



Flare
January 10 & 11, 2025

PROGRAM NOTES

Flare

Horacio Fernández

(b. 1996)

Welcome to Mictlán, the Mexican underworld. Inspired by Aztec mythology and the Mexican Day of the Dead, FLARE will take you on a musical exploration of the nine layers of Mictlán, guided by the mythical figure Xolotl. As the gates of Mictlán open, the piano introduces an insistent ostinato, symbolizing the threshold to this otherworldly realm. The heart of the composition is marked by a vibrant and fiery FLARE, embodied in the triumphant and colorful melodies performed primarily by the brass. This section represents the transformative experience of traversing the layers of Mictlán, with the music enveloping the listener in a vivid sonic display. Drawing from the rich traditions of Latin music, "FLARE"

infuses the melodies with catchiness and rhythms filled with passion and fire. The composition celebrates the dynamic energy of Latin music, creating a sonic landscape that mirrors the intensity of the mythical journey through the Aztec underworld. It's noteworthy that much of the musical material featured in "FLARE" originated from a salsa-trap song composed and produced by the artist. This fusion of traditional orchestral elements with contemporary Latin influences adds a unique and modern dimension to the piece. You can find an animated music video that illustrates the journey perfectly. The composer's original recording of the source material is available on all major platforms, providing a fascinating connection between the roots of Latin music and the innovative orchestral interpretation presented in "FLARE." Embark on this musical odyssey through Mictlán, where the gates swing open, and the FLARE of vibrant sounds awaits to engulf you in a passionate and fiery experience.

– *Horacio Fernández*

Concerto No.2 in D Major, Hob.Viib:2

Franz Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

We don't normally think of Haydn as a composer of concertos. It is true that they occupy a relatively small place in his body of work, but this is only because that body of work is so vast. Haydn actually left more than two dozen concertos that we know are authentic (Haydn's popularity in his own day meant that many works were falsely attributed to him for marketing purposes, so there were many inauthentic "Haydn" works). Perhaps half that many other concertos are known to have been lost, largely because of fires in the palace of the Esterhazy princes where Haydn worked.

Though he wasn't a virtuoso performer, and was thus typically writing his concertos for other people, he also showed a keen ability to find the peculiar voice of each solo instrument, particularly instruments for which concertos were not often written. In Haydn's day, the cello fell into that category. The instrument arrived late on the scene, evolving, or perhaps coalescing, from larger and smaller members of the violin family in the second half of the 17th century, and then took a

long time to displace the flat-backed, fretted, six-string bass viol. Once the cello was firmly established as a bass instrument, it tended to remain a supporting player. It was the more adventurous composers like Vivaldi, or cellists like Boccherini, who gave it star billing. A cello concerto could be an acoustically difficult thing to bring off in the 18th century, because in the very resonant rooms where music was usually played, a rapid low passage that sounds perfectly clear to the player can sound like a vague wash of sound to listeners a few feet away. At least one modern musicologist and performer has suggested that this was precisely the effect the composers wanted when they wrote such passages, but it is probably not a coincidence that the cello became more of a soloist as it became more common to play in the instrument's tenor and alto range.

Haydn wrote the second of his two surviving cello concertos in about 1783, when he had been running the Esterhazy musical establishment for more than two decades. Anton Kraft, the Esterhazy orchestra's principal cellist from 1778 to 1790, was a noted virtuoso, and though nothing definite is known about the concerto's origin, it has always been presumed that Haydn

wrote it for Kraft. In fact, an 1837 German music encyclopedia proposed that Kraft, not Haydn, was its real composer, a theory apparently suggested by Kraft's grandson. Though a reasonably accurate version of the concerto was published in 1804 while Haydn was still alive, the manuscript score disappeared, and in the absence of hard evidence, the Kraft theory was enough to throw the concerto's authorship into doubt for more than a century. However, through the increased popularity of the concerto among virtuoso cellists, the discovery of an original Haydn manuscript in 1951, and the availability of new performing editions that restore the original version of the concerto have allowed us to see the work in a new light and the question was resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Despite the questions about its pedigree, the second cello concerto never had trouble holding a place in the repertoire. It is the stuff of which classics are made, with graceful, lilting melodies that both sing and dance. Haydn avoided acoustical muddiness in grand style: the cello spends a great deal of the concerto playing soprano, with many passages that a violin could play without transposing. Such a use of the instrument is

doubly remarkable because the neck of the 18th-century cello was shorter than the modern cello neck, so Haydn was pushing the limits of the cello's range, and making it sing and scamper there. This sort of writing, though not unprecedented, was very much on the cutting edge in the 1780s. Despite its outwardly elegant simplicity, this concerto is in many ways the most difficult and demanding in the repertoire. In the end, as Casals admonished "We must play this music with all its grace – it is so free, fresh and lovely. Not one note dry! Always something lovely, always singing."

– *Christopher Cortez*

Introduction et rondo capriccioso, op.28

Camille Saint-Saëns

(1835 - 1921)

Cello Concerto No.2 in E minor, op.30

Victor Hebert

(1859-1924)

Symphony No.6 in D Major, op.60, B.112

Antonín Dvořák

(1899 - 1974)

Dvořák is the preëminent Czech composer of the nineteenth century, and perhaps of all of his successors, as well. This is no small achievement, considering the number of great musicians--Mozart, for example—who thought of Bohemia as the most musical country in Europe. Even today, one can hardly get on a streetcar in Prague without stepping around a double bass. Americans today, if they think of Czech music at all, other than two

works by Smetana, it is of the music of Dvořák. They know little of the other composers of the incredible musical wealth of Bohemia—including Fibich, Ostrčil, Janáček, Foerster, Hába, and Martinů—just to name a few. Dvořák is merely “first among equals” in the history of Czech music, and many more of the compositions of “the conservatory of Europe” need to reach our own concert stages.

Dvořák owed his initial recognition to Johannes Brahms, who encountered his music somewhat early in Dvořák’s career, and saw to it that he was enabled to spend time in Vienna for further study. While Dvořák’s fundamental stylistic orientation is similar to the older composer in its classical restraint and dedication to traditional forms and procedures, his compositions are unmistakably Czech in myriad subtle ways. Turns of harmony, melody, and rhythm firmly establish Dvořák’s culture, even within the disciplined tradition of musical composition leading back to, say, Beethoven. Like Brahms, Dvořák wrote stunningly well in the genres of string quartets, sonatas, and symphonies. But unlike Brahms, he also wrote tone poems, and was an active and successful opera composer, although only his *Rusalka* is widely

known in this country. He was interested in almost every genre, and few of his contemporaries composed successfully in as many different ones as did Dvořák.

He clearly thought of himself as a champion of Czech music, and he incorporated significant Czech musical, literary, and historical elements into his works. His Slavonic Rhapsodies, tone poems, operas, and songs—the list goes on and on—all are heavily infused with Czech melodies, linguistic inflections and characteristic rhythms, and national legends and stories. And it must be admitted that these essential elements of his artistic voice are near the core of his attractiveness to audiences worldwide—not just in his homeland. Yet, to focus inordinately on these elements would miss the mark in understanding the most important aspect of the nature of his music. As deeply rooted as he is in the Czech musical tradition, it would be a mistake to consign him primarily to the category of “nationalist” composers. For Dvořák was a clear adherent of the artistic thinking of those composers of the nineteenth century who were firmly rooted in the tradition of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven (and later, Mendelssohn and Brahms) as a fundamental way of composing. That is, they favored classical forms and

designs, integrated development of musical ideas, and in general, a restrained and balanced expression that placed strong emphasis on music as an abstract art. Generally speaking not for them were the “stories” and programs of folks like Liszt and Wagner, and their followers. And in mastery of the resilience of this style, the symphonies of Dvořák--as well as those of Tchaikovsky and Brahms--pretty much have come to dominate the symphonic music from those times that are favored today by concert audiences.

Dvořák wrote nine symphonies, but Americans are most familiar with Symphony No. 9 in E Minor, “From the New World.” His first four symphonies were not published in his lifetime, nor were they generally recognized until the 1950s. The seventh, and eighth symphonies have become standard repertoire, and are beginning to catch up in popularity in this country with the beloved ninth. But, it was the sixth that first brought him international recognition and acclaim as a symphonist. It dates from the time that, while widely recognized and successful in his native land, he was nevertheless struggling to find strong acceptance in the center of music of the time: Vienna. That city, of course,

was the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the Czechs had been vassals of the Austrians since 1620. Czech culture had been completely dominated by the Austrians during those three centuries, and while the Czechs were an important part of the musical life of the Empire, they were more or less still regarded as Slavic “rubes” to the snobbish Viennese.

At the time, Johannes Brahms was the center of the Viennese musical world, and his recognition of Dvořák’s talent, and subsequent support of Dvořák for state financial subsidies, was central to the younger composer’s rising success. In 1879 the distinguished conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic, Hans Richter, had programmed Dvořák’s Slavonic Rhapsody No. 3 to great acclaim, and subsequently requested a new symphony from him. Dvořák’s musical style and reputation thitherto had ridden to a significant degree on his Bohemian nationalism and use of Czech folk elements. But, now he sought to turn to a more universal, classical, style that would be seen as in the esteemed line of Viennese immortals: Mozart, Beethoven, and, of course, Brahms. The mavens of Viennese music lovers demanded this, and so, in his sixth symphony, Dvořák set out to create one in

this requisite style. Work commenced in late summer of the next year, and in several weeks it was completed. The score was sent to Richter, and the composer awaited a date for the première in Vienna. It was not to come. The anti-Czech feelings in the orchestra during the rehearsals for the Slavonic Rhapsody now bubbled to the surface, and Richter had to keep postponing the première, caught in Austrian politics. So, the work was performed for the first time the next year, 1881, in Prague.

It is a commonplace that his genial, warm, optimistic, and tuneful symphony is regarded as modeled in significant ways on Brahms' recently composed (1877) second symphony. Key, mood, melodic character, and structure—all bear similarities to Brahms' great symphony. But, of course, it doesn't matter at all. If he "borrowed" certain ideas from his champion, Brahms, then—as J. S. Bach is famously quoted—he more than "paid him back with interest."

A simple little two-note ascending motive opens the work, and becomes an essential building block for the movement. It's in the best classical tradition, which Dvořák is now cultivating. This unity of approach follows

in the succession of ideas that make up the rest of the movement. And yet, the distinctive harmonies; the clear, colorful orchestration; and the ubiquitous parallelism in the melodies—all are familiar elements that go to make up the unmistakable, genial Bohemian style of the composer. Notwithstanding its energy and decisive character, this is a warm and happy affair that somehow or other elicits the “pastoral” character that defies precise definition.

The beginning of the second movement—as well as later passages—is often cited by musical pundits as evoking the Adagio of Beethoven’s ninth symphony. That is a matter of perception, of course, but it seems somewhat apt. Nevertheless, the overall character is equally Czech, and evocative of the peaceful, sylvan beauties of the Bohemian countryside. That observation is equally subjective, too. But, various little stylistic traits point to other compositions of the composer with that reference exactly in mind. Its serenities are familiar from all of Dvořák’s oeuvre, with a healthy dose of Brahms, as well.

Dvořák’s somewhat new, “classical” style runs aground somewhat in the third movement. For it is a

furiant, a traditional, exciting Bohemian dance that simply screams Czech ethnic musical traditions. It's in 3/4 time, but with frequent shifts to a pair of 2/4 measures. Just as every schoolchild knows, six may be factored into two threes or three twos, and that juxtaposition is the basis of the furiant. So you'll hear the rapid beats often proceeding thusly: one-two-three, one-two, one-two. Excited and stimulating it is, but unfortunately, this very Czech dance is probably the main basis for the initial Viennese intellectual disdain for the symphony. The contrasting middle section is a delicate, slower affair, again featuring "pastoral" woodwinds, but, soon the sparkling furiant returns to cap it all off. At the première this movement was so well received, that the audience demanded and got an encore. It's easy to see why.

The murmuring strings that open the last movement remind us again of the parallel point in Brahms' second symphony. They soon yield to little motives and a tune here and there--all of which gives the composer ample material to create this model of the best of Viennese tight musical development and structural integrity. It's a cogent example of the mature work of the composer that lay ahead: memorable tunes, economy of means, colorful

orchestration, and lucid musical structure. All of this, along with a masterful sense of drama and cohesive direction. A marvelous, scintillating coda sails into the peroration, with the main theme soaring above it all.

There's no wonder that this work brought Dvořák the recognition that he so clearly deserved. It is the perfect combination of mainstream Viennese classicism and rich, Bohemian musical nationalism. Clearly deserving to take its place with his last three symphonies, it reminds us in this country that there is so much more to appreciate than the few works of Dvořák that we focus on.

– *William E. Runyan*