

NSSO 50th Anniversary Orchestral Fanfare

By Carl Strommen

Carl Strommen was commissioned by Friends of NSSO to compose a fanfare in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the North Shore Symphony Orchestra and its opening concert at Tilles Center. NSSO's conductor Susan Deaver suggested that a fanfare for full orchestra would include all of the NSSO members in the concert's opening fanfare, and therefore Carl Strommen attended several NSSO rehearsals to become acquainted with the orchestra. His NSSO Anniversary Orchestral Fanfare is scored for full sections of woodwind, brass, percussion and strings. In the composer's words "A fanfare is a festive, noble and uplifting composition that introduces the audience to a special occasion. The 50th anniversary of the NSSO is such an occasion, honoring a half-century of music making from an outstanding organization. It is the hope of the composer that Anniversary Fanfare will do justice to NSSO, this program and event and live up to the true definition of 'fanfare'."

Carl Strommen's contributions to band, orchestra, jazz band and vocal music make him one of the most performed composer/arrangers, nationally and internationally. His music is heard regularly in concert settings, television, and film. A resident of Glen Head, New York, Carl Strommen is currently on the music faculty of C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University, where he teaches graduate orchestration, composition and arranging. A graduate of C.W. Post Campus of Long Island University and City College of New York, he is an internationally regarded composer/arranger for Warner Bros. and Carl Fischer Publishing. He has been awarded countless commission assignments of all styles and settings, and has been a consistent winner of the yearly Writers Award, presented by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers.

Four Scottish Dances, Opus 59

by Malcolm Arnold

*(born on October 21, 1921, in Northampton, England;
died in Norwich on September 23, 2006)*

Pesante

Vivace

Allegretto

Con brio

Sir Malcolm Arnold, one of England's most decorated composers (he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1994), died four years ago, having attained world-wide fame for such film scores as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* in 1958, for which he won an Academy Award—and which he reputedly finished in less than a week—not to mention *Inn of the Sixth Happiness* starring Ingrid Bergman in 1958 (another Academy Award) and *Whistle Down the Wind* in 1961, as well as for a long list of concertos, symphonies and ballets.

He began his musical career by taking lessons on the trumpet as a child and went on to the Royal College of Music in London to continue under the celebrated Ernest Hall on that instrument and with Gordon Jacob in composition. In 1941 he won the Cobbett Prize, a famous award in England, and was appointed first trumpet of the London Philharmonic the next year. After military service, which he despised so much that he actually shot himself in the foot to get out of it, he

decided to spend some time in Italy, based on the prize money from winning the Mendelssohn Scholarship. Already very famous as a symphonic and light classics composer, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Exeter University in 1970. Critics always wrote that his strengths lay in melody rather than structural development; he himself has called attention to his fondness for the sweet and sentimental tunes he deprecatingly describes as “emotional clichés.” Those are hardly important failures to his legion of admirers all around the globe.

Arnold wrote his *Four Scottish Dances* in 1957, two years after publishing his very popular tribute to Scotland, the *Tam o’Shanter Overture*, Opus 51. The brief *Scottish Dances* are not based on folk-tunes as far as I can discover, but they do exhibit charming use of Scottish rhythmic ornaments such as the “Scotch snap,” a usually rapid figure comprising an accented 16th-note followed immediately by an upward (or occasionally downward) leap to a longer note, usually a dotted quarter.

The first dance, marked *Pesante*, is egregiously full of ebullient accent, its first theme marked by the Scotch snap mentioned above. (The snap goes up about as often as it goes down.) Vigor is everywhere apparent, and after an accelerated downward rush, the closing is a paraphrase—I think it must be intentional—of the distinctly American melodic motto, “Shave and a haircut, six bits” (or, as published in the United Kingdom in 1914 though the tune is obviously much older, “Bum Diddle-de-um Bum, That’s It”).

The second dance, *Vivace*, highlights the reed choir along with the strings, moving by clever modulations from E flat major to E major and then to F major and F sharp major before yielding to a slower, sauntering section that gives the melody to the comically drunken nasal and wiry bassoon. A brief return to the *Tempo primo* lets the dance disappear into a muted chord from the trombones.

The lovely third dance, *Allegretto*, begins dreamily with downward arpeggios from the harp (Arnold apparently believes as composer Max Bruch does, that the harp is an essentially Scottish instrument), followed by a winsome flute melody whose seventh and eighth notes are a downward Scotch snap, often repeated. This dance is based on material from one of Arnold’s film scores, *The Beautiful County of Ayr* (1954). After a *segué* announced by the horns and trombones, the string choir enlarges on the flute theme and then yields to the oboe and, once again the flute, before a dreamy ending is achieved.

The final dance, *Con brio*, is all good-hearted bluster and frantic energy, accelerating to a *Presto* and ending with a full-orchestra *Thummpp*.

The *Dances* are dedicated to the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Light Music Festival and were first performed by the B. B. C. Orchestra the year of their completion.

Concerto in D major, Opus 35, for violin and orchestra

by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(born in *Kampsko-Votkinsk*, near Saint Petersburg, on May 7, 1840;

died in Saint Petersburg on November 6, 1893)

Allegro moderato

Canzonetta: Andante

Finale: Vivacissimo

With the possible exception of the Mendelssohn Concerto (last heard in the North Shore Symphony’s 2008-2009 season of concerts, on April 19) the D major Concerto by Tchaikovsky seems to be now the most popular for the instrument in the entire repertoire.

This was not always the case. The work wandered down a difficult path at first, beginning with the obsessive doubts of the composer himself, doubts he quickly shared with his dear friend and wealthy patroness, Natasha von Meck. After completing the score in 1878, he was utterly dissatisfied with the slow movement and decided to re-write it from scratch. (With a prudent frugality rare in his character, we happily note that he published it some years later as a separate piece for violin and piano entitled *Souvenir d'un cher lieu* ("Souvenir of a cherished spot") and dedicated it to his wealthy patroness, Mme. von Meck.

The strange relationship of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky and this Mme. von Meck, born in 1831, an amateur pianist and now the wealthy widow of an engineer who had covered Russia with a network of profitable railroads, had begun in 1876 when she wrote a letter to Nicolai Rubinstein, then head of the Moscow Conservatory, seeking the name of a student violinist with whom she might sight-read sonatas. The young man Rubinstein suggested, Yosif Kotek, proved perfect for the assignment, being handsome, agreeable, talented and impecunious. Yosif was also a great admirer of Tchaikovsky, whose student he had been at the Conservatory. He showed Mme. von Meck the first Tchaikovsky pieces she had ever heard.

She was enchanted. She wrote a letter of congratulation—"Your music allows me to live with more sanguinity and pleasure"—to which Tchaikovsky naturally responded warmly. Before long they were deep in an intense and intimate correspondence, not to mention a hefty financial subsidy for the young composer (who was close to being as impecunious as young Kotek) that lasted for nearly a decade and a half. The curious part is that the two never met. Mme. von Meck was once pointed out to Tchaikovsky as "the lady with the elegant black hat sitting in her carriage," and presumably she had seen the composer at concerts from time to time, but that is all. It was enough for them, apparently, that their souls and their musical sensibilities vibrated in sympathy.

For instance, Natasha could always tell when her new pet needed soothing. At one point in 1878, finding that he would be in the neighborhood of her splendid country house, she insisted that he stay there for a fortnight. She would be away, she explained, but the servants would see to his every wish. Tchaikovsky loved the house. It was near the town of Brailov, in the sunny Ukraine. Its grounds "blazed with flowers," its resident hounds and terriers were affectionate and playful, and its paneled library furnished him with leather-bound volumes such as George Sand's and Alfred de Musset's newest novels (the latter's *Les Caprices Marianne* made Tchaikovsky "shout with pleasure"). He was "lapped in luxury"; the servants treated him like fragile porcelain. Here he wrote the violin concerto's original slow movement.

And now he suddenly decided to compose a new *Canzonetta* to put in the spurned movement's place, and sent the entire score off to Mme. von Meck, whom he always addressed as his "beloved friend" and his almost fanatical admirer, for her opinion. Apparently she was not slow to give it, and in detail. What she wrote no longer exists—Tchaikovsky seldom saved correspondence—but he seems to have been quick to answer.

Your frank judgment on my Violin Concerto pleased me very much. It would have been disagreeable to me if you had kept back anything, anything at all, for fear of offending my petty pride. But I am still fond of the first movement, even if you are not. Of course, it houses, as does every display piece of virtuoso intent, much that chiefly appeals only to the excitement of the mind; nonetheless, the themes were not painfully evolved (as you know mine often are) but sprang quickly and joyfully into my head. I know I am right in thinking that in time the piece will furnish you great pleasure. Oh, how difficult it is to make anyone see and feel in music what we see and feel ourselves. Music is not illusion but revelation.

Tchaikovsky had intended to dedicate his new work to Leopold Auer, the great Russian teacher of Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman and many other illustrious violinists, as well as a distinguished virtuoso himself, but Auer, after having studied the music carefully, disappointed Pyotr Ilyich by declaring it to be “unplayable.” Finally, another younger player, Adolf Brodsky, who had worked industriously on the music for two years, performed it publicly for the first time at a Vienna Philharmonic concert on December 4, 1881, under the direction of Hans Richter (who had conducted the premières of several Brahms symphonies).

Only a few of Vienna’s reigning reviewers liked this glorious piece of music. Eduard Hanslick, the viper-tongued dean of Central European critics, had this to say in the *Neue Freie Presse* the next morning:

For a while the Concerto has proportion, is musical, and shows some talent; but soon savagery gains the upper hand and lords it to the end of the [first] movement. The violin is no longer “played”; it is yanked about, it is torn asunder, it is beaten black and blue. I do not know whether it is possible for anyone to conquer these hair-raising difficulties, but I do know that Mr. Brodsky martyred his hearers as well as himself.

The *Adagio* with its naïve melody almost conciliates, almost wins us. But it breaks off abruptly to make way for a finale that puts us in mind of the brutal and wretched jollity of a Russian *kermess* (devil’s dance). We see wild and vulgar faces, we hear curses, we smell bad brandy. A well-known writer on art once asserted in reference to lascivious paintings that there are pictures that “stink in the eye.” Tchaikovsky’s concerto brings us for the first time to the horrid idea that there may be music that stinks in the ear.

It is said that Tchaikovsky carried a copy of Hanslick’s virulent review in his pocket for many months, and that it was a source of pain to him for the rest of his life. Presumably Hanslick never changed his petty mind.

But Leopold Auer did. He lived to play the “unplayable” Concerto with brilliant effect; he taught it to his best pupils (including both Heifetz and Elman who in turn both made stunning recordings) and contributed greatly to the work’s current rapturous eminence in the pantheon of the violinist’s repertoire. (Of course there will always be those who damn with faint praise, like the late English critic James Agate who wrote, “I like listening to it, just as I like looking at a fuchsia drenched with rain.”)

The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, predominantly lyrical in character, presents the principal theme, after a brief introduction by the strings, played by the solo violin over the simplest of accompaniments, eventually quickening its pace and burnishing its decoration, until the arrival of the second theme, *Moderato assai con molto espressione*, an even lovelier and more songful outpouring. The distinguished writer on music Edward Downes describes them both as “seductive and admirably suited to the character of the violin.”

The slow movement, marked *Andante*, seems to me one of Tchaikovsky’s most sensitive and ingratiating inspirations, its lightly melancholy theme almost whispered to the accompanying strings and horn. Another graceful melody leads not to the dying-away we expect but instead to a rip-roaring Finale, *Allegro vivacissimo*, that begins with a fiery cadenza for the solo instrument. The finale theme itself is surprisingly light-footed and dance-like, but its main purpose is to introduce different dazzling scales and dizzying leaps in the violin that set new standards for brilliance and agility.

—Intermission—

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, op. 98

by Johannes Brahms

(born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833; died in Vienna on April 8, 1897)

Brahms wrote his Fourth Symphony during the summers of 1884 and 1885 in the tiny Alpine village of Mürzschlag, which lay so high in the mountains that the growing season was very short and the local fruit hardly had a chance to ripen before winter renewed its icy chill. Nonetheless, the composer adored his lodgings there and continued to take his daily walks, hands clasped behind him, clad in a voluminous grey woolen sweater gathered together in front by a largish pin made of bone.

From this chilly realm he dispatched the completed first movement to his dear pianist friend Elisabeth von Herzogenberg with a note: “Dare I send you a new little piece of mine, or rather a piece of a *piece* of mine? My music is pleasanter than I am. These red cherries of ours just won’t get ripe, but I eat them anyhow and suffer the consequences. Don’t be afraid if you don’t like the music. I’m not sure *I* do, and the last thing in the world I want to write is another bad symphony! Let me have a word from you.”

Then when Elisabeth didn’t reply right away, he appealed to her husband Heinrich, a fellow composer and nearly as close a friend as his wife: “If *She* doesn’t like what I sent, tell her not to worry. I’m sending sketches of the other three movements anyhow. Perhaps you will like a measure or two, and send me a note in response.”

Brahms always worried about his new works, and this one was a long, demanding excursion into uncompromisingly serious territory. In many cases he worried the most about those that proved to be the best. But when a piano four-hands arrangement of the entire symphony was played by Brahms and Ignaz Brüll for a half-dozen of the composer’s closest friends in Vienna and aroused little enthusiasm, his worry deepened.

Fortunately the conductor Hans von Bülow, to whose orchestra in Meiningen Brahms offered the first performance, was enthralled. After the first rehearsal (at which young Richard Strauss happened to be present), played before Brahms arrived, von Bülow wrote him ecstatically, “Number Four is stupendous, completely original, individual and rocklike. Incomparable strength from start to finish.” Apparently von Bülow prepared his orchestra so well that the first performance, which took place under Brahms’s direction on October 25, 1885, was superb. Karl Richter, who conducted the Viennese première, was similarly enthusiastic, and his performance was also masterly. Alas, it was fashionable for Brahms at that moment to be derided by some of the musical press, where he had a few violent detractors; the Viennese public, however, among whom Brahms had now lived and been loved for thirty years, had come to associate him with other worshipped Viennese masters like Schubert and Mozart and Beethoven, and this loyal public applauded the new symphony vociferously. Brahms’s friend Theodor Billroth hosted a magnificent dinner party at the Hotel Sacher to celebrate the triumph; it proved to be a long and bibulous evening.

Parenthetically, I find it interesting to learn with what competitive energy American orchestras sought the honor of presenting Brahms’s symphonies for the first time to the New World. In the case of the Fourth, the Boston Symphony won the toss and announced the United States première for November 26, 1886, only thirteen months after the Viennese first performance. (Unfortunately Boston’s Wilhelm Gericke was dissatisfied with the dress rehearsal and withdrew it from the program, so the honor reverted to the New York Philharmonic under Walter Damrosch on December 11 that year . . . an astonishing success.)

The first movement, *Allegro non troppo*, opens with a vast, undulating flow of melody in the

answering two-note phrases so characteristic of late Brahms. On this rocking seesaw motif are based the ensuing melodies, each more beguiling than the last, with a fanfare-like theme for contrast. One of the variations of the first theme is particularly notable: a pensively elongated version in whole notes, marked *dolce*, which ushers in the final reprise. The second movement, *Andante moderato*, begins with a bare, unaccompanied motto whose sternness almost immediately melts and turns into a mellifluous E major adorned by Brahms's favorite thirds and sixths. This is followed by a boisterous *Allegro giocoso* whose energy reminds us of late Beethoven. The finale is one of the symphonic repertoire's undisputed masterpieces, a set of thirty variations on the order of a chaconne, or passacaglia, its eight-note theme marked *Allegro energico e passionato*, its power relentless, its effect overwhelming.

Almost the last music Brahms ever heard was a performance of this very Symphony played by the Vienna Philharmonic, once again under Karl Richter, on March 7, 1897. The liver cancer that would take his life was well advanced, and the once stocky, ruddy-cheeked, full-chested figure was now considerably wasted in appearance. When the last bars of the music faded away, the audience, aware that the composer was present, expressed its affection in an almost frantic ovation. Brahms managed to stand up quietly in his box, overcome with emotion, where he remained for a moment or two, gazing down upon his beloved Viennese public with tears in his eyes. When they saw his pale, shrunken figure, as his admirer Eduard Hanslick later reported, "A thrill of awe and painful sympathy ran through the whole assembly, a clear presentiment that they were greeting their suffering and beloved master for the last time in this hall."

—*Musical annotations specially written by Clair W. Van Ausdall for Maestra Susan Deaver and the North Shore Symphony Orchestra*