

# NORTHWEST Sinfonietta

A FLAIR FOR THE CLASSIC

## Tales From the East

November 19, 2004 - Town Hall Seattle

November 20, 2004 - Pantages Theater Tacoma

Dvorák: Czech Suite Op. 39

Vorišek : Symphony in D

Chopin: Piano Concert No. 2 in F minor, Op. 21

The Czech Suite for small orchestra was the final form given to the composer's original intention to write a new serenade (the third after that for strings, op.22, and for wind instruments, op.44) a pencil sketch of which, entitled "Serenade", was begun on March 4th 1879, when the composer was still engaged on the string quartet in E flat major, op.51. Of the two movements in sketch (Tempo di Marcia and minuet), however, Dvorák made no further use, but immediately after finishing the quartet on March 28th began writing a completely new composition. This was also in serenade form for small orchestra, but in the undated manuscript, bears the title "Suite" and the misleading opus number 39, under which incomplete description it was published by Schlesinger, Berlin, in 1881.

Dvorák himself gave the composition the title of "Czech Suite" when it was first performed on May 16th 1879, in Prague, by the orchestra of the Czech Interim Theatre, conducted by Adolf Cech. The title was aptly chosen as three of the five movements are versions of typical Czech folk-dances (Polka, Sousedská, Furiant), while the remaining two (the introductory Pastorale and the Romance) are specifically Czech in expression. In Czechoslovakia the work has long been known as the Czech Suite under which title also this first Czech edition appears.

Notes by Otakar Sourek

Jan Vaclav Vorišek, one of the most important Czech musical émigrés in Vienna, was born on May 11, 1791, at Vambek (in the Rychnov nad Knežnou district) in North East Bohemia where from 1777 to 1815 his father Václav Vorišek (about 1749-1815) was headmaster of the local school and a keen musician. He learned the rudiments of the art of piano and organ playing at home. In 1806 he started studying at a grammar school in Prague and later studied philosophy at the university. He improved his knowledge of musical theory, composition and piano playing under the tutorship of V.J. Tomášek (1774-1850) who at that time had an outstanding school of music in Prague. On the recommendation of his teacher he taught music to members of the noble Lobkovic family. In Prague he found himself surrounded by the new musical art of the significant romanticism which acquainted him with the revolutionary French opera, the works of Spohr, Dusik and particularly Beethoven. He was also influenced by the new National Revival in Czech music. It was at that time that his Czech song "Innocent" probably originated whose words were written by V. Hanka. In 1813 Hugo Vorišek moved to Vienna where he continued his musical studies under J. Hummel. It was in Vienna, too, that he first found recognition as an excellent pianist, finding favour not only with Hummel and Moscheles, but even with Beethoven with whom he enjoyed personal contact. When in 1814 V.J. Tomasek visited Beethoven in Vienna the latter spoke very highly of Vorišek's works.

His spiritual growth and artistic development were also influenced by the lawyer I. Sonnleithner and his friends and also the musical historian Raphael Kiesewetter, a native of Holešov in Moravia. After trying in

vain in 1818 to obtain the post of conductor of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and that of court organist, Hugo Vorišek completed his legal studies and finally accepted the post of clerk to the Imperial Council of War in Vienna. In the same year the post of court organist became vacant. Vorišek applied for the position being chosen from among eight other applicants. In 1824 he became first court organist following the death of this predecessor, Václav Ružicka, from the town of Jaromerice nad Rokytinou. Unfortunately he did not hold the post for long as he contracted tuberculosis. After unsuccessful medical treatment at Štýrský Hradec and a visit to his brother František in his native region he sought aid from the Viennese physician Jan Ondrej Wawruch who failed to save his life. He died on November 19, 1825, at the age of 34 and was buried in Währung cemetery.

Vorišek's Symphony in D Major has four parts that differ greatly in their movement and expression (Allegro con brio, Andante, Scherzo-Allegro, ma non troppo, Finale-Allegro con brio). As a whole it bears the marks of an independent artistic personality welling from the Czech national musical tradition. In its composition and structure it is based on Beethoven's creative heroism. Particularly the second slow movement, with its meditative and contemplative tones, resembles the deeply felt slow movements of Beethoven's symphonies. In the daring and vigorous scherzo of the movement we encounter more than one indication of the composer's real greatness of thought which leave us in no doubt as to the heights this bold and progressive pioneer of romantic musical expression would have reached in Vienna had this untimely death not put an end to the further development of his creative talent. The concluding movement features all the typical characteristics of a classical finale of a symphonic work.

Notes by Jan Racek

### The Advent of the Singing Piano

There is a rare breed of artists who escape all attempts at being labeled, characterized, and summed-up; and whose roots are impossible to trace within any reliable historical logic. Their artistry seems to just appear, indifferent to the stylistic continuum created by their ancestors. Frederic Chopin is one such meteoric appearance in the musical celestial sky. His single contribution to the art of piano playing is nothing short of monumental and without precedent. Until Chopin, the piano was still essentially a percussive instrument whose ability to hold a sustained and rich tone was quite limited. Chopin single-handedly conceived of a unique writing style which gave the piano a true voice (in the musical sense of the word.) His ability to create an endless haze of the most subtle colors imaginable was simply unprecedented.

Following the monumental legacy of Mozart and Beethoven, most 19th Century composers have tended to approach the piano concerto form with a great deal of caution. (Brahms waited decades before conceiving his first concerto.) Chopin's personality was so original and his conceptual approach to the piano/orchestra relationship so novel, that he embarked in full confidence in the writing of his first concerto while a 19-year-old student on his way from Warsaw to Vienna. Although labeled "No.2", the F minor concerto was composed first in 1829 and completed upon his return home to Poland. Despite the young composer's inexperience with the idiom, Chopin's style is immediately striking. His use of extreme ornamentation, harmonic boldness and the most sophisticated use of the piano pedal create the revolutionary "singing" piano line described above. Such finesse in the piano part requires the utmost care in the balance with the orchestra whose role is kept to a minimum except in the orchestral tutti. Often, Chopin marks the orchestral part pianissimo while the piano boasts forte or even fortissimo and great vigilance must be observed in not over-emulating the piano's passionate delivery. The 2nd movement was inspired by a vocal student from the Warsaw Conservatory with whom Chopin was very much in love. (The feeling was, unfortunately not mutual.) Chopin's ability to evoke the most intimate and yet passionate emotions, reaches in these pages, its absolute

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climax. The composer's Polish heritage is most apparent in the finale, a Mazurka in Rondo form where accents on the 2nd and 3rd beats give the movement its irresistible dance character.

Notes by C. Chagnard