



The Music Department Presents

Skidmore Orchestra

Conducted by Glen Cortese

Tuesday, March 5th, 7:00 PM
Arthur Zankel Music Center
Helen Filene Ladd Concert Hall

Program

“King Lear” Overture, Op. 4

Hector Berlioz
(1803-1869)

Violin Concerto No. 2 in D minor,
Op. 22
II. Romance

Henryk Wieniawski
(1835-1880)

Rebecca Merber, violin

Piano Concerto No. 5 in Eb Major,
Op. 73

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Seth Spital, piano

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 3 in Eb Major, Op. 97
 (“Rhenish”)

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

- I. *Lebhaft*
- II. *Scherzo: Sehr mäßig*
- III. *Nicht schnell*
- IV. *Feierlich*
- V. *Lebhaft*

“King Lear” Overture, Op. 4

Shakespeare’s dark tragedy was the inspiration for Hector Berlioz’s King Lear Overture, composed in the spring of 1831. Encompassing the atmosphere of the play and filled with leitmotifs, the piece unfolds as a compact tone poem.

It begins with an operatic recitative in the low strings which is reminiscent of the final movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. On one level, we hear the bold, authoritative proclamation of a king. Yet there is also something unsettling about this statement. It wanders with a demented restlessness. The plaintive voice of the oboe introduces a second theme filled with aching lament. This new theme emerges over hushed pizzicato and is met by wispy, angelic strands in the violins. When the opening motif returns, it is accompanied by a strange five-beat rhythm in the timpani—an allusion to the ancient drumbeat which announced the arrival of French monarchs.

As the Overture unfolds, the darkness of Lear comes into conflict with the shimmering light of Cordelia. As with *Symphonie fantastique*, which Berlioz completed a year earlier, it's a battle between redemption and destruction. At one terrifying moment, the tonal center seems to disintegrate completely and the instrumental voices seem unsure how to proceed. Wrenching dissonances and a turbulent, demonic "desecration" of Cordelia's previously youthful theme in the final moments evoke King Lear's ultimate mental and emotional breakdown.

Concerto No. 2 for Violin in D minor, op. 22

Born into a distinguished family of Polish musicians, Wieniawski was the toast of the world of eminent violinists in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today, as with most virtuosos who composed modestly, his name is familiar mainly to violinists, who play his formidable etudes and salon works. The significant exception, though, is his second concerto for violin and orchestra—a mainstay of that repertoire. If anyone may be said to have played himself to death, it is surely he. For his life consisted, from an early age, of incessant touring that would exhaust anyone, not to speak of one with fatal heart disease.

Recognized early on as a prodigy of startling talent, he was concertizing from an impossibly early age, and wangled an exception (he too young, as well as a Polish national) for admission to the Paris Conservatory at the age of eight. Leaving after a little more than four years there, he began his serious "adult" career, touring with his younger brother in Russia and Central Europe.

Wanting to compose, he soon went back to the Conservatory for composition lessons, and then it was off to an extensive career as a traveling soloist. He did settle down somewhat for a while in St. Petersburg, Russia, teaching at the conservatory there, at the behest of Anton Rubinstein. During his twelve years there, he composed most of his best works, including the second concerto, and developed a lasting personal and professional association with the great pianist.

At the end of his tenure in Russia he began touring again in earnest, with Rubenstein as his concert companion, starting with a remarkable tour of North America. They played an amazing 215 concerts the first year alone. And he didn't stick to the big Eastern cities, either. In the second year of the tour he went as far as California, playing concerts literally all over. He even concertized in such relatively obscure places for the time as Peoria, Illinois and Evansville, Indiana. The traveling conditions in 1872 in the US must have been ferocious, but it was typical of Wieniawski's zeal to endure them. It is said that he was always almost broke, owing to his severe gambling addiction, plus he had seven children and a wife to support. His heart condition was exacerbated by subsequent years of intense touring, and after breaking down completely in several concerts, he played his farewell concert in Odessa. He succumbed at the age of forty-five in Moscow. His friends had to play a benefit concert in St. Petersburg shortly before he died to pay off his life insurance premium to avoid leaving his family in penury. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

His musical style was a reflection of the man and the way that he played. Possessed of a superlative technique, he amazed with his mastery. Every advanced tool of technical "wizardry" associated with the legendary violin virtuosos was apparently of no challenge to him. And yet, the intensity of his emotion and expressivity is what seems to have impressed the musical establishment the most. The best performers and teachers who heard him were consistently effusive in their praise of his uniqueness, his warm tone, his intensity, and his ability to practically hypnotize his audiences with his playing. In summation, he was hailed as one of the great geniuses of the violin of all time, and true successor to the immortal, Paganini.

The second violin concerto—dedicated to the great violin virtuoso, Sarasate—bears all these marks, and more. A work of swaggering Romanticism, it

exhibits all of the earmarks of the times: extravagant, expressive lyricism, borne by stunning technical requirements. Simply put, it is a perfect example of a composition conceived to showcase the essence of the violinist/composer.

The first movement begins in a moody, stormy vein, with brief solos from members of the wind section. After an extensive orchestra introduction, the soloist explores this material, replete with all the virtuoso fireworks one might expect. The lyrical contrasting idea follows, ending with more energetic closing ideas. But, then a most unusual event occurs: unlike almost ninety-nine percent of all concertos, the movement ends without a development or recapitulation. The movement segues smoothly after the coda directly into the second movement. Wieniawski simply, like all capable artists, followed his own lead, and in this case, saw no need in saying more. Proceeding right into the middle, slow movement, the solo violin explores the heartfelt lyricism that one would expect from a mid-century Slavic master.

The last movement, “with fire,” is unequivocally that, beginning as a kind of cadenza for the soloist, at breakneck speed. After dashing along madly for a while, the mood suddenly moderates and the closing section ensues. Wieniawski marks it as *à la Zingara* (in the Gypsy manner), and it swaggers with all of the charm that implies—familiar to many from Brahms’ occasional exploration of the style. Attentive listeners will spot the employment, here, of the idea from the lyrical, second section of the first movement. A coda in the best “Wieniawski” style soon brings this essay in the finest ultra-Romantic style to a dashing end, reminding us all of the genius of the “lesser masters.”

~Wm. E. Runyan

Piano Concerto No. 5 in Eb Major, op. 73 ("Emperor")

It is Mozart, of course, to whom we owe the creation of the mature, symphonic piano concerto. Following in his stead, Beethoven wrote five works in this genre; the first two were composed in the 1790s and owe much to the example of Mozart. The third, in C minor, was completed in 1803, around the time of his second symphony, and it is a far darker and impassioned work than the previous ones. By the time of the fourth

concerto, finished in 1806, Beethoven had undergone remarkable growth as a composer. He had resolutely fought his way out of the deep suicidal depression occasioned by his increasing deafness. The monumental *Eroica* (third symphony), his opera, *Fidelio*, and the *Rasumovsky* string quartets had been created, and revealed the musical power, psychological depth, and progressive imagination of the mature composer. As such, the fourth piano concerto occupies a significant place in his *oeuvre*, with the rôle of the piano assuming greater strength and independence than in the earlier concertos. The fifth concerto (the moniker, “Emperor,” has no real meaning, having been attached later in circumstances not related to the composer, although it must be admitted, it’s not inappropriate, at all, if you must have a nickname) thus stands at the end of his efforts in the genre. It is a major work, not only in its intrinsic artistry, but also marks the culmination of an extraordinary period of inspiration and production on the part of the composer. That time began more or less in 1803 with the great third symphony, the *Eroica*, went on to include other major works in the “heroic style,” and ended in 1809 with the fifth piano concerto. Many of them are in the key of Eb major, which seems to have been Beethoven’s key of choice when essaying a bold, dynamic, confident work.

As he matured, Beethoven, like many great artists pushed the limits of the artistic conventions of his milieu; one has only to think of the challenging nature for performer and listener alike of the late string quartets and piano sonatas. That was certainly true of many aspects of his fourth piano concerto, and even more so for the fifth. The latter is a significant work in all regards, not the least for its great length—one of the longest of his symphonies and concertos—but not a measure too long for his formidable execution of the musical architecture. It unfortunately marks another milestone: it was the first of his concertos that he did not perform, owing to the significant deterioration of his hearing, which made collaboration with the orchestra impossible.

Like the fourth concerto it begins unconventionally, the piano playing the opening bars with the orchestra. The beginning consists simply of three great hammer strokes in the orchestra, after each of which the piano plays a short roulade of arpeggios, trills, and other cadenza-like gestures, in a style not unworthy of Chopin. The orchestra immediately follows with a vigorous statement of the main theme, a simple, but stately one, in the Beethovenian

tradition, and not inappropriate for the grand nature of the work. Soon, the quieter second theme comes, first in the minor in the woodwinds, and immediately in the major in the horns. The orchestra works its way through to the end of the section and the piano finally enters with a scale, a trill, and the main theme from the opening measures. There then ensues one of Beethoven's longest movements, in which the soloist and orchestra engage in a dialogue that stunningly exemplifies the creativity and genius of the composer, as they work out the themes on their way to the recapitulation—heralded by a repetition of the hallmark opening chords and piano flourishes.

The profound serenity, beauty, and reflective eloquence of the slow movement stand at the apex of the composer's gift in this voice. The gentle main theme is primarily stepwise, rather like a simple chorale, played first by the orchestra. The rich, freshness of the opening is accomplished in no small part by Beethoven's choice of key—B major, a remote key, but really an enharmonic version of one of his signature harmonic relationships. The piano enters, and engages in a series of explorations of the material, in a free and almost improvisatory fashion, interspersed with meditative, straightforward statements of the eloquent theme. This sublime, discursive mood continues—certainly no one is in hurry for it to end—but it surely must, and the composer again pulls out a bit of trickery to bring on the finale. A soft, sustained B natural in the bassoons and horns descends to Bb, the strong note in music that psychologically takes us to Eb, the main key of the concerto, and where we must go for the last movement. But the intent is mysterious: we hear a brand new theme in the piano, softly and deliberately stated, and then, without notice, we vigorously plunge straightway into the happy last movement with that new theme its subject. It's a romping, stomping affair which some have compared to a rough German dance—it's certainly in the vein of his seventh symphony, which he would compose two years later.

The shape is simple—only a diversion in the middle interrupts this dancing, active material. There, the pianist explores briefly a few fresh keys and contrasting ideas, but soon enough, the driving, dancing fun resumes, as the smashing conclusion seems to near. One more trick, though: gradually the intensity appears to be waning, not growing, and a quiet duet between the soloist and the timpani portends a tranquil ending. Not so—for a triumphal

outburst in Beethoven's best manner from the whole orchestra clinches the matter.

~Wm. E. Runyan

Symphony No. 3 in Eb Major, op. 97 ("Rhenish")

Schumann composed in almost all of the common genres, and notwithstanding his success in the larger forms, did perhaps his most respected work in song and piano literature. Known—at least during his lifetime—almost as much for his distinguished career as music critic and essayist, even today his analyses and commentaries lend valuable insights into the music of his milieu and times. He was a formidable pianist—his wife, Clara, even more so—and his contributions to the piano stand with those of Schubert, Chopin, and Brahms in artistic significance.

Schumann was a Romantic to the core, yet, withal, he had great respect for clarity, balance, and formal integrity so characteristic of the music of Classicism. It must be admitted, however, that to some degree his deep passions and emotional self-indulgences can be seen as aspects of a personality that ultimately broke down in the psychoses and pathologies that led to his early death in an institution. He was happy early on, however, and the years of his early marriage brought forth masterworks in spades, as his mind focused extraordinarily in narrow directions. Up to the time of his marriage to Clara he had composed exclusively music for the piano, a great corpus of work that is one of the century's important contributions to the literature for the instrument. But the joy and exuberance upon his marriage in 1840 led to a remarkable outpouring of songs—some 125 in that year alone.

Nevertheless, Schumann made important contributions to chamber and symphonic music, and his four symphonies are respected contributions to orchestral literature. He turned his talents to the genre—at Clara's enthusiastic encouragement—the very next year after the remarkable production of *Lieder* in 1840. His first two symphonies—No. 1 in Bb Major "Spring" and No. 4 in D Minor (it's complicated—don't ask) were the result, and the first is an especially exuberant celebration of the joy and optimism of that period—not at all prescient of the dark and tragic end to his life. The

third work did not appear until about five years later—all three composed while he and Clara were living in Leipzig. In 1850 they removed to Düsseldorf, a short distance down the Rhine from Cologne, where he took over leadership of important musical posts, to considerable acclaim and popularity. He had been there less than a month, when he visited the magnificent, imposing cathedral of Cologne—the putative inspiration for Symphony No. 3 in Eb Major, composed in November and early December, later that fall. More specifically, a subsequent visit in early November, the time of the elevation of the Archbishop of Cologne to cardinal, inspired the ecclesiastical solemnity of the fourth movement of the symphony. That movement is an added movement before the last movement, giving five movements in all—not that unusual, given Beethoven’s example in his sixth symphony, as well as Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique*.

The first movement is an energetic, effusive celebration of the Rhine River and the cathedral with a leaping, syncopated main theme that propels the whole movement. The horns, especially, inform the atmosphere with a heroic quality so associated with the works of Richard Strauss some forty years later. The gentle, undulating main section of the second movement is clearly an evocation of the flowing river. This is the traditional “dance” or *scherzo* movement of most symphonies, but here, takes the character of a gentle German *Ländler*. Schumann, being Schumann, can’t resist later taking the mood to a more forceful atmosphere, replete with the “heroic” horns, but it all ends peacefully. The third movement provides a serene interlude that reminds us of the nuance and subtle beauty of so many of Schumann’s *Lieder*. Harmonic richness and melodic invention beguile us, as the parade of winsome melodies pass before us. In a creative touch of unification, Schumann makes constant use of a little four-note chromatic ascending scale that connects the melodic passages and ties it all together—that idea getting the last word.

The interpolated fourth movement is perhaps the signature movement of the symphony, inspired by the Archbishop’s elevation. Schumann marked it as “in the character of a procession for a solemn ceremony.” That it is, and it begins with a chorale-like passage in the trombones and horns that majestically ascends into the sonic stratosphere—trombones, of course, evoking their long association with the church. The floating “solemn” harmonies are borne by the lower instruments that provide the “processional

steps.” The soaring main theme pervades throughout, with sections treated contrapuntally in the best ecclesiastic tradition. The Rhine River may be the central metaphor of the symphony, but the majestic Cologne cathedral is the spiritual focus, here.

The last movement is a spirited romp, with two dancing themes that cascade towards the conclusion. A stately pronouncement from the brass section briefly interrupts the dash to the end, and Schumann’s cheerful trip up the Rhine to Cologne joyfully concludes. The sad dementia that ultimately ended his life is thankfully little in evidence in this, one of his happiest times.

-Wm. E. Runyan

Personnel

FLUTE/PICCOLO

Lydia Watkins
Mackenzie Wicks
Emily Gross

OBOE

Eli Huttman
Jacqualine Burk

CLARINET/BASS CLARINET

Joel Egozy
Emma Lloyd

BASSOON

Daniel Liu
William Safford

HORN

Joshua Feldman
Micah Malone
Amy Baker
Patrice Malatestinic

VIOLIN I

Marlowe Jacques
Michael Emery
Sruti Ramaswamy
Michelle Stewart
Rebecca Merber
Jessica Bellflower
Julia Johnson McGuigan
Aili Teittinen-Gordon
Brooke Vincent
Olev Viro

VIOLIN II

Isabella Harellick
Josh Rodriguez
Alyson Slack
Elena Mathis
Jessica Bowen
Ava Albano
Marge Hickey
Betsy Kagey

TRUMPET

Wyn Jarvinen
Linden Amster

TROMBONE

Andrew Feldman
Emmett Leo
Amanda Middleton
Daniel Cordell

TUBA

Benjamin Lowder

TIMPANI AND PERCUSSION

James Holmes
Joshua Lucey
Arielle Lam

VIOLA

Jack Crisan
Stephani Emery
Emmanuelle Donaldson
Keegan Donlon
Adam Warner
Sue Nazzaro
Ray Bunkofsky

VIOLONCELLO

Zack Barnett
Jameson Platte
Ruth Wilson
Evan Weatherwax
Kara Duffy
Maddie Sokolowski
Maxwell Plenby

CONTRABASS

Noanddi Manigat
Luke Baker
Dave Irvin
Charles Seely

Upcoming Events

Schenectady-Saratoga Symphony Orchestra –
“Die Fledermaus”
Sunday, March 17, 3:00pm

“Salt” Micro-Opera
Friday, March 22, 7:00pm

Senior Piano Recital: Seth Spital
Saturday, March 30, 1:00pm

Senior Cello Recital: Zack Barnet
Saturday, March 30, 4:00pm

Senior Voice Recital: Lucrezia Zichichi
Friday, April 5, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Brass & Woodwind
Ensembles
Saturday, April 6, 1:00pm

Young Kim & Skidmore Pianists
Saturday, April 6, 3:00pm

Sr Voice Recital: Maggie Besthoff
Saturday, April 6, 7:00pm

Senior Cello Recital: Anna Cates
Sunday, April 7, 1:00pm

Senior Flute Recital: Lydia Watkins
Saturday, April 7, 4:00pm

Sr Voice Recital: Johnny Mulcahy
Sunday, April 7, 7:00pm

Sr Jazz Recital: Elan Stadelmann
Friday, April 12, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Big Band &
Vocal Soul Collective
Saturday, April 13, 7:00pm

Skidmore String Festival with the
Miró Quartet
Saturday, April 20, 7:30pm

Senior Piano Recitals: Raisa Ihnat &
Dylan Salinger
Sunday, April 21, 12:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Small Jazz
Ensembles
Tuesday, April 23, 7:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Chorus
Thursday, April 26, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: String
Ensembles
Friday, April 26, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Global Music
Showcase
Saturday, April 27, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Concert Band
Sunday, April 28, 1:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Guitar
Ensemble
Sunday, April 28, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Orchestra
Monday, April 29, 7:00pm