

Program Notes

Franz von Suppé

Dichter und Bauer Overture (1846)

(born 1819: Francesco Ezechiele Ermenegildo Cavaliere Suppe-Demelli)

If ever a work were deserving of the term “war horse,” it would be the Poet and Peasant Overture. Yet surprisingly, this appears to be the first performance in Civic Orchestra history.

How about that for trivia!

Born at or near Split in Dalmatia (a region of Croatia), young Franz was taken to Vienna by his mother, where he engaged in serious musical studies at the Vienna Conservatory. Ultimately, his work obtained increasing success rivaling that of Offenbach at the Viennese Court. He wrote well over 150 operas, operettas, and other theater music of all sorts. For his final thirty years, Suppé was in charge of music at the historic Theatre “an der Wein.”

If you wish for another horse of a slightly different color, check out YouTube for a recording of the 1866 *Leichte Cavallerie* (Light Cavalry) Overture.

Antonín Dvořák

Serenade for Winds in d minor, Opus 44 (1878)

I am often amused when I encounter “dated” commentary regarding composers and their music. Case in point:

“As the man is, so is the music. The composer (Dvořák) was unsophisticated almost to a point of naivete, without culture, artifice, subtlety, or guile. He wrote as his heart dictated and was completely incapable of a creative method requiring fastidious workmanship in details or a painstaking working out of germinal ideas. The ideas came from him copiously, as they did from Schubert, and he allowed them to pour out munificently in his works.”

Encyclopedia of the Great Composers and Their Music
Milton Cross and David Ewen, Doubleday & Company, 1953

I admit to being jaded. In 2021, I disagree with most of the above.

Dvorak enriched the musical world with a plethora of creation. So much so that it consumes nearly a full page of small print in Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians. So much so that the presence of the wind serenade (1878) requires a careful search. So much so that even the most dedicated audiophile is possibly unfamiliar with the work. You too? Perhaps.

Hence, one of the true joys of attending live performances—to become acquainted with the unfamiliar. And, on the other side of approximately 24 minutes, we shall hope you are happily familiar.

- I. Moderato quasi (somewhat like a) Marcia (march)
A pleasant and tuneful interplay of the members of the ensemble lasting barely 4 minutes. The main theme and secondary theme are clearly presented and then followed by a nineteen measure development section. The primary melody returns as expected and is followed by a whimsical coda, which soon brings the movement to a restful close.

II. Menuetto

Bravi clarinetti! They are not the primary instruments of the movement but surely shine throughout, especially when they lead the headlong charge into the Trio section. Lots of notes ultimately echoed by all. Then a return to the opening, and conclusion.

III. Andante con moto (with motion) and my favorite of the four movements. The horns set up an undulating rhythm that is present, in one form or another, throughout nearly the entire movement. Flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons melodically wander about, leading eventually to a twenty-one bar development section that becomes agitated and even a bit stormy. Peace ultimately prevails and the movement quietly leads to the rousing finale.

IV. Finale: Allegro molto

Hang on. There are notes galore, not to mention an impetuous rush toward a return of the opening tuneful measures of the first movement. Then, just as we suspect the serenade is quietly ending, Dvořák returns to the frantic Allegro, asks for a bit of a fanfare from the horns, and delivers the final cadence in, you guessed it, a triumphal D Major.

The Serenade in d minor is scored for pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, three horns, and one each, cello and bass.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Konzert für Klavier, Violine, Violoncello und Orchester in C-dur, Opus 56 (1803)

Composed by Beethoven roughly in the midst of his first three symphonies, the Triple Concerto is his only work in concerto form that is for more than one instrument. We all know and love the violin concerto and are familiar with the five concertos for piano and orchestra. It is probably safe to say, however, that the “triple” is the least well known of all Beethoven’s major works and that these performances by Civic Orchestra may well be the first live experience with the piece that most will have heard.

If that be the case, perhaps the first listening should concentrate mostly on the amazing artistry and dexterity that Beethoven requires of his soloists. Yes, the concerto is in the standard form having three movements. Yes, the first is somewhat quick (Allegro); the second is slow, short, and certainly lovely (Largo); and the third is a jaunty “Rondo alla Polacca” full of witty smiles and dazzling interplay between the three soloists. Dazzling!

Perhaps now that you have run out of things to read about the concerto, you might shift your attention to our outstanding soloists. We are so delighted and fortunate to have them with us!

And, if you are hearing this program on Saturday afternoon and enjoying yourself, when you get home please call your friends and neighbors and tell them that the program will be repeated tomorrow afternoon at 4:30 pm in Crowder Hall on the campus of the University of Arizona.

Charles Bontrager
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