

Finale of Symphony No. 45 in f-sharp minor (Farewell) Haydn

The summer of 1772 seemed interminable to the musicians in the court of Prince Esterhazy as the Prince was loath to return to town from his summer estate. Appealing to Haydn, their Kappelmeister, to do something Haydn wrote this very forceful and clever symphony.

The first three movements are typical “sturm and drang” in Haydn’s cheerful style. It is the last movement in which he conveys a message to his Patron. The movement begins Presto then suddenly breaks off into an unheard-of Adagio. He scored the movement so that each musician, in their customary uniform, blows out their stand candles, bows to the Prince, and departs. Finally only the first violin is left to complete the work in double stops. The Prince apparently grasped this eloquent message as he ordered the court to leave the next day.

This Finale has been a long standing tradition of the Lake Placid Sinfonietta bringing to a close another glorious summer of “Music in the Mountains.”

Program Notes by Annette Albright

Program Notes

August 13, 2011

Greek Dances

Nikos Skalkottas

Born in Chalkis, Greece, Nikos Skalkottas studied violin with his father. He then went to the Athens Conservatory and in 1921 he moved to Berlin to the Hochschule for Musik. Here he came in contact with Kurt Weill and Arnold Schoenberg. He was enamored with Schoenberg’s 12 tone technique and adapted it to his own unique use. Returning to Greece in 1933 he made a living playing violin in local orchestras but continued to compose. At his father’s suggestion, he began to collect Greek dances at inns and festivals. Possessing an extraordinary musical memory he was able to compose his “Thirty-six Greek Dances.” from which these dances are chosen. The dances are composed in simple tonal idioms in the serial technique of his own devising. He combines strength with lyricism, intensity with release. They are brilliantly orchestrated.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 in G Major, BWV 1049

J.S. Bach

In 1721 Bach sent his six Brandenburg Concertos to Christian Ludwig, Margrave, of Brandenburg, son of the prince Elector. Bach had met the Margrave when he played on a harpsichord in his court and had been asked to send some of his compositions. At that time Bach was serving in the court of Anhalt-Cothen and simply gathered six of his compositions and sent them to the Margrave. Each of the six Brandenburgs are scored for different combinations of instrument. No. 4 is scored for solo violin and two recorders and is a combination of solo concerto and group concerto. In the usual three movements of fast, slow, fast, this concerto is filled with virtuosic passages for the violin in the first and third movements. In the second movement the recorders have a prominent part. It is doubtful any of the concertos were performed in the Margrave’s court as his musicians were not as highly skilled enough to perform these works. They were not found until 1734 and first published in 1849.

Pavane for a Dead Princess

Maurice Ravel

Maurice Ravel was just twenty-four when he wrote the piano solo, Pavane pour une Infante defunte. The piece soon became the rage of Paris drawing rooms and salons. A graduate of the Paris Conservatory, Ravel had

studied composition with Faure and greatly admired the works of Chabrier and Satie, yet in this short work his own musical style is evident. Asked who the princess was, Ravel assured his listeners she was just an imaginary figure. The work is a slow Spanish dance to which a little princess might have danced. Due to its popularity, Ravel orchestrated the work in 1910. The haunting melody unfolds against a stately eighth-note pulse. Each reiteration of the melody is accompanied by a growing orchestral texture. The theme is stated in the French horn, then with flute and oboe duet and finally goes from pianissimo to a sweeping fortissimo in the strings. The overall effect is insistent.

Andante and Hungarian Rondo Op/ 35 Carl Maria von Weber

Musically educated by his father and older brother, Carl Maria von Weber was an outstanding pianist. His father, a violinist, had a touring opera company and Carl learned stage production at an early age. His opera compositions bridged the classical and romantic period in music. He was highly regarded as a performer and composer.

He wrote the Andante und Hungarian Rondo in 1809, as a concert piece for viola and orchestra for his brother Fritz. In 1813 he rewrote the work for bassoon and orchestra at the request of his friend, George Brandt, for whom he had also written a bassoon concerto. He recast the viola part for bassoon and expanded the Andante. The Rondo is a set of variations with Hungarian rhythms and accents admirably suited to the bassoon.

Rumanian Folk Dances Bela Bartok

From 1910 to 1914 Bela Bartok collected Hungarian folk songs and dances. He was a pioneer in ethnomusicology. These Rumanian Folk Dances are from Transylvania, then a part of Hungary but largely populated by Rumanians. (After WWI Transylvania was given back to Rumania.) Bartok provides simple but imaginative settings of the dances often varying a voice in the accompaniment and slightly changing the color of a chord.

Joc cu bata, the first dance, means a dance with a stick.

Braul is a dance that involves a waistband or a sash.

Pe loc is a lovely dance in which violins imitate a rustic flute while the accompaniment is a drone.

Buciumeana is a beautiful melody presented as a dance of the "Buscum," people from the region of Torda-Aranyos.

Poarga is a Rumanian polka from Bihar.

Finally the last movement is made up of two fast dances for couples, Maruntel, that come from Bihar and Torda-Aranyos.

Symphony No. 1, Op. 25 (Classical)

Sergei Prokofiev

Prokofiev is one of the most widely known and important composers of our time. His compositional style oscillates from glass-like pseudo-classical to brittle neo-impressionism, from grotesque polytonality to folk song simplicity. As a young child he exhibited phenomenal musical ability and was sent to study at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Here he studied with some of Russia's most notable musicians. He traveled widely through Europe and the United States and in 1920 settled in Paris. He returned to Russia in 1929.

This First Symphony was composed in 1917. Adapted to his own style, the work is a remarkable formal style of Haydn,

The first movement, Allegro, is in sonata form, the principal subject heard in the first violins. A transitional subject leads to the second theme, also in first violins. The development works over the first theme and there is the customary recapitulation and the movement closes with a Coda.

The Larghetto begins after four introductory measures in the violins. Two episodes follow, and then the principal theme is heard again with the four measures in closing the movement.

The third movement is a Gavotte, with themes that Prokofiev used later in some of his ballets. The first theme is only twelve measures in strings and winds and is followed by a Trio stated by the clarinet over a pedal-point in the lower strings.

The Finale (Molto vivace) is again in sonata form and brims with gaiety and charm. It follows the usual pattern of exposition-development-recapitulation. Overall, the orchestration of this symphony is light and transparent assuring its popularity since its first performance in Petrograd in 1918.

