

PROGRAM NOTES

Sinfonias

Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti (1685 – 1757)

Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti was born in 1685 in Naples, Italy to Alessandro and Antonio Anzaloni Scarlatti. He was believed to have begun music lessons with his famous father at a very young age. Scarlatti was also surrounded by notable musicians such as Bernardo Pasquin, Francesco Gasparini as a child and has undoubtedly learned much from them. At the age of 29, he served for five years as maestro di cappella at the Cappella Giulia in the Vatican. Scarlatti married twice in his life. His first wife, Maria Catalina Gentili, whom he had six children with, died in 1739 and he married his second wife, Anastasia Maxarti Ximenes, in 1742.

Scarlatti had many patrons throughout his life. They included the exiled Polish queen Maria Casimira (1709 – 14) and the Marquis de Fontes, Portuguese ambassador to the Vatican. Around 1720, Scarlatti was invited by Ferdinand VI and his wife Maria Barbara, his former pupil, to work first in the Spanish court in Seville (1729 – 1733) and then in Madrid until his death.

Although Scarlatti wrote many cantatas and numerous vocal works, he was most famous for his 555 harpsichord sonatas and his “30 essercizi” (exercises). He also wrote seventeen instrumental pieces called sinfonias. Each one contains three short movements in a fast-slow-fast structure. They are considered early examples of what we call symphonies in the Classical period. Unfortunately, Scarlatti’s music was not widely available to musicians outside his own circle, so his influence on composers such as C. P. E. Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Joseph Haydn and W.A. Mozart was minimal.

Keyboard Concerto in D Minor, BWV 1052

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach, Saxe-Eisenach in March 1685 to family of musicians. His father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, was the director of the town musicians and his uncles were all professional musicians. His father gave him lessons on the violin and harpsichord; one of his uncles, Johann Christoph Bach introduced him to the organ. Unfortunately, Bach was orphaned at the age of 10 and was raised by his oldest brother. Even though Bach was discouraged from studying music by his own brothers, he was exposed to the music of established composers of the day such as Johann Pachelbel, Frenchman Jean Baptiste Lully and Italian Girolamo Frescobaldi. During this same period, Bach also had the opportunity to study Theology and learn foreign languages such as French, Greek and Latin.

In 1699, Bach was awarded a choral scholarship to study at the famous St. Michael's School in Lüneburg. It was during this period that Bach mastered his skills on the organ. Bach married Maria Barbara Bach, his second cousin in 1706, and of the seven children that they had, only two of his sons became accomplished composers: Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. While Bach was working for the Prince of Anhalt-Köthen, his wife Maria Barbara, suddenly passed away in July of 1720. He later met and married Anna Magdalena Wilcke, a young, highly gifted soprano 17 years his junior. Together they had thirteen children.

Johann Sebastian Bach passed away on July 28, 1750 in Leipzig. Contemporary scholars suspected that he died of a stroke complicated by pneumonia. He was buried in an unmarked grave and it was not until 1894 that his coffin was found. He is now permanently interred at Leipzig's Church of St. Thomas.

During Bach's lifetime, he has written numerous pieces for the harpsichord and the organ. Other major works include three violin concertos, Six Brandenburg Concertos, St. Matthew Passion and St. John Passion, Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, Six Solo Cello Suites and the Mass in B Minor. Unfortunately, Bach's music was totally forgotten after his death. It was not until the mid 19th. century that his music was revived by Felix Mendelssohn and received renewed appreciation.

Bach's musical career can be divided into three periods: Weimar (1703 – 1717), Cothen (1717 – 1723) and Leipzig (1723 - 1750). Bach wrote all his major cantatas while he was working in Leipzig as the Cantor of the Thomasschule at Thomaskirche in Leipzig, and Director of Music in the Church at Nikolaikirche and the Paulinerkirche, the church of the University of Leipzig. It was his responsibility to write a new cantata every week for the weekly Sunday service.

This keyboard (harpsichord) concerto, BWV 1052 was composed in 1738 when Bach was with the Leipzig collegiums musicum, an organization comprised of students and community musicians, who held weekly concerts in the popular places such as cafes and gardens in Leipzig. Like many works of Bach's, this concerto is believed to be a transcription of a lost violin concerto. The first and last movements of this work are based on the traditional "ritornello" form, i.e. it has ample dialogues between the soloist and the orchestra. They are technically demanding and provide the soloist plenty opportunity to show off his/her virtuosity on the instrument. On the other hand, the middle movement is more expressive and uses a lot of ornaments to provide contrast with the outer movements. Brahms liked this concerto so much that he even wrote a cadenza for it.

Water Music Suite #3 in G, HMW 350 George Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759)

George Frideric Handel was born, the son of an appointed barber-surgeon to the court of Saxe Weissinfels, in Halle in 1685. In 1693, his father took the young Handel with him to visit the court and it was here where George discovered his love for music after spending much time playing the church organ. George's father was later advised by the Duke to ensure that George would receive the best possible musical training as he displayed such talent.

Soon, Handel began to study with the organist of St. Michel's in Halle. He learned how to compose as well as to play violin, oboe, organ and harpsichord. This teacher also exposed Handel to Italian and French music.

However, Handel's father had a different plan for his son; he wanted him to become a lawyer and enrolled him at the University of Halle. After spending only one year studying law, Handel abandoned his law studies, against his father's will, he accepted a position as violinist and harpsichordist in the orchestra of the Hamburg Opera House in 1703. In 1710, Handel became Kapellmeister to German Prince George, Elector of Hanover. When Prince George became the King of Great Britain in 1714, he took Handel with him. Handel became a naturalized British citizen

in 1727 and was one of England's most celebrated composers. He died on April 14, 1759 and was given a state funeral, and was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey in London, England; the same resting place as Henry Purcell, another great English composer.

Major Handel's compositions include the Messiah, the three Water Music Suites, Music for the Royal Fireworks, 29 oratorios, 42 operas, more than 120 cantatas, numerous arias, chamber music (e.g. concerto grossi, violin sonatas, etc.), 16 organ concerti and many keyboard works.

The three Water Music Suites were commissioned by King George I and they were premiered on July 17, 1717 on the River Thames. The performance involved more than 50 musicians and it was performed on a barge near the royal barge where King George I and friends were staying. Even though the work was written for a Baroque orchestra, Handel omitted the harpsichord and the timpani due to logistic reasons. Legends have it that King George I loved them so much that he requested the musicians to play the entire work three times on that evening. The entire evening was believed to be organized and paid for by Baron Kielmansegg.

This particular suite is scored for the following instruments: piccolo, flute, strings and continuo. It has four movements beginning with a Menuet, followed by a Rigaudon, and another Menuet and closes with a Gigue. Based on the instrumentation of this suite, music scholars believed that it was played during dinner time.

Suite from Les Boreades Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683 – 1764)

Jean-Philippe Rameau was born on September 25, 1683 and died on September 12, 1764. He was considered as one of the more influential French Baroque composers and also a leading harpsichordist of his time. Little is known about his early years; it was not until the 1720's that he gained some notoriety when he published his Treatise on Harmony. Rameau's father was an organist in several churches around Dijon, France and his mother was a woman from the French high society. Originally, he intended to study to become a lawyer but he soon realized that his real desire was to be a musician. Rameau was married to 19 year-old Marie-Louise Mangot and had four children: two sons and two daughters.

Les Boreades is the last of five tragedie en musique (a genre of French opera introduced by Jean-Baptiste Lully) written by Rameau but was never performed during his life time. The plots of these opera are usually based on classical mythology but their endings are never tragic. The orchestral suite is scored for flute, piccolo, two clarinets, two bassoons, percussion (tambourine, wind machine), strings and continuo.

The story Les Boreades is based on a feud between Alphis, Queen of Bactria and her subjects. According to tradition, Alphis must marry a Boread, a descendant of Boreas. Unfortunately, Alphis fell in love with a foreigner, Abaris, and angered the entire clan. At their wedding, some angry Boreas decides to abduct Alphis back to their kingdom. However, with the help of Apollo, Abaris is able to rescue his bride. During a challenge between Abaris and Boreas (and his sons), Apollo appears in front of them and reveals that Abaris was actually his son by a Boread nymph. The problem

is now solved; Abaris and Alphise are allowed to get married without any more dispute about their identity. The type of ending is called “*deus ex machina*”, a plot device to solve a situation in a play where it almost seems impossible to resolve.

Program Notes Written by Eric D. Fahn ©