

Conductor's Commentary On The Music

On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring

Frederick Delius (January 29, 1862 – June 10, 1934)

A tone poem composed in 1912 by Frederick Delius, *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* was written between 1911 and 1912, and was first performed in Leipzig on October 2, 1913. The work opens with a slow three-bar sequence; its first theme is an exchange of cuckoo calls, first for oboe, then for divided strings. The second theme of the piece is scored for first violins, and is taken from a Norwegian folk song, "In Ola Valley", which was brought to his attention by the Australian composer and folk-song arranger Percy Grainger (the main theme is also quoted by Edvard Grieg in his *19 Norwegian Folksongs*, Op. 66). The clarinet returns with the cuckoo calls before the piece ends in pastoral fashion.

On Hearing the First Cuckoo and *Summer Night on the River*, both composed at about the same time, along with *The Walk to the Paradise Garden* (an intermezzo extracted from *A Village Romeo and Juliet*) earned their composer a reputation as a maker principally of pastoral miniatures. After performing these pieces in a concert in 1907 the English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, quickly assumed the title of Delius' greatest protagonist, one he retained for the rest of his life.

Born in Yorkshire, England to parents who had come from Germany, Fritz Theodor Albert Delius' home was a musically cultured environment. His father was a prosperous businessman in the wool industry. As a boy, Albert (called "Fritz") learned to play violin and piano before reaching his teenage years. After attending grammar school and two years at the International College near London, followed by an apprenticeship in his father's business, he convinced his father to help him move to Florida and start his own business, which was to cultivate oranges. Still passionate about music, Frederick purchased a piano, then sought out a theory teacher by the name of Thomas Ward. In addition to the influences from Ward, he became intrigued by and absorbed in the sounds of the singing he heard from the Negro field workers. These sounds were later documented in his 1886 composition, *Florida Suite*. Now, with the confidence that he could teach music on his own, he moved to Danville, Virginia.

With another appeal to his father for assistance, Delius' father underwrote a full music education, enrolling him at the Leipzig Conservatory, where he studied from 1886 to 1888. From there he went to Paris where he spent ten years. Soon he was writing larger, more substantive works than the small-scale songs and instrumental pieces which characterized his output, including operas, large symphonic poems and incidental music for plays. During this time he became good friends with the German painter, Helene Jelka Rosen, whom he met in Paris in 1896. The next year he moved in to share her house at Grez-sur-Loing, near Fontainebleau. This became his home for the rest of his life. He and Jelka married in September 1903, by which time he had anglicized the spelling of his name to Frederick.

By the early 1920s Delius' health began to deteriorate. Even though his mental health remained intact, he began to lose the use of his limbs and he was going blind. His final works were completed with the assistance of composer Percy Grainger, and a young musician from Yorkshire, Eric Fenby, who lived with the Deliuses and dictated several of his works. Frederick Delius died at Grez-sur-Loing, his wife outliving him by just one year. They are buried at Limpsfield, Surrey, England.

Spring Pastoral

Mary Howe (April 4, 1882 – September 14, 1964)

The inspiration of *Spring Pastoral* was a poem by Elinor Wylie, and was originally composed as a chorus for three-part women's chorus with piano in 1936. It was published two years later. It has been variously described as by one critic as "...a wistful tone poem, adroitly scored with a keen sense of instrumental color..." and by another as "...delicate and sensitive, yet intensely felt composition, full of the mood and emotion its title evokes..." Although written in 1936, the piece reveals the composer's daring and independence when it comes to harmonies – it is unashamedly imbued with clusters of sound usually associated with music written much later in the twentieth century.

American-born composer, Mary Howe, is a native of Richmond, Virginia. From her early childhood she showed a great interest in music, but as she matured that interest intensified. Her musical training started with piano studies. Then, in 1904 she travelled to Dresden, Germany and began coaching under Richard Burmeister, a former student of the great Franz Liszt. After nearly ten years she returned to the U.S., and began giving recitals in a around Washington, D.C. Washington became her home. In 1912 she married, and over time raised a family.

Howe eventually entered the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, and studied composition and piano. Soon, she became acquainted with another outstanding piano student, Anne Hull, with whom she formed a duo piano team that toured from 1920-1935. While performing actively as a pianist, Howe's pursuit of composition continued, and in 1922 she earned her diploma in composition. She once wrote, "... it was not until 1924 that I really started composing. I can only say it was because gates had been opened and I wanted to go into those fields and pastures...that had always seemed the property of other people. I used to love piano playing, and wrestling with the difficulties, and the great effort to interpret. But when I began to compose I felt I had the right to be there doing it because what I worked on was myself." In 1933 her formal training ended after a brief period of study with the renowned pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger.

With roots firmly set in the Washington, DC community, Mary Howe became actively involved in its musical life. Her primary interest was the National Symphony Orchestra which she founded in 1931 in collaboration with her husband, Walter Bruce Howe and several like-minded civic leaders. Eventually she established the orchestra's Women's Committee. The list of her associations includes the Friends of Music in the Library of Congress (first known as the Chamber Music Society of Washington), the Society of Women Composers, the National Federation of Music Clubs and the Friday Morning Music Club, to name a few.

Bassoon concerto in A Minor (PV 72)

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi (March 4, 1678 – July 28, 1741)

It is puzzling that Vivaldi should have written as many as 39 concertos for the bassoon, especially because the bassoon wasn't generally a fashionable solo instrument in this period! Perhaps he wrote them for a specific player, but, if so, the identity of that musician remains unknown. Clearly, however, Vivaldi demonstrates a thorough understanding of the instrument's possibilities. Whatever the circumstances which prompted the composition of these concertos, they absolutely constitute a rewarding body of music and one of the many demonstrations of Vivaldi's remarkable ability to produce seemingly infinite variations (and there really is variety here) on a basically simple formula.

Not profound, but inventive and engaging, this is music written to please, and it still does so unflinchingly centuries later. For the soloist, the music is technically demanding, and these concertos continue to present challenges for modern day professional bassoonists.

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice, Italy, on March 4, 1678. His nickname was *Il Prete Rosso* ("The Red Priest") because of his auburn hair. Vivaldi is recognized as one of the greatest Baroque composers, and his influence during his lifetime was widespread throughout Europe. Vivaldi is known mainly for composing instrumental concertos, especially for the violin, as well as sacred choral works and over 40 operas. His best known work is a series of violin concertos known as *The Four Seasons*. His first music teacher was his father, Giovanni Battista Vivaldi. The elder Vivaldi was a well-respected violinist, employed at the church of St. Mark's. There is no definite documentation, but it is presumed that as a boy Antonio had several other teachers, among them the composer Giovanni Legrenzi.

Trained for clerical service as well as a musical life, after going through the various introductory stages, Vivaldi was ordained a priest in March 1703. His active career, however, was devoted to music. In the autumn of 1703 he was appointed as a violin teacher at the Ospitale della Pietà in Venice. A few years later he was made conductor of the orchestra at the same institution. Under Vivaldi's direction, this orchestra gave many brilliant concerts and achieved an international reputation.

Vivaldi remained at the Pietà until 1740. But his long years there were broken by the numerous trips he took, for professional purposes, to Italian and foreign cities. He went, among other places, to Vienna, Austria, from 1729 to 1730 and to Amsterdam, Netherlands, from 1737 to 1738. Within Italy he traveled to various cities to direct performances of his operas. He left Venice for the last time in 1740. Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances, he died a pauper in Vienna the next year.

Cello Concerto in D Major

Josef Haydn (March 31, 1732 – May 31, 1809)

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. It was only when the manuscript was rediscovered after World War II in the cellars of the Austrian National Library, signed and dated by Haydn was its authenticity 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. This sort of writing, though not unprecedented, was very much on the cutting edge in the 1780s.

The original orchestration for the accompaniment to the concerto called for pairs of oboes and horns and strings. In today's performance you will hear the orchestration by François-Auguste Gevaert, calling for flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons and horns in pairs, along with strings.

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. It was the more adventurous composers like Vivaldi, or cellists like Boccherini, who gave it star billing.

Haydn was a leading composer of the Classical period, called the 'Father of the Symphony' and 'Father of the String Quartet'. Although often called Franz Joseph, he went only by his second name, spelled in German 'Josef'. He was born in Rohrau, Austria, a village near the border with Hungary. His father, Matthias, was a wheelwright (a person who made or repaired wheels) and served as "Marktrichter", an position akin to village mayor. Haydn's mother Maria, had previously worked as a cook in the palace of Count Harrach, the presiding aristocrat of Rohrau. Neither parent could read music, but Mathias was an enthusiastic folk musician who taught himself to play the harp. According to Haydn's later reminiscences, his childhood family was extremely musical, and frequently sang together and with their neighbors.

Josef had two musician brothers, Michael, himself a highly regarded composer, and Johann Evangelist, a tenor singer. A life-long resident of Austria, the composer spent most of his career as a court musician for the wealthy Eszterházy family on their remote estate. Being isolated from other composers and trends in music, he was, as he put it, "forced to become original."

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.

Voices of Spring Waltzes, Op. 410

Johann Strauss, Jr (October 25, 1825 – June 3, 1899)

Voices of Spring ("Die Frühlingsstimmen Waltzer") is one of but a handful of the most famous waltzes ever created by Strauss. Composed in 1882, this waltz has been captivating audiences ever since. It was written to include a soprano solo - most likely for Bianca Bianchi, a talented and well known coloratura soprano during the time of Strauss. However, its Viennese debut was very poorly received. It wasn't until the waltz was performed in Russia that it gained its much deserved attention. Soon thereafter, Strauss transcribed the *Voices of Spring* Waltz for piano. His newly revised work garnered him critical acclaim; its fame reaching far beyond Vienna.

While there are no pauses or movements in the *Voices of Spring* Waltz, the waltz can actually be divided into three parts of two waltz pairs based on the musical ideas presented in the work. The first, and most familiar of the three, starts the piece. Its declarative opening phrase gives way to its famous, sweeping melody. As it progresses, Strauss introduces and second section, before repeating the opening theme. The second portion of the waltz has an almost pastoral sound. Its gentle melodies and harmonies are a delightful contrast to the previous waltz pair. While the third section remains the most varied and least restrictive, it seems to fit perfectly within the waltz. Finally, Strauss re-introduces the opening theme to finish the piece. Today the Reston Community Orchestra is playing a condensed version of this popular piece, arranged for small orchestra by Adolphe Dumont. (To hear the original version, one should watch the Youtube video of soprano Kathleen Battle performing it with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic, recorded in 1987).

Strauss was born in St. Ulrich near Vienna, Austria, to the famous composer Johann Strauss I. His father did not want him to become a musician but rather a banker. Nevertheless, the younger Strauss studied the violin secretly as a child with the first violinist of his father's orchestra. When his father discovered his son secretly practicing on a violin one day, he gave him a severe whipping, saying that he was going to beat the music out of the boy. It seems that rather than trying to avoid a Strauss

rivalry, the elder Strauss only wanted his son to escape the rigors of a musician's life. It was only when his father abandoned his family for a mistress, that he was able to concentrate fully on a career as a composer with the support of his mother.

Eventually his fame surpassed his father's, and he was to become one of the most popular of waltz composers of the era. He toured Austria–Hungary, Poland, and Germany extensively with his orchestra. He applied for the *Music Director of the Royal Court Balls* position, which he eventually attained in 1863, after being denied several times before for his frequent brushes with the local authorities.

In 1853, due to constant mental and physical demands, Strauss suffered a nervous breakdown. He took a seven-week vacation in the countryside in the summer of that year, on the advice of doctors. Johann's younger brother Josef was persuaded by his family to abandon his career as an engineer and take command of Johann's orchestra in the absence of the latter.

In the 1870s, Strauss and his orchestra toured the United States, where he took part in the Boston Festival at the invitation of bandmaster Patrick Gilmore and was the lead conductor in a 'Monster Concert' of over 1000 performers, performing his "Blue Danube" waltz, amongst other pieces, to great acclaim.

Most of the Strauss works that are performed today may once have existed in a slightly different form, as Eduard Strauss, the only surviving brother of the three, destroyed much of the original Strauss orchestral archives in a furnace factory in Vienna in 1907. This was because of an earlier pact between him and his brother that whoever outlived the other was to destroy their works, thus preventing them from being claimed by other composers.

Strauss was diagnosed with double pneumonia in the spring of 1899, and died at the age of 73 in Vienna, where he is buried.