

Belgrade Philharmonic  
Season 2021-22  
*We Have Really Missed You*

**Friday, 26 November 2021**

**Howard Griffiths**  
**Ziyu He**, violin

**Felix Mendelssohn**  
*Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, op. 27

Duration: around 13 minutes

**Alban Berg**  
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

*Andante – Allegretto*  
*Allegro – Andante*

Duration: around 30 minutes

**Edward Elgar**  
*Enigma Variations*, Op. 36

Duration: around 30 minutes

Goethe's two poems, *Calm Sea* and *The Prosperous Voyage*, were an inspiration to many composers; Beethoven wrote his *Cantata Op. 112* that unites the two poems, Schubert wrote a solo song *Calm Sea*, and **Felix Mendelssohn** (1809-1847), inspired by Beethoven, wrote the concert overture *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*.

Although until then Mendelssohn had seen the sea only once in his life, he created a vivid picture of nature. The initial is characterized by the atmosphere of loneliness, fear, and deathly silence among the sailors on the ship who are reconciled to their destiny. A sign of hope is the unexpected sound of a bird, which means that land is close. He hints at a happy section in which the excitement gradually grows, the fanfares announce salvation, and the sound of the orchestra rushes to greet the celebration. Their euphoria is interrupted for a moment by the hymn of gratitude, which gradually turns into a lyrical ending, depicting the joy and relief of the sailors, while the occasional bird song is heard.

Just before his death, and in parallel with his work on the opera *Lulu*, Austrian composer **Alban Berg** (1885-1935) completed his last and most popular instrumental work, the *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*. It was commissioned by Luis Krasner, while in the score the composer left a dedication to Manon Gropius, the daughter of the famous architect Walter Gropius and Alma Mahler Gropius, who passed away a year earlier.

This kind of requiem for her youth and beauty is conceived in a two-part form with two sections each. In his letter to Arnold Schoenberg, Berg called the sections of the first movement *Prelude* and *Scherzo*, and the sections of the second *Cadence* and *Coral Variations*, thus determining their character. The stylistic direction of this concert was the result of all the phases that Berg had gone through as a composer: from late Romanticism, through atonal, and later dodecaphonic music and the prevailing tonality, merging everything into a single whole.

According to the author's idea that the first movement represents life and the second death and transfiguration, the citation procedures that have been adequately applied are also interesting. That is how the melody of the Austrian folk song *Bird on a Plum Tree* was woven into the *Scherzo*, which speaks of the joy of a young girl, whose demise quite unexpectedly makes the most dramatic part of the first movement. The second movement begins with a solo cadence in which the motif B-A-C-H stands out, followed by a quote from a choral by J. S. Bach, *It is enough, Lord, if it is according to your will*, which in that way once again connects

Berg's realization with a great example. The melody of the chorale becomes the theme for the final choral variations in which the violin gets a completely new sound, supernatural and eternal.

The most popular work of British composer **Edward Elgar** (1857-1934) is certainly the *Enigma Variations for Orchestra*, which brought the author international recognition. After its London premiere in 1899, the work has had numerous performances and has been recorded more than 60 times to date.

*Enigma Variations* is dedicated to the author's friends, whose individual characters he portrayed in each of the 14 variations that culminate in a grand finale. These musical portraits include Elgar himself and his wife. In the score, each variation is marked with the initials, name or nickname of each of the author's friends. The idea for composing the work arose one evening, when Elgar, tired from all-day lectures, sat down at the piano. He played a melody that his wife liked and so he started to improvise, making a series of variations, with which he tried to show the characters of individual friends. Then he expanded and orchestrated the whole work, and *Enigma Variations* was created.

The main theme is entitled *Enigma*, and the origin of the name is never defined, except through the interpretation that there is a hidden melody in the theme, which needs to be recognized. The unusual melodic contours of G Major in the main theme are interpreted as a reflection of the author's introspection. Then various portraits are arranged so that in the finale the author returns to his theme, which is named after his nickname - E.D.U., with reminiscences on the theme of his wife and close friend and publisher, presented in the 9th variation, as two people who have had the greatest impact on Elgar's life and work.

The author himself stated that *this work, which began in the spirit of humor and continued with deep seriousness, contains sketches of the composer's friends. It can be understood that these personalities comment or reflect on the original topic, and each of them is an attempt to solve the Enigma, because the topic is so called. Sketches are not portraits, but each variation contains a distant idea, based on a certain person or an event, known only to certain people. This is the basis of the composition, but the work can also be heard as a purely musical piece, regardless of its non-musical context.*

Danica Maksimović

