

September 9 & 10, 2023 - Serenades & Symphonies

Program notes by J. Michael Allsen

To open the Arizona Philharmonic's sixth season, we have a pair of Czech composers from two generations. Dvořák's *Wind Serenade*, comes from 1878, a time when he was first achieving international fame. It is filled to the brim with Czech/Bohemian musical flavor. Martinů's engaging *Sinfonietta "La Jolla"* was composed in 1950, when he was living in United States. This is very much a work of the 20th century, but it also reflects the folk music of his native land. We close with one of the brightest of Beethoven's nine symphonies, the vivacious *Symphony No. 4*.

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) *Serenade in D minor for Winds, Cello and Double Bass, Op. 44*

Dvořák composed this work in 1878, and conducted the premiere on November 17, 1878 in Prague. Duration 24:00.

Background

By the mid-1870s, Dvořák was a success in his native Bohemia, and was beginning to look for attention in Vienna, the cosmopolitan capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1874, he applied for and won the Austrian State Stipendium: a substantial grant to artists. He would eventually win the prize four years in a row, and also won the admiration of one of the judges, Vienna's leading composer, Johannes Brahms. Only eight years older than Dvořák, Brahms would become a close friend, mentor, and a strong champion of Dvořák's music in Vienna and beyond. In 1877, Brahms pressured his publisher, Simrock to publish one of Dvořák's Stipendium submissions, the *Moravian*



Duets, a set of vocal pieces. Simrock published the duets and was impressed enough to offer Dvořák a commission for a newly-composed set of dances for piano duet—the eight *Slavonic Dances* were original compositions that used the varied and unique dance rhythms he had grown up with in Bohemia. They were an immediate hit, and Simrock quickly paid Dvořák to prepare orchestral versions of the dances.

The *Serenade for Winds* comes from this period of increasing fame. Though it is unclear whether he had a particular event in mind for the work, he apparently composed it with relative ease and efficiency: he completed the score in the space of just ten days in January 1878. This was familiar ground for Dvořák—he had composed his successful *Serenade for Strings* just a few years earlier. But here the scoring—paired oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, contrabassoon, three horns, cello, and bass—allows for a great variety of timbres and “orchestral” effects. Brahms, who saw the score later, was obviously impressed, and wrote to his friend Joseph Joachim: “Take a look at Dvořák’s *Serenade for Wind Instruments*; I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do... It would be difficult to discover a finer, more refreshing impression of really abundant and charming creative talent. Have it played to you; I feel sure the players will enjoy doing it!”

What You’ll Hear

The opening movement (*Moderato, quasi marcia*) begins with a rather stern march, though a more comical answer from the bassoons and contrabassoon seems to hint that it’s not to be taken too seriously. The contrasting music is light and pastoral, in a distinctly Czech/Bohemian style. Though Dvořák titles the second movement *Minuet* after the old French courtly dance, the outer sections are clearly inspired by the same Czech folk rhythms as the contemporary *Slavonic Dances*. He channels another Bohemian dance—the more energetic *Furiant*—in the middle section. The slow movement (*Andante con moto*) unfolds in a relaxed way; aside from a brief moment of turbulence at the midpoint, this is a series of beautiful solo melodies, often played above a gentle horn background. The main theme of the finale (*Allegro molto*) is all bustling energy, and Dvořák provides a bumptious Czech countermelody as contrast. After a short development section, there is reminiscence of the march from the first movement before a brilliant coda.

Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1959)

Sinfonietta “La Jolla”

Martinů composed this work in 1950. It was premiered in La Jolla, California on August 13, 1950, by the Orchestra of the La Jolla Musical Arts Society, conducted by Nikolai Sokoloff. Duration 20:00.

Background

Martinů was one of many composers who fled Europe as a result of World War II, and who had a profound effect on American musical life during and after the war. In March 1941, he and his wife arrived in New York City, tired, ill, and depressed. Martinů had fought the good fight as

long as possible. Following the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, he served as a cultural attaché for the Czech opposition in Paris, helping many refugees from his homeland, and composing patriotic Czech works (earning him a blacklisting by Nazi authorities in Czechoslovakia). But as German armies approached Paris in 1940, Martinů finally had to leave, seeking refuge first in Portugal and then in the United States. Things began to look up within a few months of his arrival: he was immediately surrounded by friends and received several commissions, including his *Symphony No. 1* for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He spent most of his American years in New York City, and eventually taught for several years at New York's Mannes School, but also at Princeton University and the Tanglewood Institute. Though he accepted a position at the Prague Conservatory after the war, he would remain in New York for several years, partly due to a slow and painful recovery from a fall he suffered while teaching at Tanglewood in 1946.



Despite his depression and recurring tinnitus—a particularly devastating condition for a musician—Martinů was very productive over the next few years. One of the commissions he received in his American years was from the Musical Arts Society of La Jolla, California, who asked for a “tuneful and approachable” orchestral piece. Martinů fulfilled this perfectly in his *Sinfonietta “La Jolla.”*

What You’ll Hear

His *Sinfonietta “La Jolla”* is scored for a small chamber orchestra with a prominent part for piano. It is one of the Martinů works that is usually given the rather hazy label “neoclassical” implying a connection with 18th-century musical style. Though this piece does not sound much like 18th-century music on the surface, Martinů was clearly influenced by the formal approach and emotional restraint of 18th-century works. The opening movement (*Poco allegro*) begins with crisp, chirpy music and a driving syncopated main theme from the piano, surrounded by a series of rhythmic ostinatos (repeating motives). There is a more relaxed contrasting idea in the woodwinds, but this movement is dominated by the lively style of the opening. The second movement opens with a rather solemn introduction (*Largo*) before moving into the main section of the work (*Andante moderato*) This explores two ideas, a rather disjointed piano melody over a string ostinato and more lush main theme played by the strings. Solo clarinet begins a gradual intensification until there is a climactic passage for the full orchestra. The movement then ends quietly. The closing *Allegro* is brisk and high-spirited, with a series of Czech-style dances that are decorated by brilliant lines from the piano. There is an extended contrasting section, more

serious and lyrical, until a brusque snare drum and a wild piano passage kick off an exuberant coda.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 4 in B-flat Major, Op. 60

This work was composed in 1806. It was first played in March 1807 at a private concert, in the palace of Prince Lobkowitz in Vienna. Its public premiere was in April 1808, in a Vienna's Burgtheater. Duration 31:00.

Background

The *Symphony No. 4* was a product of Beethoven's enormously creative "heroic decade"—the period between 1802 and 1812 that saw the initial work on his opera *Fidelio*, the third through eighth symphonies, the last two piano concertos, the "triple" concerto, the "Razumovsky" string quartets, and dozens of smaller works. During the summer of 1806, Beethoven's friend and patron Prince Lichnowsky introduced him to Count Franz von Oppersdorff. Oppersdorff, a long-time admirer of Beethoven's, hosted the composer at his country estate, and asked Beethoven for a new symphony. Beethoven agreed, but curiously, rather than offering his C minor symphony (the *Symphony No. 5*), which was well underway, to fulfill this commission, Beethoven immediately began work on an entirely new work in B-flat Major. This work, the *Symphony No. 4*, was finished in relatively short order, and when it was published in 1808, Oppersdorff's name appears as dedicatee—a privilege for which the Count paid the handsome sum of 500 *gulden*.



An interesting footnote here... Count Oppersdorff does not seem to have played much of a role in Beethoven's career aside from his commission for the *Symphony No. 4*, but one occasion does stand out. Beethoven's relations with the nobility in this period always seem to have been on his own terms, and he was quick to take offense at any perceived slight. In 1806, about two months after had finished Oppersdorff's symphony, Beethoven became enraged at Prince Lichnowsky, when the Prince asked him to play for some French officers at his country home. Beethoven considered this to be "menial labor" and angrily refused. The shouting match between the two escalated to the point where Beethoven picked up a chair to break over the Prince's head.

Oppersdorff, who was present at the scene, apparently threw himself between the two. It is not clear what the consequences would have been if Beethoven had brained a Viennese Prince with a chair, but it would not have helped his career!

What You'll Hear

The *Symphony No. 4* is one of Beethoven's shorter and more "Classical" symphonies, particularly in comparison to the massive works that surround it in Beethoven's output, the third ("Eroica") and fifth symphonies. Indeed, Robert Schumann referred to the fourth as "a slender Greek maiden between two Norse gods." The first movement opens with a lengthy slow introduction, with a deliberately unsteady harmonic foundation. Only when the body of the movement (*Allegro vivace*) begins after a few abrupt chords does the piece really settle into B-flat Major. An upward rush of strings leads into the first group of themes. After a transition that features a lively bassoon counterpoint, there is a second group of ideas carried by the woodwinds. At the end of the development, which focuses mainly on the opening group of themes, there is a long timpani roll and a gradual crescendo that lead to the recapitulation of all the main ideas. The movement closes with a brief and witty coda.

The *Adagio* is constructed as rondo, although the main idea is constantly developed as it returns: a flowing melody stated by the violins and picked up by the woodwinds. The dotted rhythmic figure in the accompaniment continues throughout most of the piece. The first contrasting idea is an equally lyrical melody stated by the clarinet. The central section serves as brief development before the other themes are returned. The closing passage features a wonderful bit of orchestration, as a single melodic line is passed between several instruments directly before the closing chords.

The third movement (*Allegro vivace*) is set in a clear-cut scherzo-and-trio form, based on two main ideas. The scherzo theme is all bustling energy and is filled with off-beat accents. The trio is much more songlike—it is carried by the woodwinds, but with witty commentary by the strings. Both sections are brought back in varied form, and the movement closes with a final statement of the scherzo.

Like the opening movement, the finale (*Allegro ma non troppo*) is set in sonata form. It begins directly with the opening set of ideas: a furious series of string lines with woodwind accents. The second theme is laid out by the oboe above clarinet triplets, but the sense of excited perpetual motion continues. There is particularly nice little moment at the end of the exposition: to lead back into a repeat of the exposition, Beethoven gives a sly version of the opening string lines to back into the home key. In the development, this same little passage is extended, spiraling off into a series of new keys. The development focuses mainly on the opening material. In another wry touch, Beethoven begins the recapitulation abruptly, giving the violin's sixteenth-note line briefly to the bassoon. His little closing passage now leads to the coda, which culminates in a mock-serious *forte* chord and pause. The violin line is now given briefly to the basses, and after a yet another stop, it is transformed again into a more lyrical line. Just as things start to get really serious, however, Beethoven tosses off a final burst of sixteenth notes to close the movement.

Musicians

Flute

Jeannette Hirasawa Moore, Principal

Piccolo

Rebecca Romo

Oboe

Laura Arganbright, Principal
Mary Simon

Clarinet

Scott Richardson, Principal
Mary Jackson

Bassoon

Chip King, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*
David Rachor

Contrabassoon

Matthew Dutczak

French Horn

Karen Teplik, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*
Caitlin McCready, French Horn II & Assistant
Alex Austin

Trumpet

Joshua Haake, Principal
Stephen Martin

Timpani

Maria Flurry, Principal - *chair sponsored by Jon & Christena Cavaletto*

Percussion

Matt Prendergast, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*

Piano

Andrew O'Brien

Violin I

Katherine McLin, Concertmaster
Michael DiBarry, Associate Concertmaster
Jisu Choi
Spencer Ekenes
Dasom Jeon
Ramon Soberano
Danny Yang

Violin II

Luke Hill, Principal
Louis Coste
Megan Evans
Sunny Jo
Sarah Schreffler
Ava Wipff

Viola

Kimberly Hankins, Principal - *chair sponsored by RoJean Madsen*
Nicole Allen
Bryn Cannon
Mason Haskett
Samara Humbert-Hughes
Grace Wills

Cello

Yeil Park, Principal - *chair sponsored by Barbara Metz*
Mary Anne Bruner
Mary Nebel
Barbara Metz
Claudia Vanderschraaf

Contrabass

Nathaniel de la Cruz, Principal
Jason Howard
Tzu-I Yang