

SUBLIME SCHUBERT – May 29, 2021

PROGRAM NOTES

“Entrance of the Queen of Sheba” from *Solomon* (1748) **GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL * 1685-1759**

Solomon was composed during May and June 1748, and first presented during Handel’s oratorio season at Covent Garden the following spring, on March 17, 1749. Though the performances seem to have been well attended, the work was given only two repetitions that year and then not revived for a decade; Handel included it in what proved to be his last season, in 1759. The oratorio’s text, by an unknown librettist, deals with incidents recounted in II Chronicles and I Kings: the dedication of Solomon’s newly completed temple and his happy marriage to Pharaoh’s daughter (Act I); the famous adjudication of the dispute of the two harlots over the parentage of a baby (Act II); and the visit of the Queen of Sheba and her admiration for Solomon’s wisdom and the splendor of his court (Act III). The sinfonia that prefaces the third act, usually titled (though not by Handel) *Entrance of the Queen of Sheba*, borrowed its principal thematic material from Giovanni Porta’s opera *Numitore*, produced in London in 1720. Handel originally sketched the music in a version for two clarinets and *corno di caccia* (literally, “hunting horn”; an early valve-less French horn) and reworked it for two oboes, strings and continuo as an entr’acte for *Solomon*. The movement is full of the pomp and bustle appropriate to a state visit at the highest levels of ancient government.

***In Passing* for Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano and Percussion (2010)** **CHRIS ROGERSON * BORN 1988**

Chris Rogerson was born in 1988 in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst, New York, and started playing piano at two and cello at eight. He received a baccalaureate from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied composition with Jennifer Higdon, a master’s degree from Yale University as a student of Aaron Jay Kernis and Martin Bresnick, and a doctorate from Princeton, studying with Steve Mackey and Paul Lansky. In 2016, he joined the faculty of the Curtis Institute. Rogerson’s music has been performed by leading orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists across the country and in Europe, and he has held residencies with Young Concert Artists, Amarillo Symphony, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, Music from Angel Fire, and Copland House. Rogerson is also co-founder and co-artistic director of Kettle Corn New Music, a new-music presenting organization in New York City. His honors include a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Theodore Presser Career Grant, ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award, two BMI Student Composer Awards, Aspen Music Festival Jacob Druckman Award, and prizes from the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts, National Association for Music Education, New York Art Ensemble and Third Millennium Ensemble.

Rogerson composed *In Passing* in 2010 for the Aspen Music Festival, where it was premiered in July of that year. Of it, he wrote, “This work was composed after the death of a good friend in 2010,” a simple but profound sentiment that summarizes both the motivation of the piece as well as its introspective nature.

Concerto No. 2 for Double Bass and Orchestra in B minor (1845) **GIOVANNI BOTTESINI * 1821-1889**

Giovanni Bottesini, composer, conductor and the preeminent double bass virtuoso of the mid-19th century, was born in 1821 in northern Italy. His father, Pietro, a clarinetist and composer, early taught his son the rudiments of music, and before he was eleven, young Giovanni had sung in several choirs, played timpani in the local theater orchestra, and studied violin. Bottesini’s father took his precocious son to Milan in 1835 with hope of enrolling him in the Conservatory, but they learned upon their arrival that scholarships remained only for players of bassoon and double bass. Giovanni applied himself with such vigor to the latter instrument that he was accepted into the school only a few weeks later. He left the Conservatory four years later, having obtained a graduation prize for his solo playing. With his winnings, Bottesini purchased a fine instrument made by the old Milanese master Giuseppe Testore that, legend has it, the young musician found beneath a pile of rubbish in a puppet theater.

During the decade after 1839, Bottesini lived as a free-lance musician, a period that included a residence in Havana in 1846 as principal bassist of the orchestra of the Teatro Tacón, the production there of his first opera (based, appropriately, on the subject of *Cristoforo Colombo*), and a sensational tour of the United States. When Bottesini returned to Europe, he was soon in demand as a soloist across the Continent and in England; he became universally known as the “Paganini of the Double Bass.” In addition to his performing engagements, Bottesini also held several important conducting assignments — the high point of his podium career came when he conducted the premiere of Verdi’s *Aida* on Christmas Eve 1871 in Cairo to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal. The last months before his death, on July 7, 1889, were spent as director of the Parma Conservatory.

Bottesini’s works, like those of Verdi, are characterized by their emphasis on lyricism, plangent harmonies and straightforward emotional appeal built with solid craftsmanship. The Double Bass Concerto No. 2 in B minor from 1845 opens with a fantasia-like movement built from the doleful arching melody given by the bass at the outset, with formal balance provided not by conventional thematic contrast but by elaborate passages of figuration for the soloist. The *Andante* is a sweetly sentimental, *basso profundo* aria

without words, a concert-hall analog to a scene from one of Bottesini's operas. The finale is a brilliant showpiece for double bass whose Gypsy-inflected thematic material and vibrant, dancing spirit recall the fiery Hungarian *czárdás*.

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major, D. 485 (1816)

FRANZ SCHUBERT * 1797-1828

Schubert composed incessantly and his devoted band of friends were delighted to sing and play what he wrote. Franz von Hartmann recorded of one of these Schubertiads, "There was a huge gathering [including] Gahy, who played four-hand piano music gloriously with Schubert, and Vogl, who sang almost thirty splendid songs.... When the music was over there was grand feeding and dancing. At 12:30 [we went] home. To bed at 1 o'clock."

Supplementing the songs and piano works for these Schubertiads was a growing collection of orchestral pieces composed for other amateur musical soirées. A family string quartet, comprising his brothers Ferdinand and Ignaz on violins, his father on cello and Franz on viola, attracted other players and soon evolved into a small orchestra. They rehearsed at first in the Schubert household, but as the membership grew they moved in 1816 to the apartments of Leopold von Sonnleithner. It was for one of those informal evenings that Schubert composed the sparkling B-flat Symphony.

The Symphony opens with a delicate curtain of woodwind harmonies. The violins present the gracious main theme; the second theme is a delicate melody traded between strings and winds. The compact development begins with a decorated version of the opening woodwind harmonies. A discussion of the decorating figure ensues as does a full recapitulation of the exposition's materials. The *Andante* is built from two extended themes: the first is given immediately by the strings; the second is also played by the strings, with obbligato phrases from the oboe and bassoon. Though the third movement is marked "Menuetto," in tempo and temperament it is truly a scherzo; the bucolic central trio features the bassoon. The last movement recalls the vibrant finales of Haydn in its clear melodic structure, rhythmic vivacity and witty use of dynamics.

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