

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

by Robert M. Johnstone

“German ‘Classical’ Classics”

February 6, 2016

These are the first performances of all of tonight’s works by the Richmond Symphony Orchestra.

*“L’Isola Disabitata” (“The Uninhabited Island”) Overture
Franz Josef Haydn*

born in Rohrau, Austria, in 1732;

first performance: December 6, 1779

died in Vienna in 1809

instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings

duration: 8 minutes

Josef Haydn composed in many forms; he is often described as the “father” of the symphony (writing over a hundred) and of the string quartet. Haydn is not a name usually associated with opera. Nonetheless he composed over a dozen, mostly for the opera troupe established by his aristocratic patron at Esterhazy. The *Uninhabited Island* (sometimes called “The Desert Island”) was Haydn’s tenth opera. Composed in the winter of 1779, it had a text by the celebrated poet and librettist Pietro Metastasio. The opera quickly disappeared from the repertoire (the full work appeared in print only in 1976), but the Overture has had a kinder history, its character prefiguring the term, *Sturm und Drang* (“Storm and Stress”), an early Romantic style in which swings of emotion are given free expression.

Five Heroic Marches (Heldenmusik)

George Philipp Telemann

born in Magdeburg, Germany, in 1681;

first performance: 1728, probably in Hamburg

instrumentation: piccolo trumpet, strings

duration: 7 minutes

Sixty years ago Telemann was barely known, even to the musically literate. Yet in his day he was more widely recognized and influential than either Bach or Handel (his juniors by four years). His output resembled a musical “factory,” as he churned out over 2,000 works from formidable masses and oratorios to sonatas and songs—according to the Guinness Book of Records, no one has surpassed this number of compositions. With the turn of the 19th century, however, his music fell quite suddenly out of favor; perhaps in comparison with the newly re-discovered Bach, Telemann’s sheer volume of output was thought second-rate. His works enjoyed a revival only in the 1930s-1940s (the Telemann Society, founded in the 1950s by a recording engineer and his music teacher wife, has promoted the composer’s music with a pioneering zeal).

Born into a family of clergy, Telemann had to struggle to develop his precocious gift for music against a mother determined that her son become a lawyer. But talent will out; he became an established composer and church musician by the age of twenty, moving from musical post to post in search of greener pastures. In mid-life he settled as cantor to the St. John Latin School in Hamburg, where he spent the remainder of his life.

It was while in Hamburg in 1728 that he composed his 12 Heroic Marches (we will perform 5 tonight). On the title page of the published manuscript he indicated a variety of performing options—violin, oboe, trumpet, with either string or organ accompaniment. The French titles were added by the publisher, presumably to appeal to an “educated audience.” It must have worked, for the Marches sold well, used on special occasions from weddings to sacred services.

The French titles are easily translated into their English equivalents, all displaying aspects of the “heroic” image. *La Majesté* is grand ceremonial music, stately and processional. *La Tranquillité*, by contrast, is slow, calm, peaceful—tranquil—with perhaps a touch of melancholy. *L’Armement*, the briefest of the marches, offers the hero as warrior triumphantly returned from his latest conquest. Then there is *L’Amour*, resembling *La Tranquillité* in tempo and mood, languorous with the occasional lapse into the minor—perhaps to suggest the pangs of love? The set concludes with a dance, *La Gaillardise*, brisk and lively, a brilliant romp for the piccolo trumpet and a fitting conclusion for this fine suite of baroque marches.

Symphony No. 25 in G Major, P. 16
Michael Haydn

born in Rohrau, Austria, in 1737;
first performance: probably Salzburg, 1783
died in Salzburg in 1806
instrumentation: 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings
duration: 17 minutes

Franz Josef Haydn's younger brother, Michael, has largely lived in his shadow as a composer, but it was not always thus. As a child Michael showed earlier promise as a musician, joining his older brother in the Vienna Boys' choir where, because of his three-octave range, he enjoyed most of the solo work. He was largely self-taught as a composer, a fact that perhaps accounts for the comparative conservatism of his output. Nonetheless he earned the professional acclaim of his Salzburger neighbor, Leopold Mozart (although his private life was not admired), and he became a good friend to the young Wolfgang. Perhaps this accounts for the "renown" enjoyed for over a century by Michael's 25th Symphony.

Haydn composed it in the spring of 1783. It is a charming work, clearly embodying the ideals of the "Classical" symphony of the period. Oddly though, its major claim to fame for over a century after its creation was that it was the Symphony No. 37 of his friend, Mozart! It wasn't until 1907 when Lothar Perger, the cataloger of Michael Haydn's works, discovered the true composer's identity and further revealed that Mozart had composed only the *andante maestoso* introduction which, upon reflection, does not seem entirely in character with the music that follows it. Since 1907 the number "37" has been left blank in the list of Mozart's symphonies.

"La Calamita" Overture in D Major
Johann Christian Bach

born in Leipzig, Germany, in 1735;

first performance: February 3, 1763

died in London in 1782

instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings

duration: 5 minutes

Johann Christian was the youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach, born during his father's tenure as Kantor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. The elder Bach died when Johann Christian was fifteen and the youngster was farmed out by his relatives to study music in Berlin, becoming a gifted keyboard player and budding composer. Time was fruitfully spent in Italy before an unexpected appointment as music director of the King's Theatre took him to London in 1762. He quickly became the toast of royalty, earning the favor of King George III and Queen Charlotte, by which he gained entrée to all of the best houses in the city.

J. C. Bach wrote prolifically in all genres. The "La Calamita" Overture is actually a brief 3-movement *sinfonia*, written to preface a London revival of Baldassare Galuppi's opera *La Calamita di' cuori* (Calamity of the Heart). Galuppi had moved from his native Venice to London in the 1740s and quickly became a fixture in its musical, and especially its operatic, scene. It was many years later

after Galuppi had returned to Venice that Johann Christian Bach came to admire his music, sponsoring it in the famous concerts established by Bach and his colleague, Karl Friedrich Abel. Later as a tribute to Bach, his young friend Wolfgang Mozart borrowed music from the central movement of the *La Calamita* Overture for use in the slow movement of his Piano Concerto, K. 414.

Three Minuets, P. 70
Michael Haydn

first performance: Salzburg, January 1784
instrumentation: flute, 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings
duration: 6 minutes

Austria, but especially Vienna, has long been justly famed for its affinity for the dance. The waltzes of the Strauss family leap to mind, but also the dances of Schubert, Mozart, even Beethoven, are notable examples. The fabulous swirling tempos of the waltz were notorious in their time for their extravagance and—for some—their lewdness. A more sedate, less libidinous predecessor to the waltz was the minuet—also in $\frac{3}{4}$ time—a form that found itself as the third movement in the symphonies of Mozart and Haydn, indeed of all classical era composers.

Both Haydns, Josef and Michael, wrote lots of dance music—much of it sadly neglected today—as it was much in demand at social gatherings, receptions, and light entertainments. Michael Haydn composed a set of six Minuets, listed as P. 70 in the catalog of his works by Lothar Perger. They were completed on January 23, 1784 (just a few months after his 25th Symphony, noted above). They were composed for small orchestras of varying sizes and with varied orchestrations, to allow for widely disparate local resources. We will hear three of them as illustrative of this popular dance form.

Symphony No. 15 in G Major, K. 124
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

born in Salzburg, Austria, in 1756;
first performance: February, 1772
died in Vienna in 1791
instrumentation: 2 oboes; 2 horns; strings
duration: 14 minutes

In his mid-teens Mozart made two significant tours to Italy, the first in 1770 to Milan, Rome, and Naples. There he absorbed Italian musical styles that were to greatly influence his early operatic and salon music, as well as nearly a dozen of his

early symphonies. Symphonies were an important early test for Mozart, as they were in much demand. These were not the imposing symphonies of later years but brief “sinfonias” that were largely used to open or close theatrical events, or as interludes in the intervals of large choral works.

Upon his return to Salzburg from his second Italian tour in the winter of 1771–2 he employed the Italian style in further symphonies, including his 15th in G Major, which he is thought to have composed for the coronation of the new Archbishop of Salzburg, Count Hieronymus Colloredo. This was the same man who became the Mozarts’ nemesis in later years, as their hypercritical patron who made many demands, particularly upon young Mozart’s time (with little in the way of reward) and who finally dismissed Wolfgang from his service, an act which allowed the young composer to flee his native Salzburg for the brighter prospects of Vienna. The brief 15th symphony is in four movements with a delightful third-movement minuet.

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