



Reveries
October 27 & 28, 2023

PROGRAM NOTES

Ballade in A Minor, op.33

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875 - 1912)

British composer and conductor Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) overcame prejudice against his mixed-race heritage to become enormously popular during his lifetime. Coleridge-Taylor made three tours of the United States, and in 1904, on his first visit, President Theodore Roosevelt received him at the White House. His English mother named him after the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and called him “Coleridge.” His father studied medicine in London and went on to become the coroner for the British Empire in the West African province of Senegambia in Senegal.

Coleridge-Taylor's most famous work is a set of three cantatas based on Longfellow's epic poem Song of Hiawatha. This trilogy became so popular that it was performed for two weeks each year in London from 1928 through the beginning of World War II, and it is still staged frequently. The only other works to receive similar treatment were Handel's Messiah and Mendelssohn's Elijah. Sadly, Coleridge-Taylor had sold the rights to the music for fifteen guineas, and he struggled financially all his life.

When Edward Elgar was asked to compose a work for the Three Choirs Festival, a famous annual event in England, he replied:

“Coleridge-Taylor accepted the commission gladly and conducted the premiere of his Ballade in A Minor on September 12, 1898. The performance was a very promising, early milestone for the gifted 22-year-old composer who, tragically, died of pneumonia less than fifteen years later. As one writer has said, the Ballade is a “work full of wonderful high-spirits, passion and warmth. Above all it's a harbinger of what might come, given time and opportunity.”

– **Bruce Brown**

Cello Concerto in D Minor

Édouard Lalo (1823 - 1892)

January 27 of this year marks the 200th birthday of the great French composer Edouard Lalo. His cello concerto in D minor stands among the greatest works for the instrument.

Composed in 1876, the concerto was written during an artistic renaissance in France in which Lalo also wrote his highly-esteemed *Symphonie Espangole* (1874). France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) led to a period of introspection in which cultural and artistic movements aimed to rebuild and rejuvenate the nation's spirit. France's musical pioneers united in their endeavor to return France's spirit to glory by creating a social hub where French composers could meet, collaborate, and inspire each other. This group was called *Société nationale de musique*, which still exists today, and had among its members the notable French composers Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy. Edouard Lalo himself was a founding member of the *Société nationale de musique*, and he, along with co-founders Camille Saint-Saëns and Cezar Franck, helped create the renaissance in which their music flourished.

The first movement of the concerto begins with the famous rubato passage that showcases the brooding character of the cello's lower register in a manner unique to the repertoire. Lalo transitions from this temperamental introduction by melting into the most serene C major symphonic bedding. The main theme has elements of aggressive defiance which must have resonated with the general sentiment in France at the time it was written. The second theme, however, seems like a love song of the purest nature. Lalo's wife was a contralto vocalist, and she premiered many of his songs. Lalo composed a song for a passage of Alfred de Musset's play "Barberine" called "Chanson de Barberine" (1870), in which a woman laments how her lover left her for war. Perhaps this second theme is the soldier's romantic reverie.

The first theme of the second movement, in G minor, seems to lament desolation and devastation, with small pockets of hope for new beginnings. Once again, Lalo demonstrates an impressive ability to seamlessly transition from dark, sometimes painful emotions into utter bliss. The second theme stands in stark contrast to the first with its innocent, dancing merriment, and is reminiscent of the character French audiences fell in love with in the finale of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*.

Lalo finishes the concerto brilliantly and triumphantly with a crowd-pleasing finale. Happy 200th birth year to a gentleman who pursued his dreams and shaped generations of classical musicians.

– *Christopher Kingdon Schrade James*

Flute Concerto in D Major

Carl Reinecke (1824 - 1910)

Carl Reinecke (1824-1910) was a German composer during the Romantic period. In addition to composing, he was a well known Conductor and Pianist.

Some of Reinecke's most celebrated works are his flute pieces, such as the "Udine" Flute Sonata, and his Flute Concerto in D Major. Being a flutist himself, the pieces really showcase how well he truly knew and understood the flute's capabilities.

Reinecke is famous for his seamless composition of melodies, which fit in with the rich orchestral

accompaniment, and virtuosic passages, which are evident in his Flute Concerto in D Major, Op. 283. This piece belongs to the German Romantic style and has similarities to the styles of his contemporaries, Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann, with some nods to composers such as Johannes Brahms.

The first movement is marked “Allegro Molto Moderato”. The introduction begins with what one could describe as a dreamy aesthetic. The flute solo and the rich texture throughout the orchestra then takes us through a very common Romantic style key change - D Major to B major, which is then pushed into the lyrical, but lively second theme, in A Major. The harmonic language pulls listeners through various adventurous lines and melodies. Finally, we are brought back to a very satisfying recapitulation in the home key. The final cadence ends very gently and softly, with a similar feeling to the introduction.

The second movement is marked “Lento e mesto”, which can be translated as “slow and sad”. This is quite a contrast to the dreamy, joyful mood of the previous movement. The melody throughout is sorrowful and

melancholy, but quite beautiful. The movement feels very introverted at times, as the flute sings out the melody against the dark sounds of the bass, and is joined at times by various string instruments in the orchestra. In the end, it concludes in a happy, positive modulation to a major key.

The final movement is marked “Finale: Moderato,” and was composed in Rondo form. The winds and brass set the stage for the flute solo, which enters with the joyful and triumphant main theme, which will soon be repeated throughout. The theme leads to a lyrical second section, in a brand new key, before returning to the joyful main section. Being in Rondo form, there are various diversions between new sections and the main theme. The ending comes with a fast tempo change, leading to the final conversational, quick flourishes between the flute and the orchestra. Finally, the orchestra and flute both finish together, in a very exuberant ending.

— *Sarah Abrams*

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, op.90

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Drawn from the Preface to the Henle edition, by editor Robert Pascall

Brahms composed the Third Symphony during his summer retreat in Wiesbaden (a spa town close to Frankfurt), and described it as “the Wiesbaden Symphony” at times. Even before its premiere it attracted other monikers, including the Eroica (by the conductor Hans Richter, probably because Beethoven’s third symphony has that title).

Speculations in the Brahms literature concerning the inspiration behind the Third Symphony are especially wide ranging, whether similarities with Schumann’s music or that of Wagner. It has been connected to the F-A-F (frei aber froh, or ‘free but happy’ as he used to relate to his friend Joachim in letters about their relationships). Brahms biographer Walter Blume described the opening melody as a “literally transcribed Yodel” from the border of Bavaria with Austria. Others have linked it to Romantic-era nationalist sentiments, to

unite Europe's German-speaking lands at the same time other nations (Czech, et al) were looking to form their own nations. Just about all of it is pure speculation, since Brahms indicated none of it, as was his habit: he believed solemnly in the concept of "absolute music."

However, Brahms' muse Clara Schumann wrote:

"What a work, what poetry, the most harmonious atmosphere throughout, all the movements forming a single whole, a heartbeat, each movement a jewel! - How one is surrounded from beginning to end by the secret magic of life of the forest! I couldn't say which movement I liked the best. In the first I delight straightaway in the gleam of awaking day, how the sunbeams glisten through the trees, how everything springs to life, everything breathes joy - so blissful! In the second, a pure idyll, I listen to those praying at the little forest chapel, the purling of the stream, the play of the midges and beetles as they swarm and fluster around one, so that one feels totally bound up in the bliss of nature."

The great violinist Joseph Joachim wrote of the finale:

“The last movement of your Symphony has a powerful and lasting effect ... when thinking of the second theme in C major, the brave, bold swimmer comes to me unbidden ... his strong heroic strokes ... to the goal in spite of the elements which keep pounding at him! Alas, poor mortal - but how beautiful and reconciling is the apotheosis, a release in death.”

— *Reuben Blundell*