

Belgrade Philharmonic
Season 2021/22
We Have Really Missed You

Friday, February 11, 2022

Gabriel Feltz

Carl Maria von Weber
Oberon, overture

Duration: around 10 minutes

Johannes Brahms

Variations on Haydn's Theme

Thema. Chorale St. Antoni. Andante
Variation I. Poco più animato (Andante con moto)
Variation II. Più vivace (Vivace)
Variation III. Con moto
Variation IV. Andante con moto (Andante)
Variation V. Vivace (Poco presto)
Variation VI. Vivace
Variation VII. Grazioso
Variation VIII. Presto non troppo (Poco presto)
Finale. Andante

Duration: around 18 minutes

Johannes Brahms

Symphony No. 3 Op. 90, in F major

Allegro con brio
Andante
Poco allegretto
Allegro

Duration: around 33 minutes

When he began work on his last opera ***Oberon***, Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) tried to repeat the success of *The Marksman*, with a combination of folk opera and romantic melodrama, through the use of spoken dialogue. Having received a commission from London's Covent Garden, despite his poor health, the composer accepted it for financial reasons and from the offered themes of Faust and Oberon he chose the latter. The opera, in three acts, with an English libretto, had its premiere in 1826, less than two months before the author's death. It was a triumph, followed by many further productions, and a translation into German.

Oberon is based on the German epic poem of the same name by Christoph Martin Wieland, which itself originated from the French 13th century epic romance *Huon de Bordeaux*. It is about Oberon, the king of the elves, who had a discussion with his wife about who is less faithful in marriage, men or women. Oberon vowed not to reconcile with her until he found a couple who remained faithful to each other despite the temptation. With the inclusion of the sprite Puck and the magic of evil fairies, the story draws clear parallels with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In Weber's music, we hear for the first time a full Romantic orchestra. As music director in Prague and Dresden, the composer had a great influence in expanding the orchestra ensemble and his approach to orchestration influenced Hector Berlioz and also other composers after him. In his famous study of orchestration, Berlioz cited examples from the opera *Oberon* and what his followers admired was the ability to single out and explore the soul of each individual instrument.

The overture begins with a simple but mystical call of the horn, a reference to the magic horn that plays a central role in the opera story. The reappearance of trumpet and horn calls anticipates Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung*, while the laughter of fairies in the wooden wind instruments is associated with passages from Richard Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel* and the stage music of Felix Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The overture ends virtuously, with the reinforcement of three trombones, with whose support the final chords of the overture bring the grandeur of an expanded nineteenth-century symphony orchestra.

Although **Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897) showed interest in symphonic music in his early creative period, he finished his first symphony only at the age of 43. The reason for that was the constant comparison with the works of great composers, especially Beethoven, who at the beginning of the 19th century had become a paradigmatic example of a symphonist and the standard to which everyone else was compared. The justification of his fear is best shown by the fact that Brahms' *First Symphony* was referred to by critics as Beethoven's *Tenth*, his Second was compared to Beethoven's *Pastoral*, while the famous conductor Hans Richter characterized the Third as *Brahms' Eroica*. Although such comparisons bothered the author, they were in fact acknowledgments that Brahms's works shared Beethoven's genius and mastery of composing.

Brahms' ***Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn*** was created in 1873 and the composer was encouraged to complete his *First Symphony* three years later and was also encouraged in his work on mastering a large instrumentation. His *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* were recorded as the first independent variations for orchestra in the history of music. They were

premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic, with the author conducting. The structure of the work consists of a theme, written in B flat major, eight variations and a finale. The origin of the theme has not been determined with certainty: Brahms' friend, a librarian in the Vienna Philharmonic Society, Carl Ferdinand Pohl, showed the composer a piece titled *Divertimento No. 1*, which was then considered to belong to Haydn but today is believed to have been written by Haydn's student Ignaz Pleyel. The theme of the second movement of this work, *St. Anthony Chorale*, Brahms used for a series of variations, which he originally wrote for two pianos and then orchestrated them. Eight variations follow the formal, and to a lesser extent harmonious structure of the theme, each with a different character. Some are reminiscent of the forms and techniques of past epochs, while others show the masterful stamp of a combination of counterpoint techniques and a Romantic style. The variation technique becomes more complicated and culminates in the final form of a *Passacaglia* (through counterpoint variations on a theme that is presented in the deepest section), which ends with a triumphal coda.

Brahms wrote **Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 90** in 1883 when he was on holiday in Wiesbaden, where he was revising the music he wrote for Goethe's *Faust*. These reworked fragments gradually grew into the central parts of the four-movement symphony. Symphony No. 3 was premiered that same year, 1883, and was performed by the Vienna Philharmonic under the baton of Hans Richter. The first performance was a resounding success, and the famous Eduard Hanslick rated this achievement as Brahms' most perfect symphony, the most compact in form and the clearest in detail. Most of the artistic directors of large music institutions obviously agreed with this, and the symphony was soon performed in Berlin, Leipzig, Meiningen, and Wiesbaden. The fact that the author himself considered the symphony to be too widespread and too performed speaks of the work's great popularity. Despite the fact that her excessive popularity irritated Brahms, he himself was aware of the indisputable value of this masterpiece.

The dramatic tension brought by the introductory theme of the first movement grew out of the third, so-called *Rhine Symphony* by Robert Schumann, Brahms' great friend and mentor. The dualism of major and minor determines the character of this movement, but also the work as a whole. The second movement on the dramaturgical level of the entire symphony is a lyrical break, in which the clarinet plays the role of soloist. The most famous and most popular part of the symphony is the third movement, in which the cello delivers the central, lyrical theme. The last movement of extremely great energy and strong character again brings the contrast of major and minor and sharp contrasts of thematic content that culminate and are resolved only in the coda, by repeating Schumann's theme from the first movement.

Asja Radonjić, M.Sc.