

NORTHWEST Sinfonietta

A FLAIR FOR THE CLASSIC

Orchestra vs. Piano

October 7, 2006 - Rialto Theater Tacoma

October 8, 2006 - Rialto Theater Tacoma

Johann Strauss: Wiener Blut

'Viennese Blood' or 'Viennese Spirit' Op. 354 is considered by many to be one of Strauss' finest waltzes. The new dedication waltz was to celebrate the wedding of the Emperor Franz Josef's daughter Archduchess Gisela Louise Maria and Prince Leopold of Bavaria. It was first performed with the composer at the helm on 22 April 1873 with the world-renowned Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. This partnership between the "Waltz King" and Austria's finest orchestra was a first as well and it took a long and rather tedious time for this collaboration to occur. Worried about damaging its image, the Philharmonic had refused to be associated with music it regarded as too 'light' and superficial!! In the end, Strauss' supreme artistry was able to transcend such skepticism. His music is celebrated around the world, particularly during the Neujahrskonzert (New Year's Concert) presented at the famed Musikverein Hall and performed by the finest waltzing orchestra of them all: The Vienna Philharmonic!

Johannes Brahms: Rhapsody, Op.79, No.2

Originally entitled "Molto passionato" Brahms' 2nd Rhapsody, Op.79 was composed in 1879 and dedicated to the charming and highly musical Elisabeth von Herzogenberg. Set in a dark and passionate G minor, it unfolds in an unexpectedly oppressive and turbulent exploration of sonata form.

Joseph Haydn: Symphony No.83 "La Poule"

Between 1785 and 1786, after having established himself as one of Austria's most celebrated composers and at the peak of his creative powers, Haydn was invited to Paris for the first time. His host, the Comte d'Ogny was an influential patron of the arts and the co-founder of Paris' most famous musical society, the "Concert de la Loge Olympique." It featured Europe's largest and most flamboyant orchestra boasting forty violins, ten double basses and a full wind section, all dressed in sky-blue dress coats complete with swords! This elite ensemble provided Haydn with an opportunity to further explore the full orchestral potential. He did so with the composition of six symphonies: No.82 "L'Ours", No.83 "La Poule", No.84, No.85 "La Reine", No.86 and No.87. The nickname "La Poule" (The Hen) was inspired by the second subject of the first movement which indeed is strikingly reminiscent of a hen's clucking.

Franz Schubert: Impromptu Op.90, No.2

Following a stay in bucolic Graz, Schubert returned to Vienna in October of 1827 fully rested, describing his sojourn to the countryside as "the happiest days I have known for a long time." He immediately began work on a set of compositions for chamber ensembles and solo piano. His Op.90, No.2 was given the title "Impromptu" by Schubert himself. The term usually refers to the extended development of a rhythmic idea stated in the introduction. This particular Impromptu follows a clear ABA form and is particularly striking in its key relationship where the home key of E flat major flirts for a moment with the remote B minor. Known universally for his melodic genius, Schubert shows here that his harmonic mastery is just as eloquent.

Fritz Kreisler: Viennese Melody - The Old Refrain

The long composer/violinist tradition which began with Antonio Vivaldi, found in Fritz Kreisler its final incarnation. As a pupil of Bruckner and Delibes, Kreisler showed a great gift for melody and devoted his compositional talent in the crafting of elegant and soulful compositions which have become staples of the violin repertoire. Virtuosity for its own sake was never Kreisler's aim and his own playing, while technically superb, was revered for its refinement and subtlety. "The Old Refrain" (Viennese Popular Song) is rooted in the Austrian folk tradition while the "Viennese Melody" was initially composed by Eduard Gärtner (1862-1918) and transcribed by Kreisler for the violin.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat, Op.19

I am particularly pleased to present Beethoven's second Piano Concerto which is too often overshadowed by its three senior opuses, and is the least performed of the five. Although it was catalogued as number two, Beethoven's opus 19 was written before the first Concerto.

Begun in 1793, the B flat Concerto was subjected to some substantial revisions before it was performed in 1795 by the composer himself. At that time, Beethoven had already acquired a solid reputation as one of the most accomplished pianists of his generation. To be featured as a dazzling virtuoso was a sure way for a young musician to make an impact on the Viennese public. Beethoven became also known as a great Mozart interpreter, and the influence of the Austrian master on him is most prominent in this concerto.

Beethoven and Mozart also shared a tendency to compose up until performance day. The entire last movement of Beethoven's second Concerto was completely replaced only forty-eight hours before the premiere. Further revisions were made in 1798 when Beethoven performed the work in Prague. The result is a composition to be inscribed along with Mozart's final concertos, as one of the last great 18th century piano concertos.

The Canadian genius pianist Glenn Gould described Beethoven's 2nd Concerto as: "One of the most unjustly maligned of all of Beethoven's orchestral works." We are delighted tonight to help restore this work to its deserved place amongst 18th Century musical chef d'oeuvres.

Christophe Chagnard