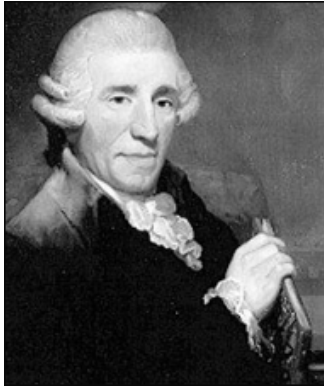


Program Notes
September 19 and 20, 2009
By Chris Morrison



Franz Josef Haydn

b. March 31, 1732, Rohrau-on-the-Leitha, Austria
d. May 31, 1809, Vienna

Along with Mozart and Beethoven, Franz Josef Haydn is one of the most significant composers of the Classical era (roughly 1750 to 1820). Sometimes referred to as the “Father” of the symphony and string quartet, Haydn’s remarkable catalog of works – over one thousand works including 104 symphonies – is one of the largest produced by any composer. His music’s distinctive combination of elegance and earthiness, its memorable tunes, skillful construction, and robust humor have all made Haydn one of the most beloved of composers. His career took off in 1761 when he entered the employ of the wealthy Esterházy family. For the next three decades Haydn worked under Princes Paul Anton and Nikolaus Esterházy, directing their orchestra and composing remarkable amounts of music for them. In the early 1780s Haydn befriended Mozart, becoming one of his most enthusiastic patrons and friends. Haydn’s growing fame led to further opportunities, including the two trips to London in 1791-2 and 1794-5 that sealed his reputation and produced works like the twelve “London” symphonies and the oratorios *The Creation* and *The Seasons*.

Symphony No. 94 in G major “Surprise”

Composed: 1791

Duration: 24 minutes

Within weeks of his separation from the Esterházy family in September 1790, Haydn received a visit at his new Vienna home from Johann Peter Salomon, a violinist and impresario who had been working for the last decade in London. Haydn’s music was already quite popular in England, and Salomon saw great possibilities in a series of London concerts at which new Haydn works would be premiered. The composer was nearly sixty, hadn’t traveled extensively, and was considering other offers (one, from King Ferdinand IV of Naples, greatly attracted him). But the adventure, and the significant sum of money Salomon offered, won him over, and Haydn arrived at Dover on New Year’s Day, 1791. Over the next eighteen months, Haydn composed and presented his Symphonies Nos. 93-98 for wildly enthusiastic London audiences. He then returned to Vienna for a couple of years – during which time he gave some music lessons to the young Beethoven – but returned to England for another series of concerts in early 1794.

The first of Salomon’s three wildly successful concert seasons got started in March, and the Symphony No. 94 was premiered under Haydn’s direction on March 23, 1792, in the middle of the second season. The *Morning Herald* critic wrote the following day, “The Room was crowded last night ... A new composition from such a man as HAYDN is a great event in the history of music. His novelty of last night was a grand Overture, the subject of which was remarkably

simple, but extended to vast complication, exquisitely [sic] modulated and striking in effect. Critical applause was fervid and abundant.”

The symphony opens tenderly, with a genial, gently rocking main theme that builds up quite a head of steam as it is developed. As is the case so frequently with Haydn, this one theme provides the base for everything that follows in the movement. The recapitulation of the theme is really more of an extension of its development. There is also a striking passage for the woodwinds just before the movement's ending.

The symphony's nickname derives from the justly famous second movement, a set of variations on a sweet, naïve tune. As the melody spins itself out, it gets quieter and quieter, dying to near silence — and then a sudden loud chord erupts from the entire orchestra. There are several theories as to why Haydn inserted that “surprise” (which was actually an afterthought, and doesn't appear in his original manuscript). One account tells us that Haydn may have said, “This will make the ladies jump!” He may have been thinking, too, of the elderly gentlemen he saw in his audiences who, lulled by their heavy dinners and a few too many drinks, routinely dozed off once the music had begun. Also, with the overwhelming success of the Salomon/Haydn concerts, a rival concert series under the direction of composer Ignaz Pleyel (one of Haydn's former students) had begun. On one occasion Haydn admitted that he included the “surprise” not to startle the audience, but simply to make the work memorable in the face of his competition. Whatever the reason, the “surprise” is just one of the delights of this movement, which features variations on the main theme by turn stormy and dramatic, sweetly decorated by the woodwinds, and propelled forward by trumpets and timpani. The movement's quiet, poignant conclusion is rather a surprise in itself.

An aggressive minuet follows, with a graceful middle section for strings joined by a solo bassoon. Haydn is well on his way here from the courtly minuet typical in symphonies of his own time to the more assertive Scherzo found in symphonies from Beethoven on. The symphony concludes with a sparkling, propulsive Allegro di molto finale; this, and other finales in the 12 “London” symphonies, calls for truly virtuosic playing from the strings — Salomon's players in London must have been a formidable group indeed.



Lowell Liebermann

b. February 22, 1961, New York City, New York

With some one hundred works to his credit, Lowell Liebermann is one of the most frequently performed and recorded of living American composers. Among his works are two operas, two symphonies, three piano concertos – the second of which received a Grammy nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition – concertos for violin and trumpet, and many chamber compositions, including four string quartets and four cello sonatas. Also a pianist, Mr. Liebermann has written a considerable number of works for his instrument which appear frequently on concert and competition programs. Liebermann began piano studies at the age of eight, and composition

studies at fourteen. He holds bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Vincent Persichetti and David Diamond. Among his many awards is a Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters as well as awards from ASCAP and BMI.

Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Op. 39

Composed: 1992

Duration: 25 minutes

The legendary flutist Sir James Galway has been a stalwart champion of Lowell Liebermann's music. He has commissioned several works, made a recording of three of them (with Liebermann himself conducting), and performed them all over the world. The Concerto for Flute and Orchestra, Op. 39 was the first of Galway's commissions, and the work is dedicated to him. Composed in 1992, the Concerto was given its premiere on November 6 of that year in St. Louis, with Galway and the St. Louis Symphony conducted by Leonard Slatkin. (Over the years Liebermann has become a favorite of flutists; his Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op. 23 of 1987 is one of the best-loved such sonatas of the twentieth century, having already received some sixteen recordings in its short life.)

The Flute Concerto's opening movement features, for much of its duration, a two-note repeating ostinato figure, resembling the ticking of a clock, played by the strings (sometimes aided by the brass). Overall the movement is a set of variations that takes the form of an arch. Initially calm and lyrical, the flute's melodic line becomes very busy and decorative as the movement proceeds. There are some contrasting interludes, including a chorale-like theme in the brass on which the flute elaborates. Towards the end of the movement, propulsive strings underlie a series of long tones from the flute, leading ultimately to a reprise of the opening, with strings spinning out the melody and flute embellishments dancing above it.

Over a quiet, regular pulsing motion, the flute spins out a graceful, sinuous line in the second movement. There is one passionate crescendo towards the end of the movement, but in general the lyrical impulse wins out in music that has been called by one critic "ethereal, serene, and emotionally gripping." The unrelentingly energetic third movement provides a dramatic contrast. Liebermann himself has described it as "a virtuoso workout for the flutist in a rondo-like form which closes with a prestissimo coda."



Felix Mendelssohn

b. February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany

d. November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany

Felix Mendelssohn was one of the most popular composers of his time, and his music remains some of the most often played from the nineteenth century. He was also one of the few musical prodigies whose youthful ability could rival Mozart's. The grandson of philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, young Felix grew up in a home that welcomed as guests

many of the most learned people of his day. He took piano, violin, and singing lessons as a youth. By the age of eight was studying composition, and was producing remarkably assured works by his teens, including the Octet at age 16 and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at 17. Mendelssohn was a key figure in resurrecting the reputation of Johann Sebastian Bach, leading the St. Matthew Passion (the first performance the work had enjoyed since Bach's death in 1750) in a now-famous 1829 concert. He subsequently held conducting posts in Düsseldorf and Berlin. But much of his later life was spent in Leipzig, where he directed the Gewandhaus Orchestra and, in 1843, founded the esteemed Leipzig Conservatory.

Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90 "Italian"

Composed: 1833

Duration: 28 minutes

"This is Italy. What I have been looking forward to all my life as the greatest happiness is now begun, and I am basking in it." Thus the twenty-two year old Felix Mendelssohn wrote to his family on October 10, 1830, having just begun his first visit to Italy as part of a "grand tour" of Europe that extended over 1829 to 1831. A leg of that journey that took Mendelssohn to Scotland, by the way, inspired his contemporaneous "Scottish" Symphony and "Hebrides" Overture.

Almost immediately upon entering Italy, he started sketching an "Italian" Symphony based on the sights and sounds he was experiencing. Those sketches didn't really come to form, though, until two years later, when the London Philharmonic Society approved a resolution on November 5, 1832 commissioning of him a symphony, an overture, and a vocal piece. Back in Berlin by this time, Mendelssohn completed the symphony during the first three months of 1833. Then he traveled to London to conduct the "Italian" Symphony's premiere on May 13, 1833 in the Hanover-Square Concert Room – the very same room, oddly enough, where Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony was given its first performance forty-one years earlier!

As beloved as the "Italian" Symphony has been with audiences ever since its premiere, Mendelssohn himself was strangely dissatisfied with it. Over 1834 and 1835 he revised the work, and even at his death in 1847 he left notes for further revisions of the first three movements. The premiere performance was the only time he conducted the work, and he never published it – the Symphony only appeared in print in 1851, four years after his death.

The exuberance of the Symphony's opening gives some notion of what Mendelssohn was experiencing in Italy. Pulsing chords from the woodwinds, set in motion by a pizzicato chord from the strings, introduce a bouncing string theme that can barely contain its energy. Two other themes soon make appearances: one in the violins, then another graceful theme in the clarinets and bassoons. The clarinet explores the opening theme for a time in a darker minor key. Then a new idea, a rising theme in the winds answered by the strings, leads back to the beginning of the work for the exposition repeat. One further time through, and the development gets underway with yet another new idea, a string theme that is developed contrapuntally. The oboe eventually leads into the free recapitulation of the opening section.

The second movement, occasionally referred to as the “Pilgrim’s March,” was apparently inspired by a religious procession Mendelssohn witnessed in Naples. The movement is dominated by a theme in D minor that some have suggested is a Czech hymn. Heard first in the oboes, bassoons and violas, then in the violins with counterpoint provided by the flutes, the melody is accompanied by a “walking” pizzicato bass line. A short contrasting central section, back in the major mode, highlights the clarinets. The third movement is a graceful, minuet-like dance. The central trio introduces a more martial strain, with a fanfare-like theme in the bassoons and horns, subsequently taken up by the trumpets and timpani.

In a letter from Rome to his sisters Fanny and Rebecka dated February 22, 1831, Mendelssohn described his symphony as “the jolliest piece I have ever done, especially the last movement.” That last movement is a Saltarello, a brilliant dance from Naples. In Mendelssohn’s hands, the saltarello starts to sound almost like the equally-lively tarantella from farther south in Italy. The swirling motion of the dance is heightened even further by the movement’s central section, where Mendelssohn creates a continuous crescendo from very quiet to very loud. For all its unbridled energy, this movement, entirely in the minor mode, is one of the very rare occasions when a symphony in a major key actually ends in the minor.