

The Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra
William Schrickel, Music Director

Sunday, November 20, 2022—4:00 PM
St. Philip the Deacon Lutheran Church, Plymouth, Minnesota

William Schrickel, conductor
Paul Schulz, clarinet
Heather Phillips, viola

Program

William Grant Still *Tamborito* from *Panamanian Dances*

Max Bruch Double Concerto in E minor, op. 88 for
Clarinet, Viola, and Orchestra

- I. Andante con moto
- II. Allegro moderato
- III. Allegro molto

Paul Schulz, clarinet; Heather Phillips, viola

Intermission

Zoltán Kodály *Háry János*—Suite

- I. *Prelude. The Fairy Tale Begins*
- II. *Viennese Musical Clock*
- III. *Song*
- IV. *The Battle and Defeat of Napoleon*
- V. *Intermezzo*
- VI. *Entrance of the Emperor and his Court*

Program Notes

William Grant Still (1895-1978) was born in Woodville, Mississippi, and was raised in Little Rock, Arkansas. While in high school, the 15-year-old began studying violin, and he also taught himself oboe, clarinet, saxophone, cello, viola, and double bass. Still graduated the following year as the class valedictorian. He attended Wilberforce University and the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, studying composition with George Andrews, George Whitefield Chadwick, and Edgard Varèse. He worked in Memphis for W.C. Handy's band both before and after a stint in the Navy that began in 1918. In the early 1920s, Still moved to New York and performed, arranged, and recorded with Fletcher Henderson, Eubie Blake, Sophie Tucker, Paul Whiteman, and Artie Shaw.

In 1931, Still's *Afro-American Symphony*, the first of his five symphonies, was premiered by Walter Hanson and the Rochester Philharmonic; it was the first symphony by a Black American composer ever performed by a major symphony orchestra. He received three Guggenheim Fellowships in the 1930s, and he moved to Los Angeles where he arranged film music, including the soundtracks for *Lost Horizon* and *Pennies from Heaven*. He led the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl in 1936 in a program of his own music, becoming the first Black musician to conduct their own music with a major US orchestra. A prolific composer, he wrote nine operas over the course of his career. He created over 150 published works, in addition to early compositions that have been lost.

Tamborito is the first of four works composed for string orchestra by Still in 1953 under the title *Panamanian Dances*. It incorporates one of a number of themes collected by Elisabeth Waldo that she brought to Still's attention. The tamborito is a traditional Panamanian courting dance, accompanied by percussion instruments and clapping. In his charming recreation, Still requires some of the string players to occasionally tap on the backs and sides of their instruments to simulate the sound of drums.

Max Bruch (1838-1920) was born in Cologne and received his earliest musical training from pianist Ferdinand Hiller and composer Ignaz Moscheles. He began to compose at the age of nine and won a prize five years later for a work for string quartet. He traveled extensively from a young age, studied art and philosophy, and enjoyed a long and successful musical career as a teacher, conductor, and composer while working at a variety of posts and living in myriad European cities; the list of locations includes Mannheim, Koblenz, Sondershausen, Berlin, Bonn, Liverpool, and Breslau. He taught composition from 1890 until 1910 at Berlin's

Hochschule für Musik, where his students included Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ottorino Respighi.

Bruch composed his Double Concerto for Clarinet and Viola in 1911, shortly after retiring from his Berlin teaching post. His son, Max Felix Bruch, a virtuoso clarinetist, and violist Willy Hess gave the work's premiere the following year. The piece is written in an extremely conservative style, harkening back to Mendelssohn compositions of 1840 rather than reflecting the cutting-edge music being created contemporaneously by Mahler, Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, and Schoenberg. Cast in three movements, the concerto opens with each of the two soloists playing short introductory cadenzas before launching into the lyrical, singing sonata movement. Bruch skillfully blends the voices of the two soloists, alternating passages where one accompanies the other with sections wherein one instrument literally finishes the musical thought of its partner. The second movement is in three sections; the first and third portions serve as relaxed, medium-tempo serenades in G major that bookend a slightly agitated central episode in B minor that is more active in the accompaniment and introduces pizzicato strings. The finale opens with a brash trumpet/timpani fanfare that ushers in a sparkling, brilliant *allegro* movement. Both clarinet and viola are afforded ample opportunities to showcase brilliant instrumental *tours de force* mixed with songful melodic interludes that range in mood from delicately whispered to exuberantly extroverted. The movement is rollicking and energetic from start to finish, with the exception of a brief musical wink in a slower tempo seconds before the orchestra's emphatic concluding four bars.

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) was born in Kecskemét, Hungary. His father worked for the railway, and the family moved several times when Kodály was a child. When they moved to Nagyszombat in 1891, he took up violin and piano and began to sing in the cathedral choir. He taught himself cello so he could play in a string quartet with his father, and he began to study scores that were in the cathedral's library. He was composing by the time he was fifteen years old. In 1902, he enrolled at Budapest's Academy of Music, graduating with a doctoral degree in 1906. During this time, he began traveling with Béla Bartók to hundreds of small villages in Hungary and eastern Europe with music notebooks, wax cylinders and a portable recording machine and undertook the first documentation of Hungarian folk music. He studied composition in Paris with Charles Widor before returning to the Budapest Academy of Music to teach theory and composition, a post he held from 1907 to 1945. After retiring from his teaching position, he was appointed to be the Director of the Academy.

Kodály's *Háry János*, a *singspiel* (play with singing), was premiered in 1926 at Budapest's Royal Hungarian Opera House. It was a huge success, and the composer extracted a suite of six orchestral selections the following year that was performed 150 times in 80 different cities by the end of 1930. The singspiel's plot centers on the stories recounted nightly by the aged title character to his friends at the local tavern concerning his youthful exploits during the Napoleonic wars.

Prelude begins with a monstrous orchestral "sneeze"—one must remember the Hungarian superstition that if someone sneezes just prior to a person telling a story, it's an indication that the story about to be told is NOT TRUE. After the hilarious sneeze, *The Fairy Tale Begins* softly and expressively in the celli and basses, gradually rising up through the full orchestra and gaining volume, passion and complexity until, right at its climax—the music is chopped off by silence! It's unfinished. The quietest echo of the motive fades away in the flute, oboe, and horns, leaving the listener to wonder about the true nature and meaning of the "fairy tales" that are about to unfold.

Viennese Musical Clock depicts Háry's "recollection" of the clock tower in the Imperial City with all its mechanically operated chimes and bells, complete with a noon-time parade of soldiers from all 12 branches of the imperial and royal armies. (In fact, there is no clock tower on Vienna's imperial palace. When a disappointed Kodaly learned this, he chose to use for his "imperial" theme the horn call played by the Hungarian village swineherds at dawn each morning to round up their pigs.)

Song is one of only two melodies used by Kodály in his singspiel that were pre-existing Hungarian tunes. In the stage work, it is used as the music of the drama's big love-duet, but heard by itself, divorced from the theatrical action and words, it serves as an orchestral love song to Kodály's beloved Hungarian homeland. The original song was collected by Bartók in 1906 in Tolna, Háry's native county.

The Battle and Defeat of Napoleon describes Háry's telling of how he virtually single-handedly defeated the cowardly French emperor in battle. Listen for the simpering saxophone imitating Napoleon's pathetic cries for mercy and the brass engaging in their grotesque accompaniment to the battle between the forces of Emperor Francis and Napoleon. The French leader slinks away from the battlefield to the desolate funereal march played by the saxophone.

Intermezzo presents the second authentic Hungarian tune Kodály used in *Háry János*. It was initially written down around 1803 in a Hungarian piano method book. A prime example of a *verbunkos*, or "recruiting dance," it is performed in the singspiel during a lengthy set change between scenes.

Entrance of the Emperor and his Court is a march with two different themes and two episodes. The first is a stylized version of a folk song calling Háry János by his

name (*Hej, Jancsika!*), and the second depicts the procession of the imperial court. The movement makes for a celebratory, festive conclusion to the suite from Kodály's masterpiece.

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