

PROGRAM NOTES

Concerto Grosso in A Minor, Op. 6, No. 4 **George Frideric Handel**

By the 1730's, German composer George Frideric Handel (1643-1759), had established himself as the preeminent composer in London. In the fall of 1739, publisher John Walsh approached Handel to compose a series of "twelve grand concertos" in the concerto grosso style that had been popularized by Italian composer Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713). While Walsh's interest was in the profit this collection would make, Handel saw it as an opportunity to showcase his instrumental music during the intermissions of his oratorio performances and to feature himself as a soloist on the organ. Handel completed the entire collection between September 29 and October 30, composing each concerto at the astonishing speed of two to three days. Walsh published this collection in 1740, which was available for purchase exclusively by subscription under a specially obtained Royal License. There were over 100 subscribers, including the royal, friends, patrons, composers, organists, etc.

Handel, whose compositions were deeply influenced by the Italian style, had met and played for Corelli while in Rome. Handel was very familiar with the concerto grosso form, an orchestral work popular during the Baroque era featuring a group of soloists (concertino) playing in contrast to the full orchestra (ripieno). As with Corelli's works, Handel's concerti are scored for a concertino of two violins and cello and a four-part string orchestra with harpsichord continuo as the ripieno. Handel later began to add oboe parts, which were never completed. As was the custom of the time, Handel did not hesitate to "borrow" material from other composers as well as his own earlier works.

The Concerto Grosso in A Minor is a typical orchestral concerto in four movements, with little writing for solo strings. The Largo affettuoso is a melodic movement that leads into a contrapuntal Allegro movement. The tranquil Largo has a beautiful contrapuntal violin part that develops over a walking bass line. In the final Allegro, Handel reworked an aria from his opera *Imeneo* (composed between 1738 and 1740) into a spirited finale.



George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) was born into a comfortable, although non-musical, family in Halle, Germany, near Leipzig. At an early age, Handel taught himself to play both harpsichord and pipe organ. He studied law, but abandoned it for music.

Handel trained in Florence, Rome, Naples, and Venice. In 1710, he became Kapellmeister to the Elector of Hanover, a German nobleman who was also the heir to the throne of England (and would be crowned King George I in 1714).

Moving to London in 1712, Handel spent the balance of his life in Britain. After his arrival, he enjoyed the patronage of the royal court and the aristocracy. Handel's beloved *Water Music* was composed in 1717 at the request of King George I to entertain guests at a party held on barges in the Thames River.

Handel soon became the composer for the private orchestra at Cannons, the country estate of the Duke of Chandos. Although he only spent a year and a half there, it was a productive time that further established Handel's reputation in Britain. He directed the newly founded Royal Academy of Music from 1719 to 1734, which presented at least thirty of Handel's opera.

Between 1734 to 1741 Handel produced opera at Covent Garden, but found the work increasingly taxing. His next project would be among his very greatest: *Messiah*. From the time of its Dublin premier in 1742, the oratorio was instantly recognized as one of his best compositions and remains his most renowned work to this day. After suffering a series of strokes, declining health, and the loss of his vision, Handel died in 1759. He was buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey with full state honors.

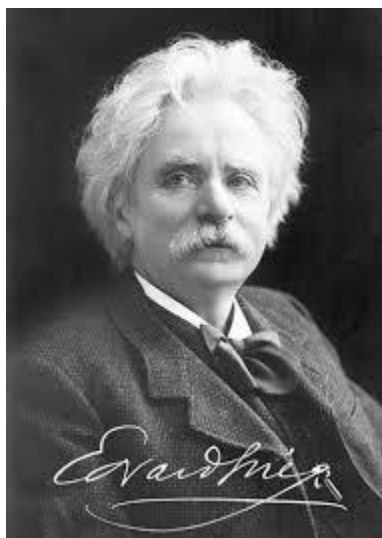
During his lifetime, Handel composed nearly 30 oratorios and almost 50 operas. He was also a prolific writer of orchestral pieces and concerti grossi. He is said to have made significant contributions to all of the musical genres of his generation, and had a tremendous influence over classical composers including Mozart and Beethoven.

Holberg Suite for Strings, op. 40 (“From Holberg’s Time”) **Edvard Grieg**

Edvard Grieg entitled his *Holberg Suite* (1884) to Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), whose celebrated comedies earned him the nickname the “Molière of the North.” Like Grieg, Holberg was born in the city of Bergen and Grieg composed this suite along with a cantata for male voices as part of a celebration to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Holberg’s birth. Grieg was eager to participate in honoring the playwright, and had even contributed a portion of his publishing fees to the construction of a statue of Holberg in their birth city.

First performed in its original version for solo piano at the Bergen Holberg celebration in December 1884 with Grieg himself at the piano, the piece was so well-received that Grieg transcribed it for string orchestra in 1885. Its subtitle of “Suite in the Olden Style” pulls from eighteenth century dance forms that the composer assumed would have been familiar to Holberg.

Historically, the structure of an 18th century Baroque suite would include five movements beginning with a prelude or overture followed by a variety of movements in different dance forms. The *Holberg Suite* follows this general format. The opening Praeludium is a bright and energetic overture. The Sarabande, a Spanish dance form most famously employed in J.S. Bach’s cello suites, is poignant with solo passages for three cellos. The sprightly Gavotte, a courtly French dance, is followed by a mournful Arioso movement, which again features solo cello in its middle section. In the closing Rigaudon, a French folk dance, solo violin and viola evoke the raucous folk sonorities of the Norwegian Hardanger fiddle.



Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), icon of Norwegian music, left his home in Bergen, Norway to study at the conservatory in Leipzig. There he began his formal musical education under the auspices of Ignaz Moscheles on piano and Carl Reinecke in composition. Despite being diagnosed with a form of tuberculosis, which left him with only one functioning lung, Grieg graduated in 1862. The composer had an intense desire to develop a national style of composition, but recognized the importance of becoming well versed in the work of the European masters. Upon graduation, he relocated to Copenhagen, studying with Niels Gade., thus remaining in Scandinavia while working in a thriving cultural center.

In 1867, Grieg married his cousin Nina Hagerup, a talented pianist, whose vocal abilities enchanted the composer. Shortly after their wedding, the couple moved to Oslo, where Grieg supported them by teaching piano and conducting. He and his wife traveled extensively throughout Europe and it was during a period of time spent in Denmark, the composer wrote his landmark opus, the Piano Concerto in A minor. The piece was received with an enthusiasm that would attach itself to the composer's reputation for the remainder of his career.

Grieg admired his literary contemporaries and forged productive partnerships with playwrights and poet, such as Bjøtjerne Björnson, and Henrik Ibsen. Grieg's collaboration with Ibsen proved to be a critical step in his compositional career, as Grieg would supply incidental music to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*. The incidental music was performed to such critical acclaim that it led to Grieg's transcription for orchestra. The *Peer Gynt* Suites remain some of Grieg's most beloved music to this day.

As a result of the success of *Peer Gynt*, Grieg enjoyed tremendous celebrity and continued to travel extensively, often meeting internationally renowned composers such as Brahms, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky. He served briefly as the music director of Bergen Symphony Orchestra and at the Bergen Harmonien. In 1885, Grieg and his wife relocated to his native Bergen, where he built their celebrated home, Troldhaugen. He and his wife summered in Norway and departed each fall for European tours that would last the remainder of the year. He died of chronic fatigue, with much credit given to his lifelong health problems, in his hometown of Bergen.

Norway's most famous composer, Grieg dedicated his career to the pursuit of a national sound. In his own words, Grieg wrote in the Romantic tradition with the determination to "create a national form of music, which could give the Norwegian people an identity."

Serenade for Strings in E Major, Op. 22 **Antonín Dvořák**

Like many composers early in their careers, Antonín Dvořák lived on the brink of poverty. To improve his financial situation, he applied to the newly established Austrian State Stipendium for young artists in 1874. The committee recognized Dvořák's dire situation and labelled his file "Anton, DWORAK of Prague, 33 years old, music teacher, completely without means."

Fortunately, the selection committee whose membership included conductor Johann Herbeck, music critic Eduard Hanslick, and composer Johannes Brahms, recognized Dvořák's talent. Their report stated:

He has submitted 15 compositions, among them symphonies and overtures for full orchestra which display an undoubted talent, but in a way which as yet remains formless and unbridled.... The fact that Dvořák's choral and orchestral compositions have been performed frequently at big public concerts made a favorable impression. The applicant, who has never yet been able to acquire a piano of his own, deserves a grant to ease his straitened circumstances and free him from anxiety in his creative work.

Dvořák was awarded a sizable stipend (enough to finally purchase his own piano!) and he and Brahms would later form a lifelong professional and personal relationship. Most importantly, the attention surrounding the prize was the first step in gaining international recognition.

Encouraged by his success, Dvořák began a series of new projects in 1874 including his Symphony No. 5, three chamber works, a song cycle, and the *Serenade for Strings*. In this five-movement work, Dvořák demonstrated his compositional prowess by employing simple musical forms (four of the movements follow a simple A-B-A structure with contrasting middle sections followed by the return of opening material) with beautiful melodies and harmonic variety. Dvořák composed the *Serenade* in only twelve days, and the piece was premiered in Prague in December of 1876 with great success.

Like his predecessor, Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884), Dvořák was considered a "nationalist" composer with his integration of Bohemian folk music in his compositions, particularly peasant rhythms and melodic material. Dvořák's choice of the serenade, a multi-movement piece that is more elaborate than a suite but less serious than a symphony, gave him the freedom to explore the light-hearted side of his musical personality. The *Serenade* includes a cantabile first movement followed by a slow waltz. The third movement features a high-spirited humor that is balanced the following lyrical slow movement and the piece ends with a lively, offbeat finale, which brings to mind a Bohemian peasant dance.



Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904) was born in a small Bohemian village in what is now the Czech Republic. Dvořák's father, a butcher and innkeeper, realized that his son possessed unusual talent and provided for private music lessons from the age of six. As a teenager, Dvořák attended the Prague Organ School. He graduated an accomplished vocalist, pianist, violist, and violinist with a strong foundation in music theory and performance.

Although trained as an organist, he accepted his first job as principal violist in Prague's Provincial Theater Orchestra under music director Bedrich Smetana. Dvořák left this position after a few years for financial reasons to pursue composition and teaching. He married his student, Anna Cermakova, in 1873, which proved to be a happy marriage bringing them nine children.

During the early years of his marriage, Dvořák continued teaching and composing. He entered the Austrian State Prize for Composition in 1874 with scores of two symphonies and other works. Although Dvořák was not aware of it, Johannes Brahms was the leading member of the jury and was highly impressed. The prize was awarded to Dvořák in 1874, 1876 and 1877, when Brahms and fellow jury member, the prominent music critic Eduard Hanslick made themselves known to him. Brahms introduced Dvořák to a Viennese music publisher who commissioned Dvořák's original *Slavonic Dances* (1878), which was instantly successful, and gave him international stature as a composer.

Dvořák's newfound success led him throughout Europe and to the United States. During the 1880s, Dvořák's Sixth Symphony, *Stabat Mater*, and *Slavonic Dances* were successfully performed in England. In 1891, Dvořák was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Cambridge University and was offered a position at the Prague Conservatory as professor of composition and instrumentation. This led to an 1892 invitation to become the director of New York City's National Conservatory of Music. Dvořák held this position for three years, from 1892 to 1895.

While in America, Dvořák's interest in cross-cultural studies led him to study the music of African Americans and Native Americans. He built fruitful relationships with these peoples, making friends and exchanging information. The originality of Native American music and the deep spirituality of African American music inspired Dvořák. His cultural experiences in America were the inspiration for his Symphony No. 9 "From the New World," which was premiered at Carnegie Hall by the New York Philharmonic in December of 1893. During this time, he also composed his String Quartet No. 12 in F major, op. 96 (the *American*), and his highly successful Cello Concerto in B Minor, op. 104.

Although Dvořák enjoyed professional and financial success in the United States, he missed his homeland and family. In 1901, Dvořák returned to Bohemia as director at the Prague Conservatory. He maintained this position until his death from heart failure on May 1, 1904.

Throughout his latter years, Antonín Dvořák was considered by many throughout the Western world to be the greatest of all living composers. Today, his music continues to occupy a prominent position in performance repertoire. In part, this popularity can be explained by Dvořák's prolific and varied repertoire that encompasses a broad range of styles while at the same time remaining true to his Bohemian roots. Perhaps his greatest appeal is his life's story: a self-made man who, through talent, hard work, and unrelenting determination overcame poverty and low social standing to become an artist revered throughout the Western world.

**Program Notes by Dr. Sarah M. Schettler,
Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, Second Flute**