Schubert's Ninth

SCHERMERHORN SYMPHONY CENTER
LAURA TURNER HALL
April 30, 2009 at 7 p.m.
May 1 & 2, 2009 at 8 p.m.

Nashville Symphony
Günther Herbig, *conductor*
Andrew Armstrong, *piano*

CARL MARIA VON WEBER	Overture to Oberon
BARTÓK	Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra Allegretto Adagio religioso - Poco più mosso - Tempo I Allegro vivace Andrew Armstrong, *piano*
	intermission
SCHUBERT	Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 "The Great" Andante - Allegro, ma non troppo Andante con moto Scherzo: Allegro vivace Allegro vivace

CARL MARIA VON WEBER
(born in Eutin, Germany, 1786; died in London, 1826)
Overture to Oberon

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

estimated length: 10 minutes

In August 1824 Charles Kemble invited Weber to compose and conduct an opera for London's Covent Garden. Consumptive since 1817, Weber was advised against it by his doctor, but his concern for his family's financial well-being after his death led him to accept the commission. He immediately decided that composing an English opera meant he should master the language, and he engaged the services of an English gentleman, from whom he took 153 lessons. His remarkable success in this endeavor can be judged from his correspondence in English about various aspects of the project.

Of the two subjects he was offered, Weber immediately rejected Goethe's *Faust* and settled on Wieland's *Oberon*. The tardy arrival of James Robinson Planché's libretto forced a year's postponement of the opening, yet Weber set to work immediately. He wrote to Planché about his concern that too many principal characters did

not have singing roles and that some of the most crucial moments in the plot did not call for music. Nevertheless, he completed the project with these concessions to English taste, fully planning to revise the opera later for Germany.

When Weber arrived in England on March 4, 1826, he had yet to compose several numbers, among them the Overture. Upon its completion, the composer wrote on his score: "Finished April 9, 1826, in the morning at a quarter of twelve, and with it the whole opera. *Soli Deo Gloria!!*" The premiere only three days later was a great triumph — all of Weber's numbers including the Overture had to be encored, and he was vociferously applauded. His exertions, however, had been costly, and less than two months later, on the night before he was to return to Germany, he died.

The libretto is universally considered one of the worst in the repertoire, yet Weber's magnificent music has saved the opera from total oblivion. Most people remember the work in the condensed form of its brilliant Overture, which takes some of the opera's most distinctive themes and arranges them in a concise sonata form. The story revolves around the fairy rulers Titania and Oberon, who mend a quarrel with each other by testing the faithfulness of two earthly lovers. Oberon's trusty servant Puck finds Huon of Bordeaux and Reiza of Baghdad, whose love remains constant through shipwreck, temptation and trial by fire. Finally, with the aid of Oberon's magic horn, Huon and Reiza are rescued, and Titania and Oberon are reconciled.

The Overture summons a Romantic fairy world through the alluring call of Oberon's magic horn. Hushed music from the opera's opening scene brings the slow introduction to a riveting burst from the entire orchestra. The main body of the Overture bubbles forth, its first theme taken from the Act II quartet "Over the dark blue waters," and its second theme from Huon's big Act I aria. The exposition's closing theme comes from the exultant concluding phrases of Reiza's Act II aria, "Ocean, thou mighty monster," when she thinks she's about to be rescued. This theme also provides the Overture's jubilant conclusion.

BÉLA BARTÓK

(born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary [now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania], 1881; died in New York, 1945)

Concerto No. 3 for Piano and Orchestra

Scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, tam-tam, xylophone and strings

estimated length: 23 minutes

Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3 is the last work that the composer left in anything near completed form. Toward the end of his life, he received several commissions, including one for a viola concerto from William Primrose and one for a two-piano concerto from the duo-piano team of Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson. The viola concerto he left in a mass of confusing sketches, though he said it was complete and needed only the "purely mechanical work" of orchestration, and apparently he never began the two-piano concerto. In the precious little time he had left before succumbing to leukemia, Bartók chose to focus instead on a non-commissioned work — a piano concerto for his wife, pianist Ditta Pasztory Bartók, perhaps to give her some financial security after he died.

Bartók left the concerto completely scored except for the last 17 measures, which he had sketched in a kind of musical shorthand. His friend and colleague Tobor Serly deciphered and scored these last measures. Although the

work was intended for Ditta, it was first performed by György Sándor, Bartók's former pupil, with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy on February 8, 1946.

The collecting and cataloguing of authentic Hungarian and Romanian folk music had occupied Bartók throughout his life. He employed these folk materials extensively in his compositions, not quoted directly, but assimilated into his own style. The first movement of his Piano Concerto No. 3 is a case in point: The broad, ornamented main theme of this sonata-form movement is Hungarian in flavor, presented by the piano in single notes doubled two octaves apart. This parallelism in which the right and left hands have identical parts, often in single notes but also in parallel thirds and octaves, pervades the movement, extending to different parts of the orchestra as well.

Bartók marked the second movement "Adagio religioso," referring not only to the chorale style in the A sections of this A-B-A movement, but also to the quotation from the "Heiliger Dankesang" (Holy song of thanksgiving) of Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 132. The middle section provides a wonderful example of Bartók's celebrated "night music" — a musical representation of the nocturnal sounds of birds and insects. Biographer Halsey Stevens relates that the composer based this section on actual bird calls that he had notated on walks in Asheville, N.C., in 1944.

The finale is a spirited rondo with two fugal episodes and an extended presto coda. The dancelike main theme again shows characteristic Hungarian syncopation, which at one point is distilled to a 15-measure timpani solo on the single note E.

Much has been made of the difference between this and Bartók's first two piano concertos. The Third contains little of their aggressiveness or percussiveness; it is less dissonant and more regular in form. Yet these are characteristics of many of the composer's later works, and it was highly unlikely that Bartók was just now trying to gain popular acceptance when he had refused to compromise throughout his life. Though the solo part may seem more streamlined than that of the first two concertos, it is certainly brilliant enough to qualify it as a virtuoso concerto.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(born in Vienna, 1797; died in Vienna, 1828)
Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944, "The Great"

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

estimated length: 50 minutes

Robert Schumann's enthusiasm upon discovering Schubert's neglected Great C major Symphony inspired one of the most famous reports in the history of music. In the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,* he described being shown numerous manuscripts while visiting Schubert's brother Ferdinand on New Year's Day, 1839:

"The sight of this hoard of riches thrilled me with joy!… Among other things he directed my attention to the scores of several symphonies, many of which have never as yet been heard.… Who knows how long the symphony of which we are speaking might have lain buried in dust and darkness, had I not at once arranged with Ferdinand Schubert to send it to the directorate of the Gewandhaus Concerts in Leipzig, or rather to the conducting artist himself [Mendelssohn]."

Schumann thus instigated the first performance of the Symphony, conducted by Mendelssohn with the Gewandhaus orchestra on March 21, 1839. Despite Schumann's famous description of its "heavenly length" and despite Mendelssohn's enthusiasm, the work had to be given in a heavily cut version because the orchestra

musicians rebelled against its difficulties. These included the seemingly endless repetition of tiny motives in a fast tempo as part of a grand scheme — incomprehensible to those accustomed to traditional orchestral practice of the time.

The success of the Leipzig performance proved no gateway to instant acceptance: Projected performances in Paris and London were aborted because again the players refused to master the symphony's challenges of technique and stamina. Resistance to the work, now considered one of the few great symphonies of the first half of the 19th century, continued into the 20th century, when one writer in the 1920s was still complaining of its "dreary passage-work." Its enshrinement as perhaps Schubert's greatest work, then, is relatively recent, though it has had its supporters ever since Schumann and Mendelssohn recognized its merits — Berlioz, Bruckner and Dvořák, for example, all wrote in superlatives about the work.

Research by John Reed, Otto Biba and Robert Winter in the 1970s and '80s cleared up several nagging problems regarding the history of the Great Symphony. Supposed to have been composed in 1828 and long considered Schubert's last symphony, the Great was actually begun in 1825 and completed in 1826; furthermore, the supposedly lost "Gmunden-Gastein" symphony of 1825 was shown to be none other than this one. In regard to the oft-mentioned lack of sketches for the work, scholar Brian Newbould has boldly hypothesized that Schubert may not have made any preliminary sketches before composing the Great in full score.

Letters had been passing among Schubert's circle during the summer of 1825 about his work on a symphony while on holiday in Gmunden and Gastein in upper Austria. The work seems to have been well advanced by August 1825, judging from correspondence between Schubert and his friend, the painter Moritz von Schwind, about the composer's hopes for having it performed. Nothing came of this, and in October 1826 Schubert dedicated the work to Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde hoping for a performance. Though he received 100 guilders and the orchestral parts were copied, a performance never materialized. According to undocumented tradition, it was put aside "because of its length and difficulty," though it has been argued that an official public performance was never planned by the Gesellschaft.

As to the glorious music itself, one of the first movement's most salient features is the main theme of the stately introduction, announced by unison horns at the outset. This theme is ingeniously reworked in the exposition and returns to make the climax at the end of the movement. Thus it not only serves as an introduction, but it permeates the entire movement to such an extent that it *redesigns* the entire concept of sonata form — Schubert takes Beethoven a step further. What's more, the introduction provides the basis for many of the key relationships and juxtapositions of unequal phrase lengths in the whole work.

The manuscript shows that Schubert apparently made certain large-scale structural revisions in the first movement as afterthoughts. Addition and subtraction of bars in the coda, for example, resulted in a net gain of approximately 40 bars, augmenting the dramatic strength of the movement's conclusion.

The Andante con moto, one of Schubert's most memorable slow movements, projects a fatalistic atmosphere with its steady march rhythm, which eventually works up to a shattering climax, a dramatic pause and tragic reflection. In his *Neue Zeitschrift* article, Schumann refrained from describing the symphony in detail but could not help from commenting on the passage leading to the recapitulation, in which "a horn, as though calling from afar, seems to come from another world. The instruments stop to listen, a heavenly spirit is passing through the orchestra."

The Scherzo shows inexhaustible rhythmic inventiveness. Its quintessentially Viennese trio seems to have caused Schubert more trouble than its relaxed lilt lets on: The manuscript shows that after the entire Symphony was drafted, Schubert apparently re-composed almost the entire second section of the trio.

The Finale is particularly remarkable for its thematic development and its driving momentum. The triplet figure that pervades the entire movement is already present in the main theme. Not only does it provide

propulsion as the accompaniment to the second theme, but it also accompanies the famous four repeated "warning" notes that come to dominate the movement. The Finale also possesses one of the great codas of all time, fulfilling the listener's hope for some of Schubert's notorious tonal excursions.

— Program notes ©Jane Vial Jaffe

ARTIST BIOS

GÜNTHER HERBIG, *conductor*

Günther Herbig left behind the challenging political environment of East Germany and moved to the United States in 1984, where he has since conducted all of the top-tier orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra and the Chicago, Boston and San Francisco symphony orchestras.

Posts Herbig has held include music director of the Detroit Symphony and the Toronto Symphony, principal guest conductor of the Dallas Symphony and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, and general music director of the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra and Berlin Symphony Orchestra. Currently, he is artistic advisor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan and principal guest conductor of Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria in Spain's Canary Islands.

Herbig has toured America several times with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, receiving high praise for the many performances they gave at New York's Carnegie Hall. In January 1989, he toured Europe with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and soloist Gidon Kremer to critical acclaim. In 1990, he toured the Far East with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and in the spring of 1991 he toured Europe with the ensemble in his 37th international orchestra tour. He has also conducted most of the major European orchestras and has also toured Japan, South America and Australia many times.

He has recorded more than 100 works, some of which were with the East German orchestras with whom he was associated prior to moving to the West in 1984. Since then, he has made recordings with several of the London orchestras, the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, the Saarbrücken RSO, Toronto Symphony, Orchestre de Paris and others. Key figures in Herbig's musical training include Hermann Abendroth, Hermann Scherchen and Herbert von Karajan. England's *Manchester Evening News* calls him "one of the greats," adding, "Herbig…brings life and distinction to everything he touches."

ANDREW ARMSTRONG, *piano*

Praised by critics for his passionate expression and dazzling technique, pianist Andrew Armstrong has delighted audiences around the world. He has performed solo recitals and appeared with orchestras in Asia, Europe, Latin America and the United States, including performances at Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatory and Warsaw's National Philharmonic. He has performed with such conductors as Peter Oundjian, Itzhak Perlman and Stanisław Skrowaczewski, and in chamber music with the Alexander, American and Manhattan String Quartets. He has also performed as a member of the Caramoor Virtuosi at the Caramoor International Music Festival, and as a member of the Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players in New York City. Armstrong's future engagements reflect his steadily growing career, including debuts with the Vancouver Symphony, Omaha Symphony and San Antonio Symphony during 2009/10.

During the 2008/09 season, Armstrong is the soloist in Mozart's Concerto K.488 at the Chautauqua Music Festival under the direction of Stefan Sanderling, before embracing Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3 with both the Fairfax Symphony (Gregory Vajda conducting) and the Nashville Symphony. He is also to appear with the Toledo, Augusta, Waukesha and Missoula symphonies, and with Mexico's Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional.

2007/08 offered an array of engagements with the Florida Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic, Boise Philharmonic and the symphonies of Tallahassee, Charlottesville, Stamford, Harrisburg, Bellevue and Ridgefield, among others. Last summer, he shared the stage with Jennifer Frautschi and Edward Arron to perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, Peter Oundjian conducting.

Armstrong's debut CD, featuring Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Sonata and Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, was released in 2004 to critical acclaim. Writing in the *American Record Guide,* critic Bradley Bolen opined, "I have heard few pianists play [Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Sonata], recorded or in concert, with such dazzling clarity and confidence." Armstrong's follow-up CD was issued in November 2007 on Cordelia Records and includes works by Chopin, Liszt, Debussy and the world premiere recording of Lisa Bielawa's *Wait* for piano and drone.

Armstrong is devoted to outreach programs and playing for children. In addition to his many concerts, his performances are heard regularly on National Public Radio and WQXR, New York City's premier classical music station.