

**Program Notes by Ken Meltzer**

**VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF JOSEPH HAYDN, OPUS 56a**

**Composed in 1873**

**Premiered on November 2, 1873 in Vienna, with the composer conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra**

**JOHANNES BRAHMS**

**Born in Hamburg, Germany; May 7, 1833**

**Died in Vienna, Austria; April 3, 1897**

**This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on January 15, 1957 with James Christian Pfohl conducting in Ovens Auditorium. The eighth and most recent performance set was on January 11 & 12, 2002 with Junichi Hirokami conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.**

In 1870, Carl Ferdinand Pohl, a musicologist and biographer of Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), showed Johannes Brahms the score of a *Feldpartita* (open-air suite), purportedly by Haydn, for eight wind instruments. More recent scholarship, however, indicates the most likely composer of the *Feldpartita* was Haydn's pupil, Ignaz Pleyel. In any event, the piece contained a second-movement theme that greatly appealed to Brahms. It was this theme, entitled the "St. Anthony Chorale," that served as the basis for a series of variations, composed by Brahms in 1873. These variations manifested themselves in two arrangements—one, for two pianos, Opus 56b, and the other, in the more familiar orchestral version, Opus 56a.

The orchestral setting of the "Haydn Variations" received its premiere in Vienna on November 2, 1873. The composer led the Vienna Philharmonic in a highly successful concert. For years, Brahms, fearful of the inevitable comparison with Ludwig van Beethoven, had resisted the demand to compose a symphony. Perhaps the triumph of the "Haydn Variations" helped steel Brahms's resolve finally to take the plunge and complete his First Symphony in 1876. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to suggest that Brahms's "Haydn Variations" were a mere stepping-stone to the Four Symphonies. The "Haydn Variations" represent the work of a master of orchestral composer, providing a remarkably wide range of moods and instrumental colors, all building inexorably to the work's exalted conclusion.

The "Haydn Variations" open with a presentation of the "St. Anthony Chorale." The use of the winds, over pizzicato lower strings, evokes the scoring the original *Feldpartita*. A series of eight variations follows. The *Finale* employs a ground bass figure, derived from the "St. Anthony" melody, and played by the lower strings. This figure serves as the foundation for yet another series of variations, culminating in a final spectacular presentation of the "St. Anthony Chorale."

*The score calls for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, triangle and strings.*

Duration: ca. 17 minutes

**PIANO CONCERTO NO. 22 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, K. 482**  
**Composed in 1785**

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART**

**Born in Salzburg, Austria; January 27, 1756**

**Died in Vienna, Austria; December 5, 1791**

**These are the first performances of this work by the Charlotte Symphony**

In 1781 the 25-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart left his hometown of Salzburg to stake his independence in Vienna. For a time, Mozart enjoyed public approval and financial success commensurate with his incomparable talents. During the mid-1780s Mozart was in great demand in Vienna as a teacher, composer and performer. In a letter to his father Leopold written in February of 1784, Mozart proudly exclaimed: “The whole morning is given over to my pupils, and nearly every evening I have to play (here the composer lists twenty-two events from February 26 to April 3)...Have I not enough to do? I do not think I shall get out of practice in these circumstances...”

Mozart was one of the finest keyboard artists of his day. Between the years 1784 and 1786, Mozart wrote twelve piano concertos that typically, he premiered in concerts (or “academies”) given under his sponsorship.

In October of 1785, Mozart began work on his opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Mozart was anxious to establish himself as an important composer of Italian *opera buffa*. He poured his energies into *Figaro*, which premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna on May 1, 1786. Still, Mozart found time to compose several other important works during this period, including three piano concertos—K. 482 in E<sup>b</sup>, K. 488 in A and K. 491 in C minor.

Mozart completed the score of the Concerto in E-flat on December 16, 1785. While specific documentation of the work’s premiere date no longer exists, Mozart’s usual practice was to offer the first performance of a Piano Concerto shortly after its completion. And in a letter of January 13, 1786, Leopold Mozart reported to his daughter Nannerl:

Meanwhile to two letters of mine I have had only one reply from your brother, dated December 28, in which he said that he gave without much preparation three subscription concerts to 120 subscribers, that he composed for this purpose a new piano concerto in E-flat, in which (a rather unusual occurrence!) he had to repeat the Andante.

The Concerto No. 22 is in three movements. The first (*Allegro*) opens with the traditional orchestral exposition of the movement’s principal themes, the first of which is a grand orchestral statement. The soloist soon enters with his versions of the thematic material. Throughout, the solo writing is notable for the elegance and technical brilliance

that were hallmarks of Mozart's keyboard artistry. The C-minor slow movement (*Andante*) maintains a hushed, melancholy atmosphere throughout. The soloist immediately presents the tripping principal theme of the *Rondo* finale (*Allegro*). The appearance of a hushed, elegant minuet (*Andantino cantabile*) provides surprising contrast prior to the Concerto's spirited conclusion.

*The score calls for solo piano, flute, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.*

Duration: ca. 24 minutes

### **ORCHESTRA VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF PAGANINI, OPUS 26**

**Composed in 1947**

**Premiered on November 27, 1947 in Leipzig, Germany, with Herbert Albert conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.**

### **BORIS BLACHER**

**Born in Niu-chang, China; January 19, 1903**

**Died in Berlin, Germany; January 30, 1975**

**The first and only performance of this work by the Charlotte Symphony was on February 23, 1991 with Leo Driehuys conducting in Dana Auditorium on the campus of Queens College (now University).**

The Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) was one of the greatest and most charismatic virtuosos in the history of music. Paganini's riveting stage presence, coupled with the violinist's spellbinding technique, repeatedly drove audiences into a frenzy.

Paganini was as much a master of self-promotion as he was of the violin. Well before the age of the intense marketing efforts that attend many superstars in today's entertainment industry, Paganini understood the value of publicity, particularly of the sensational variety. Paganini did little to stifle incredible rumors that he learned to play the violin on a single-stringed instrument while serving a prison sentence for murder, or that his incomparable talents resulted from a pact with the devil. In fact, Paganini encouraged these and other stories at every turn. The violinist's shoulder-length hair and gaunt, black-attired figure only served to reinforce the diabolical associations.

Not surprisingly, Paganini's works for violin showcased his unique talents. While commentators have differed as to the musical worth of Paganini's compositions, there is no question they exerted a profound influence upon subsequent artists. One work in particular, the last of Paganini's 24 *Caprices for Solo Violin*, Opus 1 (ca. 1805), has served as the inspiration for such pieces as Johannes Brahms's *Paganini Variations*, Opus 35 (1863) for piano, Nathan Milstein's *Paganiniana* (1954) for violin, and two works for piano and orchestra, Sergei Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Opus 43 (1934), and Witold Lutoslawski's *Paganini Variations* (1978).

Another work based upon the *Caprice* No. 24 is German composer Boris Blacher's *Orchestral Variations on a Theme of Niccolò Paganini*. During World War II, Blacher was forced to relinquish his position at the Dresden Conservatory because his teachings conflicted with Nazi ideology. At the conclusion of the War, Blacher was able to return to teaching and composing. He completed his *Orchestral Variations* in 1947. The work premiered in Leipzig on November 27, 1947. Herbert Albert conducted the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

As in the case of Paganini's original *Caprice*, Blacher's orchestral work is in theme and variations form. The *Orchestral Variations* opens with the Paganini theme in its original version for solo violin. A series of sixteen brilliant and diverse orchestra variations on the Paganini theme follows, culminating with the grand final bars.

*The score calls for 3 flutes plus piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets plus bass clarinet, 3 bassoons plus contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.*

Duration: ca. 16 minutes

### **DER ROSENKAVALIER WALTZES, OPUS 59, Second Sequence**

**Composed in 1910**

**Premiered on January 26, 1911 in Dresden, Germany at the Königliches Opernhaus**

**RICHARD STRAUSS**

**Born in Munich, Germany; June 11, 1864**

**Died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany; September 8, 1949**

**This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on October 27 & 28, 1952 with James Christian Pfohl conducting in the auditorium at Piedmont Junior High School (now Middle School). The third and most recent performance set was on November 1 & 2, 1972 with Jacques Brouman conducting at Ovens Auditorium and on the campus of Pfeiffer College (now University).**

After the success of *Salome* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909)—two lyric dramas featuring sensational, even horrific themes—Richard Strauss informed his librettist, poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, that he wished to compose “a Mozart opera.” Hofmannsthal first suggested a story based on the life of Casanova. Early in 1909, the two finally agreed on the plot that was to become the basis of *Der Rosenkavalier* (*The Knight of the Rose*). Hofmannsthal described the story in the following manner: “(A) pompous, fat, and elderly suitor favored by the father has his nose put out of joint by a dashing lover—could anything be plainer?”

*Der Rosenkavalier* met with an immediate and resounding success. At the public dress rehearsal, Strauss was mobbed by a multitude of ecstatic admirers. Within a year of the Dresden premiere on January 26, 1911, the Königliches Opernhaus presented fifty sold-out performances. Special “Rosenkavalier trains” transported eager opera lovers from Berlin and neighboring towns to Dresden.

*Der Rosenkavalier* takes place in Vienna during the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa. The Feldmarschallin, a married woman of thirty-two, is carrying on an affair with the 17-year-old Count Octavian Rofrano. The Marschallin's boorish cousin, Baron Ochs, pays a surprise visit to seek her aid in his impending marriage to Sophie, the young daughter of the bourgeois Herr von Faninal. Octavian is enlisted to deliver to Sophie the traditional engagement gift of the silver rose. When Octavian arrives at the Faninal household, he and Sophie immediately fall in love. Octavian vows to defy Ochs. In the final act, Ochs is tricked into abandoning his designs on Sophie. The Marschallin realizes her time with Octavian has come to an end, and graciously yields to the young lovers.

Although the reign of Maria Theresa spanned the years 1740-1780, the music of *Der Rosenkavalier* frequently presents a nostalgic glimpse of the music of a later era, forever associated with another (unrelated) Strauss, the "Waltz King" Johann (1825-1899). Richard Strauss fashioned two orchestral "Waltz Sequences" from music featured in *Der Rosenkavalier*. The First Waltz Sequence, completed in 1944, includes music from Acts I and II. The Second Waltz Sequence, penned a decade earlier, focuses upon the music of the opera's third (and final) act.

*The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.*

Duration: ca. 12 minutes