

Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra
William Schrickel, Music Director

Sunday, May 20, 2018—4:00 PM
Southwest High School Auditorium, Minneapolis, Minnesota

William Schrickel, conductor
Heather Phillips, viola

Program

Johannes Brahms *Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80*

Ralph Vaughan Williams Selections from Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra

- I. Prelude
- II. Carol
- III. Polka Melancolique
- IV. Galop

Heather Phillips, viola

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski *Music at Night*

- I. Allegro drammatico
- II. Drammatico e rubato
- III. Allegro, Misterioso
- IV. Allegro Molto

The four movements are played without a pause.

Intermission

Howard Hanson Symphony No. 2, op. 30 (*Romantic*)

- I. Adagio–Allegro Moderato
- II. Andante con tenerezza
- III. Allegro con brio

Program Notes

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Breslau (now Wroclow, Poland) in May of 1879. He had been nominated for the honor by his friend, Bernhard Scholz, the school's Director of Music. Brahms was unable to attend the ceremony, so he conveyed his thanks with a note written on a postcard. Scholz let Brahms know that a written letter did not convey sufficient gratitude and that the school was expecting a musical thank you. Scholz wrote to Brahms: "Compose a fine symphony for us!-But well-orchestrated, old boy, not too uniformly thick!" In the summer of 1880, while vacationing in Bad Ischl, a spa town in Austria east of Salzburg, Brahms wrote the *Academic Festival Overture* while simultaneously composing his *Tragic Overture*. Brahms himself conducted the first performance of *Academic Festival Overture* in Breslau at the degree confirmation ceremony on January 4, 1881.

Brahms never attended college, and he was known for having a wicked and curmudgeonly sense of humor. The *Academic Festival Overture* is nowhere near as dry and "academic" as its name implies. After a soft and mysterious introduction that sounds appropriately "serious," Brahms unveils his version of the first of the four drinking songs (each one extremely well known and immediately recognizable to the entire student body) that make up the bulk of the overture's thematic content. Trumpets and woodwinds solemnly intone *We have built a stately house*, and very quickly the music takes on a celebratory quality as the song's melody meshes with Brahms' own introductory material. A more lyrical section is ushered in by the strings playing *The Land of our Fathers*. More Brahmsian development ensues before a pair of jocular bassoons introduces *What Comes from Afar?*, a freshman hazing song. Yet more thematic reworking leads to what seems to be a traditionally formal recapitulation, but Brahms has one more joke to spring on his listeners. Just as the piece sounds like it will end with a boisterous reprise of the hazing song, Brahms adds the artillery of the full percussion section to the symphonic mix, and the triangle, cymbals and bass drum announce the entrance of *Gaudeamus igitur* (*While We are Young, Let Us Rejoice*), the Latin song traditionally associated with school graduations and the celebration of the joys of youth. The ecstatic energy of Brahms' spectacular orchestration carries the work to its jubilant conclusion, complete with a hilarious "fake" ending followed by three final, brilliant C major chords.

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was born in Down Ampney, a small village in the Cotswold district of south central England. He studied music at the Royal College of Music and at Trinity College in Cambridge, and his teachers included Charles Stanford and Hubert Parry in England, Maurice Ravel in France, and Max

Bruch in Berlin. Early in the 20th century, Vaughan Williams journeyed throughout the English countryside, notating (and eventually publishing) the folk music he heard sung and played in the various small towns. His Hungarian contemporaries, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, were doing the same thing simultaneously in central Europe.

Vaughan Williams, who began playing the viola in his early student days at the Charterhouse School in Surrey, composed his Suite for Viola and Small Orchestra on a commission from violist Lionel Tertis, who played the work's premiere performance in 1934. The Suite comprises a total of eight movements organized in three groups. Heather Phillips, the Principal Viola of the Metropolitan Symphony and winner of the MSO's annual solo competition in 2017, chose four of the movements to perform at this afternoon's concert.

The Prelude and Carol are from the first of the Suite's three groups and share a Christmas-related theme. The Prelude opens with an arpeggiated, declamatory allusion to the music of J.S. Bach, which contrasts with bassoon and flute solos that are more lyrical and pastoral. The Carol features a chorale melody gently passed back and forth between the solo viola, the muted divided violins, and the delicate voice of the flute. The Polka Melancolique and Galop are from the third, dance-related group. The melody of the Polka, slow and in a minor key, is played three times by the soloist, with two quicker and lighter orchestral episodes separating the statements. The final Galop is all high energy and bubbly spirits, with the soloist's jaunty syncopated melody initially ushering in, then alternating with, a contrasting bouncy tune introduced by the solo piccolo.

Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (1923-2017) was born in Lwow, Poland (now Lviv, Ukraine). He began studying violin and piano at the age of 4 and composed his first piece when he was seven. He received double degrees in conducting and composition from both the Lwow Conservatory and the Academy of Music in Krakow. He made his American debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in 1958, and the following year, he and his wife, Krystyna, fled his native Poland via Amsterdam. He was appointed Music Director of the Minneapolis Symphony in 1960. In 1974, after years of lobbying tirelessly for a new home for what had by then become the Minnesota Orchestra, he led the opening concerts in Minneapolis' new Orchestra Hall, an acoustically acclaimed venue built as a result of the visionary leadership and extraordinarily generous financial support of Ken and Judy Dayton. Upon relinquishing his Music Directorship in 1979, Skrowaczewski was named the Conductor Laureate of the Minnesota Orchestra, and he led the orchestra every year until 2016, a relationship spanning 56 consecutive seasons. He composed over 80 works in the course of his career, including piano sonatas,

film scores, chamber music, ballets, concertos, and large scale works for full orchestra.

In 1947, a year before he moved from Poland to Paris for two years, Skrowaczewski began to work on composing a new piece for orchestra. While living in Paris, he met Christina Thorsby, a journalist from the U.K. who befriended the 24-year-old musician. She arranged the commission for him of a new ballet to be premiered in 1949 in Monte Carlo. The scenario was based upon the true story from the early 1400s of Ugo and Parisina, illicit Italian lovers (they were stepson and stepmother) living in Ferrara who were murdered by Parisina's husband by being entombed while still alive inside a wall of the husband's castle, slowly starving to death. Skrowaczewski wrote the following note about *Music at Night*:

My *Music at Night* has been extracted from the ballet *Ugo et Parisina*, which I wrote in Paris in 1949 upon an extremely romantic and tragic love story from ancient Ferrara. In this ballet I had used deliberately two kinds of musical language: the first, reflecting love, emotions and the lugubrious fate of the two lovers – romantic, imbued with chromaticism, based on one Leitmotiv made mostly of semitone intervals that occasionally develop into a 12-tone row; the second, connected with the general action, rituals, group dances, etc. – definitely neo-classical and more tonally oriented.

In *Music at Night* I have tried to concentrate upon this first, romantic language expressing the passionate subject matter of the ballet upon which it is based, eliminating the neo-classical element connected with the simple action. Thus, *Music at Night* becomes a sort of symphonic variation concentrated essentially on one theme. There are four sections, played without interruption.

Howard Hanson (1896-1981) was born in Wahoo, Nebraska. He studied at the University of Nebraska, the Institute of Musical Art (later renamed the Juilliard School of Music) and Northwestern University. He began his teaching career at the College of the Pacific in California before moving on to the American Academy in Rome and then, beginning in 1924 and for the next forty years, directing the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. (At Eastman, one of his star pupils was Dominick Argento, the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra's Composer Laureate.)

Hanson's Symphony No. 2, subtitled *Romantic*, was premiered in 1930 by Serge Koussevitzky in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The composer's program note for the first performance is excerpted (in edited form) below:

My aim, in this symphony, has been to create a work young in spirit, Romantic in temperament, and simple and direct in expression. The first movement begins with an atmospheric introduction in the woodwinds. The principal theme is announced by four horns and is imitated in turn by the trumpets, woodwinds and strings. A transition leads into the subordinate theme in the strings with a counter subject in the solo horn. The development section follows, with the principal theme announced by the English horn and developed throughout the orchestra. The climax of the development section leads directly to the return of the principal theme in the original key by the trumpets. The subordinate theme then follows, and the movement concludes quietly in a short coda.

The second movement begins with its principal theme announced by the woodwinds with a sustained string accompaniment. An interlude in the brass, taken from the introduction of the first movement, develops into the subordinate theme, which is taken from the horn solo in the first movement. A transition leads into a restatement of the principal theme of the movement.

The third movement begins with a vigorous accompaniment figure in strings and woodwinds, the principal theme entering in the four horns and later repeated in the basses. The subordinate theme is announced first by the cellos. The development of this leads into the middle section, *piu mosso*. This section begins with a pizzicato accompaniment in the violas, cellos, and basses, over which is announced a horn call. This leads to a fanfare first in the trumpets, then in the horns and woodwinds, and then again in the trumpets and woodwinds. The climax of this fanfare comes with the announcement of the principal theme of the first movement by the trumpets, against the fanfare theme of the woodwinds. The development of this theme leads into a final statement of the subordinate theme of the first movement *fortissimo*. A brief coda of this material leads to a final fanfare and the end of the symphony.

Though Hanson did not compose any movie scores, it is interesting to note that the music from his *Romantic* Symphony has had major impacts on films made (in at least one case) more than fifty years after the symphony was premiered. It is

obvious that John Williams was hugely influenced by the music of the opening of the symphony's final movement when he derivatively scored the bicycle chase scene in 1982's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*. And three years earlier, in 1979, an enraged Hanson had to be persuaded not to sue the makers of *Alien* for using (without Hanson's permission and without paying him a cent!) the music that ends the symphony's second movement to underscore the final scene of the film along with the closing credits.

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