

August 21, 2022 - Dancing from Tonga to Vienna

Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

This season's opening concert begins with a wry and entertaining work by Dominick Argento, his *Royal Invitation*. This work was inspired by the appearance of Queen Sālote of Tonga at the coronation of British Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The Arizona Philharmonic then welcomes pianist Thomas Pandolfi for Mendelssohn's fine *Piano Concerto No. 1*. After intermission, to the most high-spirited of Beethoven symphonies, the joyous *Symphony No. 7*, which Richard Wagner famously called "the apotheosis of the dance."

Dominick Argento (1927-2019)

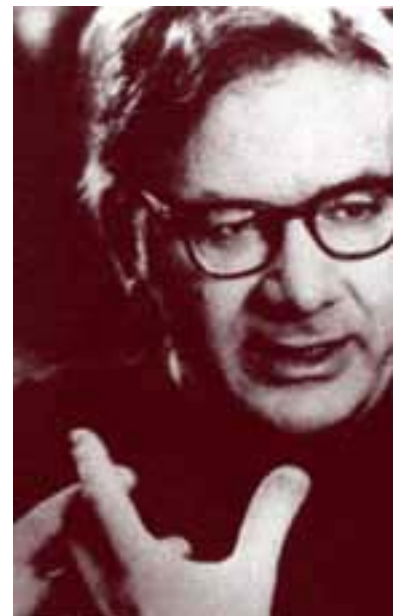
Royal Invitation (Homage to the Queen of Tonga)

The ballet Royal Invitation was composed in 1964, and the suite heard here was premiered on March 20, 1964, by the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Sipe.

Duration 23:00.

The late American composer Dominick Argento was born in York, Pennsylvania. After service as a cryptographer in World War II, he studied composition at Baltimore's Peabody conservatory, with additional studies in Italy and at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. In 1958, Argento moved to Minneapolis to take a position at the University of Minnesota, and he would spend the rest of his life in Minnesota. He is best-known as one of the leading American opera composers of the late 20th and 21st centuries, with some 13 operas to his credit. Argento is also acclaimed as a choral composer and for his art song cycles.

Royal Invitation, one of Argento's relatively few purely instrumental works, was conceived initially as a ballet, but has only been performed as a concert work in the suite heard here. It was inspired by a pair of queens: the newly-crowned Queen Elizabeth II of England and Queen Sālote Tupou III of Tonga. Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 was an event whose significance went beyond simply crowning a new British monarch. Britain at the time was still recovering from the



devastation of World War II, and the once all-powerful British Empire was clearly beginning to disintegrate. The lavish event, based upon 1000 years of English tradition, was the first coronation to be televised, and in fact was the first event to be televised live internationally. The coronation solidified support of the Royal family in Britain, and did much to restore Britain's reputation and pride worldwide. Among the thousands of invited guests were heads of state from the British Commonwealth and the remaining British Protectorates, including the South Pacific archipelago of Tonga. Queen Sālote, who had been the constitutional monarch of Tonga since 1918, was an imposing figure...literally: standing 6'3" and weighing 300 pounds. But her humor, affability, and casual approach to stiff British protocol made her one of the most popular figures at the coronation. Most famously, when it rained on the coronation procession, Sālote—according to Tongan tradition that one should not imitate the actions of a person one is honoring—refused a hood for her carriage, smiling broadly and waving to the cheering crowd, with rain dripping down her face and bare arms.

Argento's music is light and often humorous, and his movement-titles tell the story of the ballet. In *I. Official Proclamation and Formal Preparations: Departure of the Official Bearer of Invitations*, a fanfare-style figure and a reference to *Rule Britannia* sets British envoys in motion as they scurry to prepare to present formal invitations to dignitaries around the world—represented by short woodwind figures above *pizzicato* strings. In the second movement, *The Official Sojourn through foreign capitals*, the envoys make their rather pompous appearances to deliver their invitations: with individual dances for horns, flute, oboe, and bassoons. *III. Arrival in Tonga: Reception and Royal Request for lessons in what Her Majesty regards as the most modern of Western Dances – the Fox-trot* begins with a grandiose horn fanfare, which represents Sālote herself, to welcome the envoy. The music soon turns lighter, a dialogue between wind woodwinds as Queen Sālote politely asks to learn what she has heard is Queen Elizabeth's favorite dance, the fox-trot. The movement ends with a short dance lesson and another fanfare. In *IV. Back in England: Procession of Nobles and Dignitaries – interrupted by Sālote's appearance in Leopardskins*, the music begins with short woodwind phrases representing the thoroughly dignified guests, who soon organize themselves into an orderly fugue. Tension increases at the approach of Queen Sālote, dressed outrageously, and Sālote's formal entrance is marked by her horn fanfare. The end of the movement portrays a bit of clucking disapproval on the part of the aristocratic guests as well as Sālote's own unruffled dignity. The closing movement, *Finale: Her Majesty's enthusiastic, if not wholly successful, efforts to conform to Western Protocol: Her capitivation of the Royal Entourage*, is filled with humor, beginning with a fractured version of *Rule Britannia*. Order briefly returns in the guise of a short fugue, and *Rule Britannia* once again attempts to dominate...only to be combined with Queen Sālote's animated fox-trot. The piece ends with Sālote's fanfare and a reference to the first movement's opening figure.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

***Concerto No. 1 in G minor for Piano and Orchestra,
Op. 25***

*Mendelssohn completed this concerto in 1830-1831.
He was the soloist in the first performance in
Munich on October 18, 1831. Duration 21:00.*



Like many 19th-century young men of wealthy families, Mendelssohn was able to indulge in the “grand tour” — years spent wandering Europe, in his case, between 1829 and 1833. For Mendelssohn, however this was more than idle tourism: he absorbed musical influences from around Europe and composed constantly. (The *Piano Concerto No. 1*, one of the large works from these years, was composed at roughly the same time as two of his most famous “musical souvenirs” of the grand tour, his *Hebrides Overture* and “*Italian*” *Symphony*.)

Mendelssohn spent much of the summer of 1831 in Munich, giving several concerts and socializing with friends, but the main attraction of Munich seems to have been a young pianist, Delphine von Schauroth, with whom the 22-year-old composer was flirting. Mendelssohn may have had her in mind as soloist for the concerto. Their relationship did not apparently work out, and when he returned to Munich for the premiere in October, it was Mendelssohn himself who played the solo part.

When Mendelssohn completed the *Piano Concerto No. 1* in 1831, he had in fact already composed a *Piano Concerto in A minor* as a teenager in 1822, which he performed at one of his family’s private *musicales* in Berlin. However, he clearly considered this to be a youthful work, and never revived it. The *Piano Concerto No. 1* and the *Piano Concerto No. 2* he completed in 1837 are more mature works that represent Mendelssohn’s musical taste: generally avoiding heavy-handed virtuosity in favor of thematic development. Though the composer wrote rather dismissively that “I wrote it in but a few days and almost carelessly,” the *Piano Concerto No. 1* became a popular work, championed by Franz Liszt, Clara Schumann, and other virtuosos of the 19th century.

The concerto is in the traditional three movements, though they are all linked together as if to emphasize this is a single unified work. (Mendelssohn also reportedly hated hearing applause between movements, and may have done this here and in other works partly to avoid this!) The opening movement (*Molto allegro con fuoco*) begins with a short introduction that leads to a fierce main theme from the piano. There is a stormy transition that leads into a lighter *tranquillo* idea, again introduced by the piano. The development section focuses mostly on this second idea, though often using the forceful style of the first theme. There is an abbreviated recapitulation of the main ideas, but this is interrupted by a brass fanfare and a wistful piano passage that leads

into the *Andante*. The lovely, songlike main theme is first played by the orchestra and then elaborated by the piano. There is a tender middle section carried by the piano before a return to the opening idea. The movement ends with a new, equally lyrical idea, and after a pause for a short breath, launches into the third movement: a stern brass fanfare (*Presto*). The piano answers with short, ferocious bursts, before introducing the bold main theme (*Molto allegro e vivace*). The final movement is a rondo, alternating this idea with a second idea dominated by a brilliant right-hand line of 16th-notes in the piano. In this movement Mendelssohn provides some of the blazing virtuosity typical of 19th century concertos, and he also introduces a surprise near the end: a brief reminiscence of the opening movement's themes, before a brisk coda.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) ***Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92***

Beethoven's seventh symphony was completed in 1812, and performed for the first time in Vienna on December 8, 1813. Duration 38:00.

Beethoven's seventh and eighth symphonies, which were composed at roughly the same time during 1811-1812, are among the last products of what has come to be known as his "heroic decade"—the remarkable period of creativity between 1802 and 1812. The sublime optimism and joy of these symphonies are their most "heroic" qualities—these were works written when the composer had become almost entirely deaf, when his ill health and loneliness could have dried up his inspiration. The seventh is particularly exuberant, and was one of Beethoven's own favorite works.



The *Symphony No. 7* was first performed in December 1813, at a benefit concert for Austrian and Bavarian soldiers wounded at the battle of Hanau. Beethoven also included his hastily-composed "battle symphony" *Wellington's Victory* on this program. The *Symphony No. 7* was warmly applauded, but *Wellington's Victory* was a huge hit with the audience. For his part, Beethoven was disgusted with the public's rapture over what he considered to be a shoddy piece of work, and more than a little disgusted with himself for writing it. Since then, however, *Wellington's Victory* has faded into well-deserved obscurity, and the *Symphony No. 7* has been recognized for what it truly is, one of Beethoven's most joyful and subtle works. Despite its lightness of feeling, however, the seventh is the most complex of the symphonies, save the ninth, and displays a confident compositional virtuosity in its form and thematic development.

The long introduction to the first movement (*Poco sostenuto*) is almost a movement unto itself,

with two themes exposed and fully developed in the course of its 64 measures. However, at the point we would expect to hear a recapitulation, the texture begins to thin, finally leaving only violins and upper woodwinds to echo one another. The rhythmic fragment that is passed between them blends seamlessly into the beginning of the *Vivace*. Immediately, there is distinctive three-note rhythm that will dominate this movement. The opening theme, played by the flute, emerges from this rhythmic figure and is gradually taken up by other sections of the orchestra. There is a brief hold, and a sweeping string figure leads back into a statement of the theme by full orchestra. A second theme is also built from the same rhythmic material. In the extended development section, Beethoven shows his mastery of contrapuntal writing. A grand crescendo and a forceful passage by full orchestra leads to a recapitulation of the opening theme. Even at this point, Beethoven is able to pry further surprises from his thematic material, before bringing the movement to a close with a lengthy coda.

The second movement (*Allegretto*) begins as a solemn theme and variations. The theme is first heard in the low strings, and the timbre becomes brighter as the first three variations proceed: first the second violins are added, then the firsts, and finally, the entire orchestra is added to the mix. After the third variation, Beethoven abandons the theme briefly in favor of a new pastoral melody. The movement then moves on in the manner of a rondo: introducing new material, but always returning to elaborate variations on the original theme.

The scherzo is one of Beethoven's most charming symphonic movements. Here he expands the traditional three-part form of symphonic third movements to a five-part structure with elements of sonata form. The opening section is a good-natured theme (*Presto*), and the trio contains somewhat slower and sweeter music (*Assai meno presto*). Following the trio, the scherzo theme is stated again and developed. Another statement of the trio and a return to the scherzo round out the form. As a parting joke, Beethoven begins the trio melody yet again, now in a mournful D minor, but after only four measures, brings the movement to an abrupt end in the original key.

One writer has described the finale (*Allegro con brio*) "a triumph of Bacchic fury." This movement is filled with good humor and incessant energy. The opening theme is clearly dancelike in nature, recalling some of the pastoral feeling of the sixth symphony. The second theme is softer in nature, with mincing dotted figures in upper woodwinds and strings. As if to counterbalance the massive introduction of the first movement, Beethoven provides the final movement with a huge coda extending for well over 100 measures. This extensive closing section serves almost as a second development, exhausting the possibilities of his thematic material.

"I am Bacchus incarnate, to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow... one who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world." - Beethoven

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PROGRAM

DOMINICK ARGENTO *Royal Invitation (Homage to the Queen of Tonga)*

- I. *(Allegro) Official Proclamation and Formal Preparations: Departure of the Official Bearer of Invitations*
- II. *(Moderato, tempo di Marcia) The Official Sojourn through foreign capital*
- III. *(Maestoso assai) Arrival in Tonga: Reception and Royal Request for lessons in what Her Majesty regards as the most modern of Western Dances – the Fox-trot*
- IV. *(Allegretto piacevole) Back in England: Procession of Nobles and Dignitaries – interrupted by Sālote's appearance in Leopardskins*
- V. *(Allegro non troppo) Her Majesty's enthusiastic, if not wholly successful, efforts to conform to Western Protocol: Her capitivation of the Royal Entourage*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
25

Concerto No. 1 in G minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op.

Molto allegro con fuoco

Andante

Presto— Molto allegro e vivace

Thomas Pandolfi, piano

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92

Poco sostenuto—Vivace

Allegretto

Scherzo: Presto— Assai meno presto

Allegro con brio

BIOGRAPHIES

About Thomas Pandolfi

Thomas Pandolfi began his music career early on at The Juilliard School (BM & MM) where the young prodigy caught the influential ears of Vladimir Horowitz, who would become his mentor, and legendary composer, Morton Gould. Since then he has been an audience favorite, selling out the world's most prestigious stages, including Lincoln Center Alice Tully Hall, Strathmore, The Kennedy Center, Kiev Opera House, Bucharest's Romanian Athenaeum, London's Cadogan Hall, and many others. In addition to being hailed as one of the greatest interpreters of Polish masters such as Chopin and Paderewski, this versatile pianist has received accolades from every thing from Bach to Gershwin, with Morton Gould saying, "It's the finest performance of Gershwin I have heard since the composer himself." His original and virtuosic transcriptions of works such as West Side Story and Phantom of the Opera, are one-of-kind, jaw-dropping, and dramatic encores that keep audiences of all ages returning to his performances again and again. Maestro Pandolfi is a Steinway Artist and when he is not on tour, resides in Washington, DC.



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PETER BAY conductor

Peter Bay became Music Director and Conductor of the Austin Symphony Orchestra in 1998 and is also Conductor of the Big Sky Festival Orchestra (MT) and Arizona Philharmonic. Maestro Bay has appeared with over eighty different orchestras including the National, Chicago, St. Louis, Houston, Dallas, Baltimore, New Jersey, North Carolina, San Antonio, Tucson, West Virginia, Colorado, Hawaii, Sarasota, Fort Worth, Bochum (Germany), Carinthian (Austria), Lithuanian National, and Ecuador National Symphonies, the Minnesota and Algarve (Portugal) Orchestras, the Louisiana, Buffalo, Arizona, Rhode Island and Boca del Rio (Mexico) Philharmonics, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Eastman (Postcard from Morocco) and Aspen (The Ballad of Baby Doe) Opera Theaters, and the Theater Chamber Players of the Kennedy Center. Summer music festival appearances have included Aspen and Music in the Mountains (CO), Grant Park and Ravinia (IL), Round Top (TX), OK Mozart (OK) and Skaneateles (NY). In June 2018 he led fully staged performances of Leonard Bernstein's Mass as part of the Bernstein100Austin celebration. Peter is the primary conductor for Ballet Austin. For Austin Opera he has conducted A Streetcar Named Desire, La Traviata, Turandot, The Marriage of Figaro, and La Bohème.



Other positions held by Bay have included Music Director of the Erie Philharmonic, Annapolis Symphony Orchestra, Breckenridge Music Festival (CO), Britt Festival Orchestra (OR), Hot Springs Music Festival (AR), and posts with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and Richmond Symphony. Bay and the ASO with pianist Anton Nel released a critically acclaimed Bridge CD of Edward Burlingame Hill's music. With the Richmond Symphony he recorded the U.S. premiere of Britten's *The Sword in the Stone* for Opus One Records, and with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra Voices, featuring the percussion ensemble NEXUS. He is conductor for Christopher Cross' *Secret Ladder* album and Hanan Townshend's soundtrack to the 2016 movie *The Vessel*.

In 1994, he was one of two conductors selected to participate in the Leonard Bernstein American Conductors Program. He was the first prize winner of the 1980 Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Young Conductors Competition and a prize winner of the 1987 Leopold Stokowski Competition sponsored by the American Symphony Orchestra. In July 2012 and January 2020, he appeared in *Solo Symphony*, a choreographic work created for him by Allison Orr of Forklift Danceworks, and was inducted into the Austin Arts Hall of Fame in May 2016.