

Chapel Hill

Philharmonia

Sunday, 12 February 2017
3:00 p.m.

Moeser Auditorium
University of North Carolina at
Chapel Hill

Donald. L. Oehler, Music Director

Inspired by Love

Sinfonietta

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)

Fanfare

The Castle

The Queen's Monastery

The Street to the Castle

The Town Hall

— Intermission —

Concerto in A minor

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Allegro affetuoso

Andantino grazioso — Allegro vivace

Dana Protopopescu, piano

The Eternal Feminine

Das Ewig-Weibliche / Zieht uns hinan.

The final lines of Goethe's *Faust*. (Translation: The eternal feminine draws us upward.) Volumes have been written about these lines and what Goethe meant by them. Here we use them simply to note that the feminine influence as inspiration has led to some wonderful creations. Cases in point are Leoš Janáček's *Sinfonietta* and Robert Schumann's *Piano Concerto*, our program today.

The feminine influence in these two cases was about as different as could be. In Schumann's case it came from Clara, his beloved wife for five years after a tumultuous courtship, mother of his three children (eventually to be eight). Janáček's inspiration was the wife of a friend, a woman decades younger than he, to whom he sent hundreds of letters expressing his affection, mostly unanswered. But the importance of these two women in the creation of the works we play is undeniable.

Leoš Janáček's Tribute to His Newly Independent Country — and to Kamilla

Robert Schumann died at age 46 in an asylum for the insane. If Leoš Janáček had died that young few outside his immediate surroundings would remember him or what he did. Obviously gifted, he studied in Prague, Leipzig and Vienna, but returned to his native Moravia where he founded an organ school in Brno that later became a conservatory. He spent many years researching the folk music of Moravia and Silesia, and married a former pupil. By 1904 he had composed numerous works including two operas, but none had brought him much recognition. The death of his daughter shaped the plot of his first successful opera, *Jenufa*, dedicated to her memory. Its premiere that year in Brno was well received, but the 50 year old composer regarded it as largely a matter of provincial pride.

To get the opera mounted in Prague depended on the consent of Karel Kovařovic, director of the National Theater. Unfortunately, in 1887 Janáček had written a disdainful review of one of Kovařovic's operas, leading to bad feeling between the two. Finally in 1916 Kovařovic agreed to produce *Jenufa* in Prague, where it met with high acclaim. This marked the beginning of the period of Janáček's greatest productivity. He was 62.

Estranged from his wife after an affair that same year, Janáček soon met the young woman who became his muse and obsession for the rest of his life. Kamilla Stösslová, married, 38 years his junior, neither encouraged nor rejected his attention, which he expressed in over 700 letters to her, containing varying degrees of passionate expressions. She insisted that he burn her few responses, and agreed only in 1927 to communicate on a first name basis. One of his string quartets, titled *Intimate Letters*, clearly refers to this almost entirely one-sided correspondence.



Kamilla Stösslová and son Otto in 1917, the year she met Janáček

Kamilla was with him on a few occasions, the last being an excursion to the countryside in 1928. Her son wandered off and in the search for him Janáček got a severe chill that led to his death by pneumonia. But two years earlier she had been by his side at a band concert in her hometown when he got the idea of how to carry out a commission he had received.

In 1926 the Czech people were exuberant about their newly independent country and the society called Sokol — based on Juvenal's motto *Mens sana in corpore sano* (Sound mind in a sound body) — exemplified this pride. Sokol turned to Janáček, now in his 70s and world famous, to provide opening music for their festival in Prague. Inspired by the band music he heard with Kamilla, he composed a short work for brass, mostly trumpets, plus percussion.

But his inspiration didn't stop there. He decided to add four short tone poems for orchestra, depicting places in Brno, to the work. He called the result *Military Sinfonietta*, but subsequently dropped the first word from the title. The first performance was in Prague in June 1926. The work achieved immediate success and was soon being performed all over Europe.



Janáček in caricature

In one of his Harvard lectures Leonard Bernstein illustrated a simple principle of composition: when a new thematic idea is presented, repeat it immediately, perhaps in modified form, so that it is reinforced in the listener's memory. Examples abound: the opening of Beethoven's 5th symphony, or *Happy Birthday*. This practice is so universal that one is usually unaware of its use.

In the *Sinfonietta* Janáček takes this to a literal extreme. In dozens of places a short musical idea (often as few as three bars) is repeated at once, note for note. Instead of writing out the repetition, the composer uses the "repeat" musical notation. He called these *časovka*, which Janáček specialist John Tyrell translates as "a little flash of time". These fragments presage similar devices used toward the end of the 20th century by "minimalist" composers like Philip Glass and Steve Reich.

Another stylistic device that anticipates the minimalists is repeated rapid patterns. An example is the opening of the second movement, where the two clarinets play this pattern:



Passages like this form a shimmering and murmuring background in much of the work.

Apart from these forward looking techniques, Janáček's style was informed by two influences: the Russian romantics, especially Tchaikovsky, and the folk music he absorbed during his researches. In this he resembled Bartók, who similarly forged a personal style at once local and international. A militant pan-Slavist, Janáček rejected what he saw as the oppressive influence of Wagnerites and other Germanists who dominated the music schools where he had studied.

After the opening *Fanfare*, each movement of the *Sinfonietta* has the title of a place in Brno. The second and fourth movement titles, *The Castle* and *The Street to the Castle*, refer to Spilberk Castle, on a hill overlooking the city. It dates from the 1200s and was important during the Thirty Years War. In the Austrian Empire it was notorious as a place where malefactors and revolutionaries were imprisoned and often tortured. *The Queen's Monastery*, the title of the third movement, was important in Janáček's life. He lived there for four years as a boy, singing in the choir and learning about music. *The Town Hall*, subject of the last movement, has a section dating from the 1200s. Inside the entrance is a suspended statue of a crocodile. The legend is that the people of Brno, having never seen a crocodile, were convinced that it was a dragon.

A year after the work's premiere Janáček wrote an article called *My Home Town* in which he explained the significance of these places in the *Sinfonietta*. First he recalled his unpleasant memories of Brno during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and then explained how he saw it after 1918 when the Czechs had won their independence:

And then I saw the town undergo a miraculous change. I lost my dislike of the gloomy Town Hall, my hatred of the hill from whose depths so much pain was screaming, my distaste for the street and its throng. As if by a miracle, liberty was conjured up, glowing over the town the rebirth of 28 October 1918. I saw myself in it. I belonged to it. And the blare of the victorious trumpets, the holy peace of the Queen's Monastery, the shadows of the night, the breath of the green hill and the vision of the growing greatness of the town, of my Brno, were all giving birth to my *Sinfonietta*.

In the *Fanfare*, amid chords in the low brass the tympani immediately bang out the motivic element for the entire work, with a rhythmic stress characteristic of the Czech language:



This movement is basically an elaboration of this six note theme, nine trumpets and other brass providing layer on layer of sound until one feels surrounded by it.

The Castle seems partly to invoke the grim reputation the place had in the bad old days, but the main theme of the movement is a simple folk dance.

The musical depiction of *The Queen's Monastery* is solemn and introspective, as if depicting Janáček's memories of the place.

The Street to the Castle, the fourth movement, evokes daily life, including the singing and dancing that took place in the establishments along the street.

Near the end of *The Town Hall* the brass players from the first movement join with the rest of the orchestra for an extended celebratory ending, reprising the fanfare music while trills in the strings and woodwinds seem to imitate the happy sounds of ringing bells.

Robert Schumann's Concerto for Clara

After devoting most of his twenties to writing piano music which, if he had done nothing else, would have secured his place alongside Chopin as one of the great romantic composers for that instrument, Schumann took on, in succession, the writing of songs and chamber music. In his *Liederjahr* 1840 he wrote no fewer than 138 songs, many of a quality to rank with the best of Schubert. Two years later he composed string quartets and works for piano and strings that still appear in the programs of ensembles everywhere.

His efforts to create larger works for orchestra were more problematic. In 1841 he produced his first symphony to be published, and he completed another that eventually was published in revised form as his fourth. Also in that year he wrote a *Fantasy in A minor* for piano and orchestra, but this was not well received and went unpublished.

In 1844 Robert accompanied Clara, by then widely renowned as a concert pianist, on a tour of Russia. Upon their return he began to have symptoms of a disorder which included hearing the note A above the treble clef ringing in his ears. It was during this unhappy period that Clara persuaded him to expand the *Fantasy* of 1841 into a piano concerto for her. He wrote a long rondo final movement and preceded it by a short intermezzo, completing the work we know today. It was introduced in a performance by Clara in 1846. An instant success, it was performed by her innumerable times in her long career and has been a staple of the piano concerto literature from the beginning, becoming probably Schumann's most popular work with orchestra.



Robert and Clara Schumann in a daguerreotype from 1850

Many artists have had their extroverted and introspective temperaments but few gave them names, as Schumann did. He called his heroic spirit Florestan, his reflective one Eusebius. In his piano pieces the titles sometimes refer by name to one or the other. Whether this duality reflects anything related to Schumann's later descent into severe mental illness is doubtful, but his music often exhibits the two quite clearly. The piano concerto is full of the contrasts of these personalities.

The opening of the concerto's first movement (the 1841 *Fantasy*) is pure Florestan, a strong descending A minor flourish by the piano after a chord from the orchestra. But immediately Eusebius enters with the plaintive main theme of the movement, played by the oboe:



Apart from this instance, the orchestra does not introduce the thematic material in the usual way for a concerto of that period. In fact the movement is in a fairly standard sonata form. In the

development Eusebius has a big moment, a lovely calm dialogue between piano and clarinet. After an extended cadenza for the soloist the coda transforms the main theme into a sprightly march (Florestan) which dies away into the distance until the soloist begins a sweep to the final chords.

The brief Andantino (which Schumann specified as an introduction, not a separate movement) is all Eusebius. Its beautiful middle section is based on a lyrical melody introduced by the cellos. An echo of the main theme of the first movement provides a transition to the rondo, in which the soloist bursts forth with a Florestan theme in a swinging two-bar rhythm:



The second subject is a gentle triple rhythm dance (Eusebius) which looks rather strange on the page because its three beats are spread over two bars:



These contrasting two-bar rhythms arise from the different ways to divide six beats: 3-3 or 2-2-2. They slide easily back and forth as the rondo progresses, like Schumann's two temperaments. Of course the heroic Florestan gets the last word and the concerto ends triumphantly.

One can imagine the joy Clara must have felt every time she performed this wonderful music. As Tovey wrote, "... the whole concerto, like all Schumann's deepest music, is recklessly pretty."

Lawrence Evans

About Our Soloist

Dana Protopopescu began studying music in Bucharest at a very young age, concluding brilliantly at the Brussels Conservatory and the Hochschule für Musik in Hanover under the guidance of Eduardo del Pueyo and Karl Engel. At age 14 she performed her first piano concerto with orchestra. Since then she has captivated audiences in London, Moscow, Paris, Barcelona, Montreal, Washington D.C., Boston and Seoul, working with conductors A. Rahbari, I. Markevitch, A. Walter and L. Langree. Her recordings include Mendelssohn's complete works for piano, and her CDs of the Hummel and Weber concertos were highly acclaimed in press reviews by CD Classics (London), Penquin Guide (USA), and Diapason (France). Recently she received a Music Critic Award in Bucharest. Dana Protopopescu is also an avid chamber music player. She has performed with Y. Toda, L. Prunaru, M. Beaver, M. N. Lemieux, M. Brenche and I. Monighetti, as well as in trios with M. Martin and F. Helmerson. She has accompanied performers in the International Bel Canto Competition and the Bolshoi Soloists of Moscow. She serves as the official pianist for the violin session of the Queen Elizabeth Competition.