

NORTH SHORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Susan Elizabeth Deaver, Conductor and Musical Director
Season 2009-2010
Concert II

Sunday afternoon, March 7, 2010 at 3:00 o'clock

“Spectacular Sounds”

—NOTES ON THE MUSIC—

Carnival: Concert Overture, Opus 92

by Antonín Dvořák (*born in Mühldorf, Bohemia (now Nelahozeves, Slovakia), on September 8, 1841; died in Prague on May 1, 1904*)

Life was sweet for Dvořák as his fiftieth birthday approached in 1891. He was already recognized as one of the finest teachers at the Prague Conservatory, and his compositions were performed everywhere. He had made immensely loyal and influential friends, like Johannes Brahms. He was comparatively well to do . . . for the son of an innkeeper. He had recently completed his *Symphony No. 8*, Opus 88, and his massive *Requiem*, Opus 89, and both had been splendidly received.

Now he decided the time had come for him to add a few shorter orchestral works to his ever-growing list of large scores. He was much taken with the idea of several connected works, such as, perhaps, a triptych of orchestral overtures based on the connected themes of “Nature,” “Life” and “Love.” He found himself with a head full of good ideas, and music began to stream effortlessly from his pen. Before long, in March of 1891, he had completed the first overture, *In Nature's Realm*, a panoramic view of earthly wonders; *Carnival*, depicting Life, followed, that summer, and *Othello*, representing Love, was completed in January, 1892. Dvořák conducted the première of all three in Prague on April 28, 1892, at a concert that became a farewell appearance prior to his taking up the directorship of the new National Conservatory of Music in faraway New York City, at the invitation of Mrs. Jeannette Thurber, wife of a wealthy wholesale grocer. (The same three pieces also appeared on the welcoming concert played in Carnegie Hall on October 21, 1892, in honor of his arrival in New York.. Thus it turned out that the exuberant *Carnival Overture* was written barely a year before his most famous composition, the *Symphony from the New World*, which was completed in the summer of 1893,

Although not ostensibly a Czech “national” work, it is easy to hear that the *Carnival Overture* could not have been created anywhere but in Bohemia. And despite the fact that the three Overtures have material in common and clearly belong together, the *Carnival Overture* has long since slipped away from its sisters to enjoy a much-performed and -applauded life of its own.

The composer wrote a program for the piece, describing how he imagines

the lonely, contemplative Wanderer reaching the city at nightfall, where a carnival of pleasure reigns supreme. On every side is heard the clangor of instruments, mingled with shouts of joy and the unrestrained hilarity of the people giving vent to their feelings in their songs and dance tunes.

Like most descriptive music, this tale conceals a fairly straightforward ABACA armature. Romantic listeners may wish to listen for the episode “C”, in which the Wanderer, according to the composer, encounters a pair of surreptitious lovers, characterized by the appearance of that most Dvořakian of instruments, the English horn, so memorably used in the second movement of his *Symphony from the New World*.

Opening with a brilliant orchestral *tutti*, a driving, whirling spin of melody which could suggest either a turbulent carnival scene or metaphorically the hurly-burly of life. When the din dies down a bit, the music glides

into a yearning mood, as if sheer tumult is not the only thing on earth, though the relaxation does not last long. After another frenzied section, the horn stops the orchestra in its tracks with a single trenchant *fortissimo* note, fading to *pianissimo*, and the *Andante cantabile* section follows, accompanied by tremulous patterns in the strings. Excitement picks up again, little by little, until soon the orchestra is splashing swipes of brilliant color everywhere, and the tempo rises to fever pitch for a blazing conclusion.

from Concerto in E minor, Opus 85, for violoncello and orchestra

by Edward Elgar (born on June 2, 1857, in Broadheath (near Worcester), England; died on February 23, 1934, in Worcester)

Final movement: Allegro—moderato—Allegro ma non troppo

Elgar began writing his only cello concerto in 1918 shortly after ending of World War I while he was living in London rather than in his delightfully pastoral home in Worcestershire, where he had composed many of his most imposing scores, and where his charming wife could protect him from most of life's racket and stress. Post-war London was something different, and Elgar's music showed it. The War had brought pain to him and Lady Elgar, as it had to the whole of England, a country whose confidence had been shaken, just as its economy had been transformed and its emotional balance severely challenged.

The Cello Concerto shows Elgar's shift from the opulence of his major works like the First Symphony, the Violin Concerto and the large resplendent tone poems *Cockaigne* and *Falstaff*, all of them created in the bluff, hearty, John Bull self-confidence of a country that had learned not to doubt itself.

But across the English Channel an artistic revolution was brewing, and cacophonous figures like Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartok, Claude Debussy and Arnold Schoenberg were shocking the musical world with their experimental vocabulary. One Elgar biographer describes his late scores rather melodramatically: "Confident Edwardian gestures are supplanted by fierce anger; ceremonial mourning like that in the Second Symphony had become naked grief. Elgar, dumped into purgatory, pared the comfortable fat off his orchestra to bare his own lacerated soul."

Other critics find the Cello Concerto one of the most beautiful and significant works in the entire Elgar canon, praising its restraint, admiring its passion, expatiating on its formal poise.

The last movement, *Allegro*, fourth of four, opens with a dramatic flourish from the solo cello and a subsequent *recitativo* that functions as a soliloquy of desolation, until the orchestra enters with a few flourishes of its own, a boisterous intertwining of energy and anguish. The tempo changes to *moderato*, and the cello becomes poignantly songful again, eventually quoting from the concerto's previous movements, particularly the nostalgic *Adagio* theme. Abruptly the orchestra breaks in with a dry of anger, and the music storms to a rather abrupt but strong conclusion.

Elgar was pleased with what he had done. He wrote to his friends Sidney and Francis Colvin, to whom he dedicated the score, "I think it's a large work, a really large work, and I think *good* and *alive*!"

España (Rhapsody for Orchestra)

by Emmanuel Chabrier (born in Ambert, Puy-de-Dôme, France, on January 18, 1841; died in Paris on September 13, 1894)

Chabrier, from a well-to-do French family—his father a successful lawyer, his mother a beautiful aristocrat with unerring taste in music and the arts—would have become a musician right from the beginning if he had had his way. But his father was determined that any son of his would go into the legal profession, and he insisted that Emmanuel have a rigorous and wide-ranging education. The young man was almost impossibly gifted in music; he had started piano lessons at the age of six and within a year or two was everywhere acknowledged a prodigy. A

pianist of consequence, he composed a number of successful piano pieces, the earliest of which appeared in print when he was only nine.

But he also continued with the legal education his father insisted on, and did well there, too. And he was as interested in poetry and painting as he was in music. Being affluent he could afford to establish and maintain friendships with poets like Paul Verlaine, who wrote a wonderful sonnet about him, and artists like Édouard Manet, who painted his portrait at least twice. As he grew into young manhood he became known as what the French call “*un vert galant*” (a gay blade), happy and popular no matter where he found himself. Obviously there was every possibility of a brilliant career in almost any field.

When he married, in 1873, he chose a beautiful, social young woman who like him delved deeply into the arts. The couple established a *salon*, invited all the creative crowd of Paris, among them painters, poets, sculptors, dramatists, and musicians like Camille Saint-Saëns, Henri Duparc, André Messager and Vincent d’Indy, to name only a few of the latter, all of whom accepted with alacrity the Chabriers’ frequent invitations for evenings of magnificent food, splendid wine and brilliant conversation. The couple led a wondrous life.

It was on a vacation trip to Spain with his wife in 1882 that Chabrier conceived the idea of an orchestral piece about the Iberian peninsula. He had a talent for rhythms, an eye for hot sunlight and black shadow, an ear for instrumental coloration, a genius for melody. Besides all that, his ancestors came from the countryside of the Auvergne in southern France, an area that had always been deeply influenced by the nearby province of Andalusia across the border.

Chabrier began making sketches for his new piece, calling it *España*, with the sub-title, “an orchestral rhapsody” (the last-named word coming from two Greek linguistic stems meaning “sewn together”). He wrote to a friend, the conductor Charles Lamoureux, who ultimately conducted the first performance: “It will be an extraordinary *fantasía, muy española*, based on memories of this wonderful trip. I’ll make the whole audience move to feverish rhythms, and my melodies will be so voluptuous that everyone will end up locked in one giant kiss.”

The finished piece was everything he had hoped. American critic Edward Downes further quotes the composer’s intent: “The more shouting there is, the more the dancer laughs with her mouth enticingly open, she more she sways her hips and swings her body.”

Alfred Bruneau, a close friend and fellow composer, paints an enticing picture of one of Chabrier’s own performances, this one in Bruneau’s own home:

He [Chabrier] played the piano as no one has ever played it before, or ever will. The sight of Chabrier, in a drawing room full of elegant women, advancing towards the fragile instrument and then playing his *España* in a blaze of broken strings, hammers reduced to pulp and splintered keys, was indescribably droll and a spectacle of truly epic grandeur.

The first public performance with orchestra took place under Lamoureux’s direction at a concert for the Société des Nouveaux Concerts in Paris on November 4, 1883. It was the greatest success Chabrier ever had, and it established his name at once among the important composers of the day. Alas, a terrible illness and paralysis struck him down only a few years later; the sunniness of his enchanted life disappeared forever into a withering miasma, and he died almost mad.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937), who was to write a number of orchestral works that seemed more Spanish than Spain itself (*Boléro*, *Rapsodie espagnole*, *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*), admitted that Chabrier’s art and style, especially *España*, had influenced him more than that of any other musician.

from Le Carnaval des animaux (“The Carnival of the Animals”): Excerpts from Saint-Saëns’s original score and from the suite transcribed by Steven Rosenhaus

by Camille Saint-Saëns (born in Paris on October 9, 1835; died in Algiers on September 16, 1921)

Introduction and the Lion’s Royal March

Tortoises

The Elephant
Kangaroos
Personages with long ears
The Swan
Finale

Apparently, when Saint-Saëns composed this “Grande Fantaisie Zoologique,” early in 1886, he had no intention of offering the work to the public; he simply thought to provide an entertainment for a few friends at Carnival time (Mardi Gras). Following the first private performance, the work was presented again at the request of Saint-Saëns's old friend and supporter Franz Liszt, shortly before the latter's death in July of that year. Then Saint-Saëns specifically prohibited further performances of it until after his own death, excepting only the beautiful penultimate section, “The Swan,” for solo violoncello with harp accompaniment. The public première finally took place on February 26, 1922, a little more than two months after the composer's death, and *The Carnival of the Animals* quickly became one of Saint-Saëns's most popular works.

At one time Saint-Saëns had taught, with great success, at the École Niedermeyer, a training school especially for budding church organists, and it was in this stern atmosphere that he first had the idea of a little bestiary, a group of musical pieces based on animals and their sound and movement. Such humorous sketches had been known in French music since the 16th-century days of Clément Jannequin and his *Réveil des oiseaux* and Etienne Méhul's *Le Chasse de jeune Henri* a century later, which included the sound of barking dogs. Saint-Saëns's impish humor was perfect for such fare. All we need remember is the hilarious romping when he visited Tchaikovsky in Russia and the two of them dressed up in tutus and danced a little ballet as Pygmalion and Galatea in dog costumes, described in detail by Tchaikovsky's brother, Modest..

Saint-Saëns's original score called for only a dozen instruments: two pianos, a flute, a clarinet, a glockenspiel, a glass harmonica, xylophone, string quartet, and double bass. Nowadays the glass harmonica is replaced by a celesta (an instrument not yet available in 1886), the strings are usually beefed up to orchestral proportions, and some performances include recitation of verses written for the occasion.

This afternoon we hear eight of the work's fourteen brief sections. They are admirably encapsulated in Brian Rees's splendid biography of the composer, as follows:

- First a fanfare, and then a rollicking march. For *The Lion's Royal March* Saint-Saëns specifies, for who knows what reason, a “Persian” style to be used for the leonine roars, as demonstrated in his own song collection, *Mélodies Persanes*, Opus 26. The strings strike up a majestic march, only to have two apparently insane pianists join in.
- *Tortoises* are represented by the Galop from Jacques Offenbach's opera *Orpheus in the Underworld* played *adagissimo*, as they plod on in their obstinate way, oblivious to all harmonic obstacles. Finally they triumph, of course, as tortoises will..
- *The Elephant* is pure parody, with the double bass lumpenly murdering Hector Berlioz's exquisite “Dance of the Sylphs” from his *Symphonie Fantastique*, plus allusions to Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer thrown in for good measure.
- *Kangaroos* are in this case two pianists whose gracefully accurate fingers hop up and down, sometimes resting for a moment on *terra firma* and then leaping off again
- “*Personages with long ears*” seems to have been a current phrase meaning, *e. g.* reactionary opera critics who do not understand newer styles such as Saint-Saëns's own; these “large-eared” asses make “braying sounds” like ordinary donkeys.
- The melodic lines of *The Swan* suggest the graceful contours of the swan's arched neck
- The *Finale* harks back to the mood of France's Second Empire, from 1852 to 1870, when Napoléon III was emperor, with his elegant playmate Eugénie whose love for waltzing made her ballroom famous. Various of the animals join in a merrily outlandish can-can.

Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity (*from The Planets, Opus 32*)

by Gustav Holst, (*born in Cheltenham, England, on September 21, 1874; died in London on May 25, 1934*)

Fascinated in his 20s by Oriental religions, philosophies and myths, Holst had dedicated himself and his music for some years to the arcane mysteries of the East. By the time he reached his 40s this intense preoccupation had passed, leaving only his absorbing interest in astrology and its application to music.

When in 1914, at the age of 40, he began work on *The Planets*, a suite of seven orchestral tone poems which was for the first time to bring him world-wide fame and considerable income, Holst admitted that while the individual pieces were suggested by the planets' astrological significances, they were in no way programmatic; that is, they were not simply stories in music. Rather, he added, the subtitle to each was intended to be sufficient clue to its musical content.

While it is easy to hear the aggressive rhythms of “Mars” and associate them with the noisy battles of war, it may be new to some of us to regard “Venus” as the bringer of “peace,” having instead long held her responsible for knock-down strife in worldly, not to mention domestic, affairs. “Uranus” in its awesome distance from the earth and the sun, conveys the mystery that surrounds any magician, though the music's mischievous tone might suggest laughter were not its prodigious prankiness far beyond mere giggles. The very word “joviality,” related to “jollity,” connotes Jove, or “Jupiter,” as he is more familiarly called. (Holst mentioned, in some notes written for the first performance of the suite, in 1920, that Jupiter represents not merely hilarity but the more ceremonial kind of rejoicing associated with religious or national holidays, and a present-day critic has described this movement as “an overture for an English county fair.” Indeed a sizable portion of it is based on an old British folk-song, though the tune is largely unfamiliar to American ears.)

Money meant little to Holst. He had scabbled hard all his life, playing trombone in a number of orchestras, conducting church choirs and playing the organ, and devoting so much time to teaching that he could compose only on weekends when he was able to lock himself up in his sparsely-furnished workroom at the girls' school where he was a member of the faculty. He had no time to spend money; why bother with it? So he was bewildered by the fortune and fame that *The Planets* brought him, beginning within months of its premiere and continuing the rest of his life. “Composers should pray not to be a success,” he wrote to a friend. “If nobody likes your work, you have to go on just for the sake of your belief in your work, and you are in no danger. But woe to you when all men speak well of you!” On the other hand, Holst's wife, Isobel Harrison, a one-time singer whom he had met in music school but whom he had to wait seven years to marry while he scrounged up sufficient money, was said to be pleased beyond words by their London town house in a fashionable neighborhood and their country house in a charming village, both of which *The Planets's* royalties were more than sufficient to allow.

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