



Carsten Schmidt, artistic director

2009 Summer Sounds

Opening Concert: European Journey

Friday August 21 at 7pm
Trinity Episcopal Church

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With

Gabriel Dobner, piano
Michael Haag, bass
Erin Keefe, violin
Vladimir Mendelssohn, viola
Diane Pascal, violin
Carsten Schmidt, piano
David Schrader, organ and harmonium
James Wilson, cello

PROGRAM

- Schatz-Walzer (Treasure Waltz)*, op. 418,
from *The Gypsy Baron*, arr. by Anton Webern
Pascal, Keefe, Mendelssohn,
Wilson, Dobner, Schmidt
Johann Strauss, Jr. (1825-99)
- Sonata for Violin and Piano
Pascal, Schmidt
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
- Toccat, Adagio, and Fugue in C, BWV 564
Schrader
J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Intermission

- Biblical Songs, op. 99
Nos. 3, 4, 6, 8, 9
Haag, Dobner
Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)
- Piano Quintet in C Minor, op. 1
Pascal, Keefe, Mendelssohn,
Wilson, Schmidt
Ernő Dohnányi (1877-1960)

NOTES

The Staunton Music Festival opens its 2009 Summer Sounds with a musical journey across Europe. Most of the pieces heard this evening were written in the late 19th century, thus firmly within the orbit of German Romanticism trumpeted by Wagner, though we also reach as far back as early Bach and as far forward as Debussy's 1917 Violin Sonata. For those in attendance who may never have traveled across Europe or have not done so for many years, tonight's concert offers a brief "audio tour" of Paris, Vienna, Prague, and much more.

STRAUSS

The name of Strauss is today synonymous with Viennese dance music. And though there are many such dances and also many such Strausses, the name usually refers to a waltz written by Johann Strauss, Jr., "The Waltz King." This evening's selection, however, comes from a larger work. Strauss was immensely popular as a dance band leader in Vienna, but he also achieved great success and fame for his stage works. By far his most popular opera is *Die Fledermaus*; only slightly less well known was *Der Zigeunerbaron*, "The Gypsy Baron" (1885). The libretto of this comic opera picks up on several plot strands and characterizations that appealed to Strauss' contemporaries. A minor landowner returns from exile to marry a lovely but very poor gypsy girl (touching on the conflict between class affiliation and affairs of the heart). Unbeknownst to him, this girl is actually the daughter and heir to a Turkish pasha, and she is the rightful owner of the pasha's immense treasure. Gradually her identity is revealed, along with the unexpected windfall, all filled out with a trove of subordinate but fetching characters (the fortune teller, the pompous local mayor, a troop of Hussars, etc.).

The "Treasure Waltz" features a selection of numbers pulled from the larger work. You may recall the performance of Strauss' "Emperor Waltz" last season, and many of the same features are present here as well. The "Treasure Waltz" actually includes four different waltzes, each with a sectional structure, as well as a march introduction and coda. The coda, in particular, becomes a source of interest as it draws together many of the preceding waltz tunes before leading up to the final cadence, which nearly always—as here—sounds as whirling crescendo of excitement, leaving the dancers to catch their breath.

DEBUSSY

If you know Claude Debussy only through his piano compositions—the *Preludes*, perhaps, *Clair de lune*, or *Estampes*—you already know a great deal about his musical palette. However, there is a side to his creativity and life story that emerges only in connection with the late chamber music. Debussy died miserably from colon cancer in spring 1918, fatigued, impoverished, and unable to do the one thing which meant everything to him: composing music. Besieged by a virulent cancer from within and the German imperial menace from without, Debussy nevertheless planned to write a set of six neo-classical sonatas for various instruments. Only three were completed. Each tries a kind of musical escapism, reverting to simplicity of texture and form and eschewing Debussy's own lush "Impressionism" in favor of a leaner, more purely abstract and sardonic style. Initial ideas for the third sonata, a work for violin and piano, emerged in December 1915 but cancer intervened; Debussy wrote hardly a note of music dur-

ing 1916 as his condition worsened considerably. Surgery failed. He was now faced with regular morphine injections (causing confusion and lethargy) and sickening radiation treatments, not to mention the encroaching German army. Against this backdrop the nostalgic Violin Sonata emerged in fits and starts. Two movements were completed early in 1917, but the third caused Debussy much consternation and uncertainty as he revised several earlier drafts. A despondent Debussy played the piano part at what turned out to be his final public appearance in September.

The work's classical sonata form and modest scope (it lasts just 13 minutes) may be seen as a defiant gesture against German musical grandiloquence and, in turn, against the Kaiser's attacking army. It also pays tribute to the influence of Erik Satie, whose austere piano works were popular in Paris at this time and which caused a vogue for "antique" triadic harmony and witty, irreverent rhythmic figures. Debussy himself described the sonata as "the simple play of an idea turning on itself, like a snake biting its own tail." Some critics deride the work as the product of a sick, despairing soul, and to be fair, the work as a whole balances between sterile repetition and a few truly inspired passages. For instance, the opening passages are serene and engaging, while the nagging gypsy-like chromaticism that concludes the movement seems unwarranted in this classical landscape. The second movement, to me the best of the three, explores quick juxtapositions of contrasting characters, and Debussy succeeds in playing off the lyricism of Fauré against an intensity and use of pizzicato that would make Shostakovich envious. In the finale violin cadenzas decorate a shimmering piano texture, reminiscent of Debussy's own earlier piano music. And if the rumbling finish provides more smoke than fire, there can be no denying that only Debussy could have composed this capricious yet elegant homage to the ancient genre of the accompanied violin sonata.

BACH

J. S. Bach's mastery of organ technique and composition has often been remarked upon in my previous notes. Still, it bears repeating that the vast majority of his organ works were written when Bach was still a young man—that is, when he was employed as resident organist in three central German cities between 1703 and 1717: Arnstadt, Mühlhausen, and Weimar. The Toccata, Adagio, and Fugue in C Major, BWV 564, dates from sometime between 1710 and 1717 and contains features of both old and new music. While the opening movement, with its brilliant solos for manuals and pedals separated, echoes the long tradition of North German keyboard toccatas, the overall fast-slow-fast structure is rare among Bach's organ works and indicates the influence of the emerging Italian concerto form. The delightful fugue may be classed as a dance fugue (in 6/8 time), but its real charm lies in the pregnant pauses that Bach later fills with counter-material. Between the splashy display of the toccata and the buoyant fugue, the composer places a penitential slow movement based on a pictorial walking bass line. The Adagio ends in a series of pained dissonant suspensions. Bach seems most intent on exploiting the contrast between these "learned style" melodic gestures and the ensuing playful animation of the fugue theme.

DVOŘÁK

Antonin Dvořák's works capture the essence of central European (Bohemian) folk traditions melded to a cosmopolitan or "high art" style of concert music. Ironically, some of his most famous pieces—the *New World* Symphony in E Minor, the powerful B-minor Cello Concerto—were written in the United States, where he lived in the 1890s as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Despite the demands of his administrative post, **Dvořák** found these American years to be particularly fruitful; witness the above mentioned symphonic works, as well as the ten *Biblical Songs*, written in March 1894.

Spiritual earnestness ran deep within **Dvořák**, so the idea of composing musical settings based on the Book of Psalms had likely been with him for some years. But several prominent losses—the deaths of Tchaikovsky and Gounod, two of **Dvořák**'s rivals; the passing of Hans von Bülow, a conductor and close friend who championed **Dvořák**'s music throughout Europe; and the news from back home of his father's impending demise—; these events all helped quicken the impulse to set the *Biblical Songs*. Tonight we hear a selection of five from the set, nos. 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9.

Song 3, setting the opening lines of Psalm 55 ("Hear, oh hear my prayer"), explores a mood of gentle entreaty with steady pulsing chords in the accompaniment, while stronger emotions emerge through ascending chromatic melodic motion, already hinted at in the brief piano prologue. **Dvořák** uses the pitch G as a kind of anchor to which the vocal line returns again and again. The same strategy is used in song no. 4 (Psalm 23), which opens as a recitative anchored on the pitch B. The piece typifies the composer's genius for a simple folk style, unencumbered by layers of harmonic twists and turns, and which thus allows the clarity of the Psalmist's feelings to come through on the wings of pure sound.

Dvořák revisits the B pedal tone in song no. 6, his treatment of verses from Psalm 61. The high chordal accompaniment yields a serene, consoling atmosphere as backdrop to the strophic melody. The simplicity of the opening material works in deliberate contrast to the more impassioned middle section; the contrast may be understood as an opposition between hymn and lied styles, between the divine and earthly impulses. Song no. 8 (Psalm 25) turns inward, meditating on feelings of pain and desolation. **Dvořák** heightens the austere mood with unison writing between piano and voice and a very minimal accompaniment. All this is by way of preparation for the touching expressive breakthrough to C major at the pivotal phrase, "For I trust in Thee." A similar effect occurs toward the close of song no. 9 (the first four verses of Psalm 121). The opening section sounds free and unmeasured but then proceeds to strummed chords redolent of celestial harps. The breakthrough here takes place on "Behold" and employs the exact same melodic motion—a leap from G up to E—that marked the emotional crux of the previous song.

DOHNÁNYI

Hungarian composer Ernő Dohnányi, known by his own choosing as Ernst von Dohnányi, grew up in a musical household. After early training and several well-received public performances, Ernő was sent to study at the Royal Academy in Budapest where he came directly under the spell of Brahms. Dohnányi's composition teacher was a close friend of Brahms, and he fos-

tered the boy's musical tendencies and helped bring him and the newly written Piano Quintet, op. 1, to the elder master's attention. Brahms, not a little flattered by this obvious homage, praised the Quintet and helped promote its first significant performance in Vienna—an event that Brahms unfortunately did not live to see. The influence of Brahms on Dohnányi's youthful work is clearly paramount, particularly in the symphonic chamber writing that bursts forth on occasion. One also feels the presence of Franz Liszt, whose innovations in thematic unity across multiple movements impacted the structure of this quintet. The example of these masters helped inspire the 17-year-old Dohnányi to moments of impassioned, grand rhetoric supported by wonderful piano writing.

The opening movement is marked by broad sweeping gestures and robust cascades in the piano; Dohnányi's own brilliant technique on the keyboard manifests itself at every turn. Contrasted with this animation are the graceful chordal second theme and the inspired shift to C major at the coda. I defy any listener to claim that this movement could not have actually come from a lost chamber work of Brahms himself, so thoroughgoing is the homage. In the second movement Dohnányi shows an assured command of rhythmic control and harmonic pacing, in particular when he combines the movement's two themes in the coda. A lyrical vein runs through the Adagio movement, characterized by an expressive downward leap, frequent appoggiaturas (accented melodic dissonances) and close counterpoint in the strings. The finale offers a study in rhythm, from the irregular grouping of five- and six-beat measures at the beginning to the propulsive cross rhythms (a trademark of Brahms) that drive the main theme. Dohnányi, perhaps not unexpectedly given the influences mentioned above, caps the whole work off with a cyclic return to the *first* movement's opening theme, presented now in a radiant C major.

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TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Dvořák, Biblical Songs

No. 3 (Psalm 55)

Gott, o höre, hör' auf mein Gebet, verschliess Dein Ohr nicht vor meinem Flehn. Neige Dich und höre mich, denn mein bitt'res Los dauert mich sehr; ich klage zu Dir. Angsterfüllt schlägt das Herz mir und Todesangst krampft das Herz zusammen; mich fast ein Todesgrauen an. Ich sprach zu mir: Oh, wenn ich Flügel wie die Taube hätte, flög' ich weit, um mich endlich auszuruhen. Sieh, endlose Fernen lokken und weilen will ich in Wüsten. Mit schnellem Flug würde ich fliehen vor dem Sturm und Unwetter.

No. 4 (Psalm 23)

Gott der Herr ist Hirte mir, ich werde niemals Mangel leiden. Auf der Flur, so da grünt, stärkt Er mich und Er führt mich zu stillen Seen. Und Er labt Seele und Geist und Er weist mir gerecht um Seines Names Willen die Spur. Muss ich auch ohnmächtig wandeln in dem Tal der Todesschatten, fürchte ich für mich nichts Böses, denn auch Du bist bei mir. Und Dein Stab und Dein Schutz schenken Trost und Ruhe.

No. 6 (Psalm 61)

Gott, erhör' mit Langmut mein Flehn, merke, Herr, auf mein Gebet! Denn Du bist ewig Zuflucht mir und Schutz, ein fester

55:1 Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.

55:2 Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise;

55:3 Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me.

55:4 My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me.

55:5 Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me.

55:6 And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! *for then* would I fly away, and be at rest.

55:7 Lo, *then* would I wander far off, *and* remain in the wilderness. Selah.

55:8 I would hasten my escape from the windy storm *and* tempest.

23:1 The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

23:2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

23:3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

61:1 Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.

61:2 From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed:

Turmbau, Heerscharen bietend die Stirn. Lass mich weilen in Deinem Zelt ewiglich und unter Deinen Fittichen. Ew'ger! Du bist mein starker Gott, ich suche Dich am Morgen, meine Seele lechzt nach Dir, schmachkend ruft stets mein Leib nach Dir in dem ausgedorrten öden Land, dem Wasser mangelt. So möchte zu Deinem Namen ich preisend heben meine Hände und singen loben Dich, Herr, mein Leben lang.

No. 8 (Psalm 25)

Blicke mich an und erbarme Dich meiner, Herr, denn sieh', verlassen bin ich und ohnmächtig und meine Herzensängste drücken mich nieder; enthebe mich meiner Not. Erbarme meiner Dich! Sieh all meine Not und all mein Leid, verzeihe alle Sünden mir. Dein Schutz bewahre stets die Seele, o Herr, vor Schmach und Sündenfall, denn ich harre Deiner!

No. 9 (Psalm 121)

Ich hebe den Blick zum Berg empor, woher wird mir Hilfe kommen? Hilfe kommt mir von dem Herren bloss, Schöpfer Himmels und Schöpfer der Erde. Nie lässt Er zu, dass wanke oder dass strauchle je dein Fuss, denn dein Hüter, Er schlummert nicht. Sieh, niemals schläft, niemals schlummert der, der in Ewigkeit Israel schützt.

lead me to the rock *that* is higher than I.

61:3 For thou hast been a shelter for me, *and* a strong tower from the enemy.

61:4 I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings. Selah.

61:5 For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given *me* the heritage of those that fear thy name.

61:6 Thou wilt prolong the king's life: *and* his years as many generations.

61:7 He shall abide before God for ever: O prepare mercy and truth, *which* may preserve him.

61:8 So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

25:16 Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I *am* desolate and afflicted.

25:17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged: *O* bring thou me out of my distresses.

25:18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.

25:20 *O* keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee.

121:1 I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.

121:2 My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.

121:3 He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber.

121:4 Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

