

Program Notes

Mock Morris by Percy Grainger

Australian composer Percy Grainger grew up a musician; by the age of 13 he was already an accomplished pianist. At that age he traveled to Germany to study music at the Hoch School, and after a few years he moved to England where he became enamored with the folk music there, particularly the music of the working class. He spent much of his musical life thereafter studying and setting English folk music. Grainger wasn't very interested in just setting folk tunes in a competent way; he wanted to truly capture the singing voice of the English countryside, and as such his arrangements highlight the vocal ornaments and articulations captured from listening to live performances from local singers. At one point he came across the merry and jaunty Morris dance, an English country dance believed to either have druidic or Italian origins. What's interesting here is that Grainger didn't just want to set an existing Morris dance tune - he wanted to make one completely his own. Mock Morris is the result. The tune is a completely original composition but has deep roots in English folk music tradition. Originally composed for six-part string orchestra in 1910, nearly every instrument has the melody at some point. The use of duplet and triplet rhythms are prominent throughout. The ending features the violas and some pleasant pizzicatos from the entire orchestra close the piece.

Romanian Folk Dances by Bela Bartok

Composed in 1915 originally for piano solo and later arranged for small ensemble in 1917, Bartok's Romanian Folk Dances have been arranged for multiple different ensembles, including the string orchestra version heard today, which was arranged by the composer's friend Arthur Willner. There have been other arrangements but one of the most notable is a version for violin and piano by Zoltan Szekely. The original version is based on seven folk tunes from Transylvania which were thought to have been originally played on the fiddle or shepherd's flute. The movements of the piece feature the folk tunes Stick Dance, Sash Dance, In One Spot, Dance from Bucsum, Romanian Polka, and Fast Dance which vary from vibrant dances to more contemplative melodies. The string orchestra version features several moments where a solo violin assumes the role of the shepherd's flute or fiddle, rising above the orchestral accompaniment to give the listeners a taste of Transylvanian melodic tradition.

Serenade for String Orchestra by Norman Leyden

Norman Leyden is perhaps best known for his composition of thousands of scores for radio, film, and various other orchestrations. A notable clarinetist, Leyden co-wrote "I Sustain the Wings" with Glenn Miller in 1943 which was used as an introduction to a World War II radio series. He had a successful musical career that included being the conductor of the Oregon Symphony Pops orchestra and wrote this Serenade for String Orchestra in 1971. The Serenade is written in four contrasting movements, with the first two being based on Baroque dances, and the last two written in a more Romantic style. Like the string serenades of Dvorak and Tchaikovsky, Leyden reprises tunes from earlier movements in the finale, "Cakewalk". The first two movements, Prelude and Fugue, present stately melodies that are passed throughout the orchestra. The last two, Nocturne and Cakewalk, present different listening opportunities; the Nocturne has a steady and pleasant feel in five beats to the measure, while the Cakewalk finishes the piece in a marked and jaunty style not unlike a rustic folk dance.

Élégie by Gabriel Faure

Originally composed for cello and piano, Faure's *Élégie* op. 24 is thought to come from an unfinished cello and piano sonata written just after the success of his first piano quartet in 1880. Faure's common practice in writing larger works was to work on slow movements first. Once he completed the slow movement that would later be published as the *Élégie*, he never finished the rest of the sonata. Faure later orchestrated the piece as well as writing a transcription for viola and piano. This arrangement for cello and strings arose out of Faure's original full orchestration. The *Élégie* starts somber and melodic in its opening and then transforms into a more intense and impassioned middle section before returning to the slow and soft opening melody in c minor (which incidentally was the key used in the piano quartet!).

Symphony No. 1 by William Boyce

William Boyce wrote a large variety of music over his life and musical career from around 1734 until his death in 1779 and shares experience with Beethoven as a composer who went deaf but continued to compose. Baptized in the church as a young boy and serving as choir boy in the same church until his voice changed, he studied music and became organist of Oxford Chapel in 1734. After obtaining that position he started dabbling more in composition and wrote dozens of oratorios, operas, and other large and small vocal works. He didn't wind up writing a purely instrumental composition until 1747 when he finished his "Twelve Sonatas for Two Violins and a Bass." In 1756 he wrote his *Symphony No. 1* in B flat, just two years before deafness overwhelmed him and forced him to retire from his various organist posts. This *Symphony* is in three movements with the first being like a traditional sonata with playful runs of sixteenth notes breaking up the staccato eighth-note pulse. The second movement, in a slow three, is plaintive yet beautiful, and the last movement is a quick country-type dance in 6/8.

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