succeed as a composer. And then success arrived with a great rush. Dvořák attracted the attention of Brahms, who alerted his own publisher Simrock to this unknown Czech musician. In 1878, when Dvořák was 37, Simrock published his first set of *Slavonic Dances*, and they swept across the planet: they were performed throughout Europe and even in distant America, and suddenly Dvořák's music was in demand.

One of those who took up his music was Joseph Joachim, the greatest violinist of the era. He played Dvořák's chamber music in Berlin and invited the composer into his home to hear the rehearsals. The modest Dvořák was overwhelmed and wrote to a friend: "after being here [in Berlin] for only a few hours I had spent so many enjoyable moments among the foremost artists, that they will certainly remain in my memory for the rest of my life." Dvořák resolved to write a concerto for Joachim, who had just given the first performance of Brahms' Violin Concerto. He drafted the concerto during the summer of 1879 and the following spring journeyed to Berlin to go over the manuscript with Joachim. Joachim liked the piece, went over it in detail with the composer, made some suggestions and was happy to accept the dedication. Dvořák made the revisions and then ran into a bad surprise: Joachim never played the concerto in public. It was not that Joachim disliked the piece. Performances were scheduled but were then postponed or canceled, so finally Dvořák turned to another violinist: Frantisek Ondricek gave the first performance on October 14, 1883, in Prague.

Dvořák's Violin Concerto offers all his considerable virtues: appealing tunes, energy and color, and a strong Czech flavor. It also presents some innovations. Dvořák does away with the traditional orchestral exposition of themes at the opening: the orchestra offers a powerful opening gesture, and the solo violin enters immediately with its own material, which is lyrical, almost rhapsodic. That entrance establishes the character of the concerto – it can be brilliant at moments, but this is essentially lyric and relaxed music. Dvořák offers secondary material, and the concerto appears to proceed in sonata form, but another surprise comes at the end of the movement when Dvořák does not recapitulate his themes. Both Joachim and Simrock objected to

this, but Dvořák was adamant. Instead of the traditional ending, he gives the soloist a cadenza-like passage and then goes on without pause into the slow central movement. This *Adagio* is also lyric in character, based on the violin's opening idea, which Dvořák marks *espressivo*. This theme is then varied, and at the center of this movement the music suddenly erupts in a great F minor storm, full of brilliant violin writing: octaves, runs, trills and swirls. The storm passes, the opening mood returns, and the movement concludes serenely.

The finale – which Dvořák specifies should be *giocoso*: “happy” – is the most distinctly “Czech” movement in the concerto. Solo violin leads the way with a dancing, syncopated tune that has been compared to the Czech *furiant*, an old folk-dance based on cross-rhythms. The idea is treated in a sort of rondo form, and there are some extended episodes along the way. One of these is a *dumka*, an expressive, dark interlude in D minor. But the dancing energy of the opening returns, and finally it drives the concerto to its vigorous conclusion on four ringing chords.

Dance Suite

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born March 25, 1881, Nagyszentmiklos, Hungary

Died September 25, 1945, New York City

Bartók wrote the Dance Suite in 1923 for a festival celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the merging of the cities of Buda, Pest and Obuda into the capital city of Budapest. The Budapest Philharmonic gave the first performance on November 19, 1923, at the festival. Bartók had long been interested in folk music and had made lengthy treks through Eastern Europe and North Africa, collecting and recording folk songs. While the Dance Suite sounds as if it based on folk material, all of the themes are Bartók's own, created in the character of the folk music of different nations. In a letter he made these styles clear: “No. 1 is partially and No. 4 entirely of an Oriental (Arabic) character; the ritornello and No. 2 are of Hungarian character; in No. 3 Hungarian, Rumanian and even Arabic influences alternate; and the theme of No. 5 is so primitive that one can speak only of a primitive character here, and any classification according to nationality must be abandoned.”

The Dance Suite consists of five sections and a brilliant finale based on themes from the earlier movements. Bartók binds the movements together with a lyric ritornello that appears in

different instruments. One of the distinguishing features of the thematic material is its frequently narrow compass: some themes are built of only two notes, while others remains inside a very narrow interval.

The opening movement, marked *Moderato*, is based on the bassoon theme heard at its beginning, a melody that remains within the span of a minor third. It builds to a great climax, and the movement concludes with the ritornello heard here in four solo violins. The *Allegro moderato* is a brutal dance based on only two notes, again a minor third apart. This pounding theme, heard first in the violins, is punctuated by snarling trombone glissandos. The ritornello this time appears first in the clarinet, then the violins. The good-spirited *Allegro vivace* rocks along happily on its opening bassoon theme, grows in intensity, and ends not with the ritornello but with a fiery restatement of the main theme. Bartók noted the Arabic inspiration for the *Molto tranquillo*, and commentators invariably find this movement – one of Bartók’s many “night-music” movements – a depiction of the quiet moonlit desert; muted string chords are interrupted by eerie melodies in the winds, and the ritornello fades into silence. The brief fifth section, *Comodo*, opens with a muttering rhythmic figure over a deep pedal in the piano and contrabass and leads directly into the *Finale: Allegro*. Here Bartók re-introduces themes from all previous sections except the fourth, and the music races to a blazing close.

Selections from *Hungarian Dances*

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Brahms had a life-long fascination with Hungarian music, which for him meant gypsy music. As a boy in Hamburg, he first encountered it from the refugees fleeing revolutions in Hungary for a new life in America, and he was introduced to gypsy fiddle tunes at the age of 20 while on tour with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. (It was on that tour that Brahms began his lifelong collection of Hungarian folk-tunes.) Over a period of years, he wrote a number of what he called *Hungarian Dances* for piano four-hands and played them for (and with) his friends. He published ten of these in 1869 and another eleven in 1880, and they proved a huge success. There was a ready market for this sort of music that could be played at home by talented amateurs, and these fiery, fun pieces carried Brahms’ name around the world. (They also

inspired the *Slavonic Dances* of his friend Antonín Dvořák.)

In the *Hungarian Dances*, Brahms took *csardas* tunes and – preserving their themes and characteristic freedom – wrote his own music based on them. To his publisher, Brahms described these dances as “genuine gypsy children, which I did not beget, but merely brought up with bread and milk.” It has been pointed out, however, that Brahms did not begin with authentic peasant tunes (which Bartók and Kodály would track down in the twentieth century), but with those tunes as they had been spiffed-up for popular consumption by the “gypsy” bands that played in the cafés and on the streetcorners of Vienna. Brahms would not have cared about authenticity. He loved these tunes – with their fiery melodies, quick shifts of mood and rhythmic freedom – and he successfully assimilated that style, particularly its atmosphere of wild gypsy fiddling. (In fact, he assimilated it so successfully that three of the *Hungarian Dances* are based on “gypsy” tunes that he composed himself).

If this music was an instant success with audiences, it also proved popular with performers, and the *Hungarian Dances* soon appeared in many arrangements. All 21 have been orchestrated: Brahms himself prepared three of these, Dvořák orchestrated the final five, and various others arranged the remaining 13. Cristian Măceralu concludes this concert with five of Brahms’ *Hungarian Dances*, each orchestrated by a different composer. The famous No. 2 in D minor surges with a fiery energy and just as quickly heads off in another direction, throwing off sparks as it goes. No. 4 in F minor opens with a passionate, measured melody that seems made for a throbbing gypsy violin, then takes wing at the *Vivace* section. The brief No. 8 in A minor alternates the dark propulsiveness of its beginning (Brahms’ marking is *Presto*) with sparking interludes. No. 16 in F minor is built on a melancholy main theme, again reminiscent of gypsy fiddling, and this is set off by *Presto* episodes along the way. This collection concludes with the brief No. 10 in F Major, music full of equal parts fire and paprika. Brahms must have really liked this one – it is one of the three he orchestrated himself.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger

PERFORMANCE HISTORY

by Dr. Melvin G. Goldzband, San Diego Symphony Archivist

Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* Suite is being heard in San Diego for the first time at these performances. Dvořák's only violin concerto was introduced first to San Diego Symphony audiences during the 1965-66 season, when Earl Bernard Murray conducted it and Shmuel Ashkenasi was the soloist. The work's most recent outing here, its sixth, was during the 2003-04 season, with Midori soloing under James Paul's baton. Bartók's delightful "Dance Suite" was given only once before in San Diego, when Peter Erős led a performance during the 1980-81 season. The *Hungarian Dances* by Brahms have been played often by the orchestra, sometimes programmed during Masterworks concerts but more often during more popular programs, beginning in the Marcelli era of the 1920s and 30s.