

Program Notes
April 10 and 11, 2010
By Chris Morrison



Franz Schubert

b. January 31, 1797, Vienna, Austria
d. November 19, 1828, Vienna, Austria

Franz Schubert is one of the best-loved and most important composers of the nineteenth century, his music marked by a remarkable melodic gift, rich harmonies, and an expansive treatment of traditional forms. During his short but extremely prolific career, he composed nine symphonies, dozens of chamber and solo piano works, and a host of operas and liturgical works. His songs, numbering over 600, virtually created the genre of the art song.

He started composing in his teens, and some early works came to the notice of Antonio Salieri, who worked with the young composer on composition and music theory. After a couple of unhappy years spent as a schoolteacher by day and composer by night, Schubert decided to pursue a career as a full-time composer, leading a somewhat bohemian life while creating a vast number of compositions that, at the time, attracted little attention. Only gradually did his music win acclaim, inspiring a remarkable burst of creativity in the mid 1820s. By that time, however, he was suffering badly from the syphilis and (possibly) typhoid fever that would take his life at age 31.

Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759 “Unfinished”

Composed: 1822

Duration: 25 minutes

Between 1813 and 1818, Schubert wrote his first six symphonies. But then he began to rethink the symphonic form, seeking to enlarge his ambitions for it. What we now call the “Unfinished” Symphony is actually only one of three symphonies that Schubert left incomplete between 1818 and 1822. The B minor Symphony was begun early in 1822, and within a few months Schubert had completed two movements. Later that year, though, he contracted syphilis, and was unable to work for a few months. By spring of the following year he was partly recovered.

At that time he found out that he was to be awarded an honorary diploma by the Styrian Music Society in Graz, Austria – one of the rare occasions during his life that Schubert and his music received significant recognition. In response to that honor, Schubert sent the two finished movements of the B minor Symphony to Anselm Hüttenbrenner, a friend of his who served as director of the Society. Hüttenbrenner, for reasons still unknown, set the Symphony aside in a drawer, unacknowledged and unplayed. Only in 1865, fully 37 years later, did he reveal the score’s existence. Why did he wait so long? No one knows. Whatever the reason, Hüttenbrenner did eventually help arrange for the first performance of those two movements, under the direction of Johann Herbeck, on December 17, 1865 in Vienna.

Why did Schubert never complete the B minor Symphony? The simplest, and probably best, answer is that he didn't know how to complete it. The first two movements are of such a grand scale and completeness of accomplishment – as Richard Freed aptly writes, “exquisitely balanced, consummate in craftsmanship, glorious beyond words in the depth of its inspiration” – that anything that followed it would probably be found wanting, an anticlimax.

Schubert did almost finish a third movement Scherzo in piano score, but only two pages (some nine bars) were orchestrated. Felix Weingartner and, more recently, Brian Newbould have created completions of this movement. It has also been speculated that the Entr'acte in B minor from Schubert's incidental music for *Rosamunde* – with the same key and instrumentation as the Symphony – was originally intended to be its fourth movement. In 1928, the centenary of Schubert's death, the Columbia Gramophone Company actually held a worldwide competition to complete the “Unfinished” Symphony. The winner was British pianist-composer Frank Merrick, but his work and the other one hundred or so submissions are forgotten today.

Reviewing that first performance of the “Unfinished” in 1865 – by which time Schubert and his music were famous – the famous critic Eduard Hanslick wrote evocatively of the first movement's opening minutes: “When after the few introductory measures, clarinet and oboe in unison began their gentle cantilena above the calm murmur of the violins, every child recognized the composer, and a muffled ‘Schubert’ was whispered in the auditorium. He had hardly entered, but it seemed that one recognized him by his step, by his way of opening the door. And when, after this nostalgic cantilena in the minor, there followed the contrasting G major theme of the cellos, every heart rejoiced, as if after a long separation, the composer himself were among us in person.” As this last-named theme moves to the violins, though, bold chords shatter the mood. But the tune returns, this time with an underlay of trombones. This also builds dramatically, leading to further development of the opening music – angry at times, even ferocious, before taking on an almost triumphal cast – before a final restatement.

More memorable melodies are spun out in the second movement. The first is introduced by basses, French horns and violins in counterpoint. Then a second emerges, played first by the clarinet, then the oboe. The music takes on a purposeful stride as the themes are heard again. As a whole the movement is relatively simple in outline, something like a modified rondo of ABABA. Each of the main themes is subjected to brief variation, and eventually the tranquility of the opening returns, as the themes recur one last time with a tinge of regret and longing.



Leos Janáček

b. July 3, 1854, Hukvaldy, Moravia (now Czech Republic)

d. August 12, 1928, Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic)

One of the most renowned composers ever from what is now known as the Czech Republic, Leos Janáček spent the early years of his career as an organ teacher and choir director. His close study of the folk music of Moravia and Slovakia, the inflections and rhythms of the folk melodies and

spoken languages of those areas, became a primary influence on his compositional style, which developed from a melodic lyricism indebted to the music of Antonín Dvorák to a much more angular sound, with irregular phrase lengths and bold dramatic contrasts. His first international success came quite late in his life, in 1916 with a very successful performance of his opera *Jenufa* (composed in 1896-1902). For his remaining years, in his sixties and seventies – inspired by his new found fame as well as the 1918 establishment of Czechoslovakia and his affection for Kamila Stösslová, a married woman almost forty years his junior – he was a prolific composer of operas like *Katya Kabanova* and orchestral works like the *Sinfonietta*.

Lachian Dances

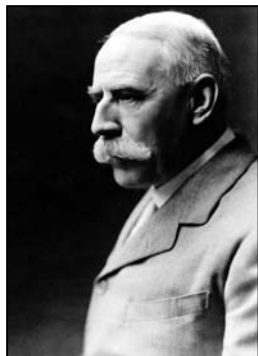
Composed: 1888, rev. 1924

Duration: 20 minutes

As he entered his late twenties, Janáček had finally put together something of a musical career for himself. In 1881 he founded an organ school in Brno, where he also started an orchestra and established classes in violin, piano and singing (this school, which Janáček ultimately directed, later became the Brno Conservatory). Within a few years he was also composing fairly regularly. But the disappointment he experienced when his first opera, *Sárka*, failed to receive a performance led him to embrace even more fully the folk music studies he had already embarked upon.

Most of the work on the Lachian Dances was done by the late 1880s. The title is an abbreviated form of Wallachian, referring to the region of Wallachia in the northern part of Moravia, near the Polish border, where Janáček was born and from which many of the work's melodies and dance rhythms were derived. One of Janáček's first mature compositions, the Lachian Dances received their first performance on January 11, 1889 in Olomouc. The composer returned to the Dances in the mid 1920s, reordering the six movements and adjusting the orchestration.

The first movement, "Old-Time Dance I," combines a wedding dance in 3/4 time, introduced by the violin, and a livelier "club" or "ribbon" dance in duple meter. One can hear clearly the influence of Dvorák, particularly his Slavonic Dances, in both the melodies and orchestration. The second dance, "Blessed," is also a traditional wedding dance. The "Blacksmith's Dance" emphasizes the timpani in a portrait of a hammering blacksmith whose pace of work is reflected in the music's increasing tempo. Janáček returns to the mood of the opening dance for the more restrained fourth movement, "Old-Time Dance II." The title of the fifth movement, "Celadensky," refers to the village of Celadná from which this lively dance came. The finale, "Saw Dance," had its origins in a dance related to the farmer's preparations for the onset of winter, cutting and storing wood for the fire. This dance falls into three parts – an opening Andante, a more vigorous second section, and an even faster conclusion.



Sir Edward Elgar

b. June 2, 1857, Lower Broadheath, England

d. February 23, 1934, Worcester, England

Widely regarded as the greatest English composer since the eighteenth century, Sir Edward Elgar was largely self-taught as a musician (although he received some early training from his organist father). For years he made a meager living as a free-lance conductor, teacher, and composer. The success, however, of his first major orchestral work, the “Enigma”

Variations of 1899, brought him attention throughout Europe. Some of his other best-known works, like the first of his Pomp and Circumstance Marches and the oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*, were produced soon afterwards. Long prone to depression, Elgar found the years of World War I particularly difficult: his music started to fall out of fashion, and new compositions like the Cello Concerto reflected what William Butler Yeats referred to as Elgar’s “heroic melancholy.” While he produced little music during his last years, he did make a number of famous recordings of his works during that time. A composer of much chamber music, oratorios, two symphonies (and the beginnings of a third), and songs, Elgar was appointed Master of the King’s Musick in 1924.

Cello Concerto in E minor, Op. 85

Composed: 1919

Duration: 30 minutes

Often introspective, sometimes deeply emotional, Sir Edward Elgar’s Cello Concerto has been seen as both a reflection of his disillusionment at what he saw of the world in the aftermath of World War I, and an examination of his own mortality. The Concerto was Elgar’s last major work, although he lived for another fifteen years after completing it. A year after its premiere, with the death of his beloved wife Alice, Elgar largely withdrew from public life and wrote almost no more music.

The vast scale of World War I’s destructiveness temporarily paralyzed Elgar’s creativity, and he wrote almost nothing between 1914 and 1918 – as he wrote to Sir Sidney Colvin, to whom he later dedicated the Cello Concerto, “I cannot do any real work with the awful shadow over us.” Then, in March 1918, Elgar checked himself into a London nursing home to have his tonsils removed. On awakening one morning after the operation, he suddenly asked for a pencil and paper and wrote down what became the main theme of the first movement of the Cello Concerto.

Elgar was living at that time at Brinkwells, a small thatched cottage in Sussex. While the setting was a quiet, pastoral one, the sounds of distant artillery could still occasionally be heard. Having returned there to recuperate from his tonsillectomy, Elgar soon threw himself into the composition of three chamber works – a Violin Sonata, Piano Quintet, and String Quartet. His wife noted that these works were quite different from anything he had written before, calling the Violin Sonata, for instance, “wood magic ... so delicate and elusive.” All three were given their

premieres in May 1919, and by the summer of that year Elgar was ready to return to that sketch from the nursing home. Within a couple of months the Cello Concerto was complete.

The Concerto's first performance – on October 27, 1919 at London's Queen's Hall, with cellist Felix Salmond and Elgar himself leading the London Symphony as part of the opening concert of the Orchestra's first post-war season – turned out to be something of a fiasco. Albert Coates, then the Orchestra's music director, was to conduct the rest of the concert on which the Concerto appeared. But he used up so much of the rehearsal time that little remained for the Concerto, and the critics were unrelenting in their criticism of the ill-prepared performance. One, Ernest Newman, wrote that "the orchestra made a public exhibition of its miserable self." But he liked the Concerto itself, remarking on its "profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity ... a fine spirit's lifelong wistful brooding upon the loveliness of earth."

Unusually, the first movement begins with four somber, insistent bars of the cello by itself. This dramatic music, answered by strings, clarinets and horns, leads into the movement's first melody – the one written at the nursing home. Introduced by the violas and subsequently taken up by the cello and the full orchestra, this memorable lament, with something of the consoling quality of a lullaby about it, was described by Elgar as "very full, sweet and sonorous." A feeling of tonal instability is introduced as Elgar effectively contrasts minor and major tonalities. After a lyrical central second theme and a recap of the opening music, now much colder and emotionally drained, the movement winds down with a number of pizzicato notes.

Following without pause, an altered version of the cello's solo opening leads off the light-hearted second movement. The orchestra seems reluctant to join in the merriment, but eventually they team up in a whirlwind of eighth notes. A lyrical second theme provides contrast. The slow movement, a song without words of only sixty bars, is dominated by a single melody. Both deceptively simple and terribly moving, this movement has been called "one of the most heartbreakingly poignant utterances in musical history."

Emerging directly from the third movement, the finale introduces a note of struggle, as the subdued cello tries to make its way against the brusque, insistent orchestra. The main theme, marked "nobilmente" but also carrying within it a hint of menace, is presented first by the soloist, then, after a brief interruption, by the entire orchestra. Hints of past melodies reappear – a bit of the mood and tonality of the second movement, the main theme of the Adagio, and then the cello recitative with which the Concerto began. The music then comes virtually to a stop, leading into a slow epilogue described by Hugh Macdonald as "as passionate as anything [Elgar] had ever written, full of drooping phrases and desperate gestures, like a dying man reaching up for help." The movement's main theme returns before an abrupt, ironic concluding trio of chords – "as if," to use Elgar biographer Michael Kennedy's apt words, "too much had been revealed."