

Overture to *Die Fledermaus*.....Johann Strauss, Jr.
Born in Vienna, 25 October 1825; Died in Vienna, 3 June 1899

Johann Strauss, Jr. established himself as the first Austrian composer of Viennese operettas at the request of several theater owners and managers in Vienna. The capital had been swept by the craze for the operettas of Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880). While these works guaranteed large revenues from ticket sales, they were also expensive to produce owing to the high royalties or performance fees demanded by Offenbach's publisher. The solution to this problem seemed self-evident . . . persuade Vienna's greatest composer of popular dance music to turn his attention to the lyric stage. Between 1871 and 1899 Strauss composed sixteen operettas and one comic opera. The most popular of the operettas is *Die Fledermaus (The Bat)*, composed in 1873-1874.

The story is a comic one of planned revenge for a humiliating practical joke which is complicated by the appearance of old lovers, mistaken identities and the double standard applied oftentimes to the flirtations of married couples. Strauss typically composed his operetta overtures as "preview" pieces, basing them on melodies from the operetta itself, and the Overture to *Die Fledermaus* is no exception. Most of the thematic material comes from Act I and the famous Waltz. The beautiful oboe solo and accelerating theme following it are the heroine's aria "So muß allein ich bleiben" ("So I must remain alone"), lamenting her anticipated solitude when her husband goes off to serve a five-day jail

sentence for a minor offense, and her tongue-in-cheek “sorrow” at his absence. The bright, peppy theme which follows is the aria and following ensemble “Mein schönes, großes Vogelhaus” (“My big, beautiful birdhouse”), when the head of the prison comes to collect the husband personally. He compares his house of detention to a lovely birdhouse in which all the residents are happy. (FYI, he takes “the husband” away to prison, not realizing that it is an old boyfriend of the wife who is lounging around in the husband’s smoking jacket!) In addition to the richness of the melodies and the clever use of them, the Overture displays Strauss’s skill at orchestration, an aspect of his composition that won him compliments from colleagues such as Brahms and Verdi.

Strauss conducted the first performance of *Die Fledermaus* at the Theater an der Wien on 5 April 1874. The operetta’s overture is arguably the most famous and beloved example of its genre in the entire orchestral repertoire.

Cello Concerto in D major, Hob. VII: 2.....Franz Josef Haydn

Born in Rohrau, 31 March 1732; Died in Vienna, 31 May 1809

Haydn and his friend Mozart exemplified the extremes of the patronage system during the Classical period. Despite his unceasing efforts to gain steady employment, Mozart never landed the type of position his genius deserved. His adult life was a constant scramble to obtain commissions and present benefit

concerts (for his own benefit), punctuated by the pedagogical duties with piano and composition students which brought in some income. Haydn, on the other hand, found employment with the Esterhazy family, Hungarian aristocrats who maintained a small orchestra and chorus as part of their entourage. A new servant was hired not only on their ability to perform a specific household duty, but also on their talent to perform on an instrument. Haydn was in charge of this Court Orchestra and remained in the employ of the Esterhazys for some twenty-eight years. Having access to his "own" orchestra allowed Haydn to experiment with the genre of the symphony, in form and content, standardizing both by means of the popularity of his works. The Esterhazys were generous patrons, allowing Haydn to publish works he had written for the Court Orchestra and to accept commissions from other patrons as long as those activities did not conflict with his contractual duties.

Haydn's Concerto in D major was written in 1783 for Antonin Kraft, one of the court cellists at Esterhaza. Haydn evidently had help from him on the technical details of the solo part. Haydn was a fair violinist, oboist, and keyboard player, but had no expertise on the cello. The skillful writing for the soloist shows Haydn's melodic genius coupled with a familiarity of the instrument the composer did not possess. For many years the concerto was attributed to Kraft, but as the noted Haydn scholar Karl Geiringer has stated: ". . . there is nothing among Kraft's known, and incidentally rather mediocre, compositions to justify the attribution of a masterpiece like the D major concerto to him . . . "

Haydn cast the D major Concerto in the three-movement form standardized by Vivaldi, employing formal structures of his own time. The first movement is in concerto-sonata form, while the slow movement, in the dominant key of A major, is a modified rondo. The finale is a perky rondo in 6/8 meter with three contrasting episodes. The structure is inventive, in that the rondo theme consists of two statements of the melody presented by the soloist and then the *tutti* orchestra. The third statement of the rondo theme varies in that the second half is in the minor mode, setting the aural scene for the first part of the final episode, also in minor. The Concerto in D major was published twenty years after Haydn's death and has been a staple of the cellists' repertoire ever since.

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, op. 39.....Jean Sibelius
Born in Tavestehus, Finland, 8 December 1865; Died in Järvenpää, 20 September 1957

Despite the growing reputations of people like Kokkonen, Rautaavara, Sallinen, and Aho, Jean Sibelius remains the most important figure in the musical history of Finland, as well as the first Finnish composer to achieve international recognition. He received his musical education in Finland, Berlin, and Vienna. Although he originally aspired to a career as a violin virtuoso, his creative inclinations lead him to the field of composition. He returned to Finland in 1891

after failing to win a position in the violin section of the Vienna Philharmonic and began composing a series of nationalistic works that secured his position as his country's leading composer. The Finnish epic poem, *The Kalevala*, provided the inspiration for Sibelius's five-movement tone poem *Kullervo*, op. 7, as well as the *Lemminkäinen Suite*, op. 22, based on the adventures of the folk-hero Lemminkäinen. Other nationalistic pieces included *En Saga*, op. 9, the *Karelia Overture*, op. 10, and the *Karelia Suite*, op. 11. By 1897 Sibelius was regarded as Finland's greatest cultural asset. The Finnish legislature voted him an annual stipend that allowed him to compose, free of teaching duties or financial worries.

"The Silence of Järvenpää" is the term commonly used to describe the compositional career of Jean Sibelius from 1926 until the end of his life. Like Gioacchino Rossini and Charles Ives before him, the Finnish master came to a point in his career and abruptly stopped composing, even though he lived another thirty-one years. Sibelius's seven symphonies date from 1899 through 1924. The only major orchestral work he produced after the last symphony was the tone poem *Tapiola*, op. 112, in 1926. The world waited eagerly, but in vain, for the fabled Eighth Symphony, only giving up hope after the composer's death in 1957. Sibelius's reputation has fluctuated widely during the years since his compositional death. In the 1920s through the 1940s he was considered by many to be one of the greatest twentieth-century symphonists. Critics were harsher to Sibelius and his legacy during the 1960's and 1970s.

Sibelius began composing his First Symphony in April of 1898 while staying in Berlin. He worked on it during the following year while also producing several works of a smaller scale. This period of time was one of growing protest in Finland against the Russian government. (Finland was officially a Grand Duchy of the Romanov Empire.) This feeling of political unrest is as easily discernable in the Symphony No. 1 as the influence of Tchaikovsky. In February 1899 The Czar issued the "February Manifesto," which effectively stripped the Finnish legislature of any power it thought it had. This blatant move toward russification only further fanned the flames of Finnish national feeling. Sibelius conducted the premiere of the Symphony No. 1 in E minor, op. 39, two months after the appearance of that document, on 26 April 1899. Though not overtly intended as such, it quickly became a musical symbol of Finland's suffering at the hands of the Russians.

It is surprising that no one has attached a title or nick-name to the Symphony No. 1. The work is far more tragic or *pathétique* than any of the compositions by Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Schubert, or Beethoven which bear those titles. The first movement opens with a mournful clarinet solo, lightly accompanied by the timpani. This passage provides much of the thematic material for the rest of the symphony. The violins enter with a theme that quickly develops into a "call-to-arms" for the entire ensemble. A delicate passage for flutes and harp leads into a somber melody in the woodwinds. The movement ends quietly, in the lower regions of the orchestra. The second movement is a

well-constructed rondo. The opening material returns three times, slightly altered for each subsequent appearance. Two of the intervening episodes are based on the rhythm of the rondo theme, while the third looks back to one of the themes from the first movement. The Scherzo is reminiscent of Bruckner, though more melodically appealing. Fierce outbursts from the timpani and brass are contrasted by the pastoral serenity of the Trio section. The finale opens with the first movement clarinet theme played by the strings, punctuated by the brass. A short interlude leads into the main body of the movement. Several themes are developed, culminating in a broad, lyrical melody given to the strings. A fugal passage and material from the beginning of the movement lead back to the lyrical theme, now wearing the mask of tragedy. The symphony ends softly on two pizzicato chords with a note of desolate resignation.

When music critic Olin Downes heard the Symphony No. 1 for the first time, in 1907, he wrote: "Here, oh God, was again grandeur, honor, nobility: Again the dignity of the human soul and the cry of the human spirit which nothing can kill, and which therefore never dies . . ." Downes went on to become Sibelius's most enthusiastic champion in the United States, encouraging performances of the orchestral works by all the major ensembles in the country.

Program Notes by Bruce Gbur

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