

Youthful Visions – Clinton Symphony Winter Concert 2019
Program Notes by William Driver

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) is one of the great figures in German Romanticism. He embodied the ideal of the Romantic artist, inspired by poetry, history, folklore and myths to create a national opera that would reflect the uniqueness of German culture. Weber composed his opera ***Der Freischütz*** between 1817 and 1821, and the work received its premiere in Berlin on June 18, 1821. The overture to the opera, one of the most famous nineteenth century works in this form, breaks with the eighteenth century style of overtures that contained only suggestions of the themes that would follow in the opera proper. The overture is larger in scope and scored in broader, more romantic terms than the classical overtures of Mozart and Beethoven.

Utilizing dark orchestral colors, Weber sets the tone of the opera and allows the overture to have a more important function than usually occurred in opera. He further ties the overture to the rest of the work by introducing themes and motifs from various arias, rather than merely suggesting them, and using the overture to develop those ideas. Without giving away the essentials of the opera, Weber prepares the audience for what is to come. In fact, the overture to *Der Freischütz* is a model that served as the standard for generations of composers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Edward Elgar (1857-1934) composed ***Salut d'Amour*** as a love song to his future bride, Alice Roberts. In the summer of 1888, Elgar decided to take a holiday with his dear friend Dr. Charles Buck. As Elgar departed Worcester for Dr. Buck's Settle, Yorkshire estate, Alice gave him a poem she had written entitled *Love's Grace*. While at Settle, Elgar, much taken with Alice's poem, decided to reciprocate with a short piece of music especially for Alice. He titled the piece *Liebesgruss* (*Love's Greeting*), dedicated "To Carice", a mashup of Alice's forenames Caroline Alice. Elgar presented the musical love poem to his future bride on his return from Settle. They were married the following year. At the birth of their daughter two years later, they named her Carice.

Elgar sold the piece outright to the music publisher Schott for two guineas (approx. \$2.50). Under its original title *Liebesgruss*, the piece did not sell well, so slowly in fact that Schott changed the title to ***Salut d'Amour***, trusting that a more exotic name would enhance the appeal of the work. The firm also shortened Elgar's name to Ed. Elgar to give the composer a more exotic air. Apparently, the ploy worked for sales increased dramatically to the publisher's delight, but with no financial gain for Elgar.

Towards the end of 1888, Edward submitted three arrangements of the work - for solo piano, for violin and piano, and an orchestral arrangement in order to increase the prospects of performances. Later, Elgar composed a follow up to *Salon d'Amour*, *Mot d'Amour* (*Liebesahnung* or *Love's Word*). Which some consider superior to its predecessor. It, however, is rarely performed today.

Vocalise is the fourteenth song in a series of fourteen published by composer **Sergei Rachmaninoff** (1873-1943) in 1915. Originally composed in 1912, Rachmaninoff revised the piece in 1914 before its publication in *14 Songs, Op 34*. Unlike the other thirteen songs in the collection, **Vocalise** has no text, but utilizes a wordless vocalization from the soloist, and of the vocalist's choosing. As Rachmaninoff explained to soprano Antonina Nezhdanova, "What need is there of words, when you will be able to convey everything better and more expressively than anyone could with words by your voice and interpretation?" Some critics have questioned Rachmaninoff's decision to cast the song without words, as Nezhdanova herself did, but others have proposed that

Like Mendelssohn, Rachmaninoff felt that not all music required text to convey intense emotion; rather, the absence of ... is one of the contributing factors to its immense emotional intensity and sorrow.

Rachmaninoff and Nezhdanova premiered **Vocalise** on January 24, 1916. After the premiere, the composer arranged the piece for orchestra and soprano and for orchestra alone. In the years since its composition, others have also arranged the work for a variety of combinations of instruments.

Critic Karl Flodin wrote in 1907 after hearing the **Symphony No 3 in C major, Op 52** of **Jean Sibelius** (1865-1957):

The symphony meets all the requirements of a symphonic work of art in the modern sense, but at the same time it is internally new and revolutionary – thoroughly Sibelian.

In early spring 1906, Sibelius informed his friend Axel Carpelan that his Third Symphony in C major was near completion. It was Carpelan who had suggested to Sibelius some years prior that he and his family vacation in Italy as inspiration for his monumental Second Symphony; consequently, Sibelius kept in close contact with Carpelan about his musical affairs. He proposed to conduct the first performance at the Philharmonic Society in London in the next spring. However, Sibelius failed to meet his proposed deadline, and, after some concentrated effort he penned the finale notes in time for its premiere at the Great Hall of Helsinki University with himself conducting. The London concert had to be postponed, however, and he eventually put the finishing touches to the work in time to conduct it at the Great Hall of Helsinki University on September 25, 1907. Interestingly, the orchestral parts for the finale did not arrive until the last rehearsal.

The material for the **Symphony No 3** had been with Sibelius for some time. Parts of the score show the influences carried over from the First and Second Symphonies, particularly in the finale. He also drew motifs from works he never completed, such as a piano suite, a tone poem, and an oratorio.

The **Symphony No 3** may well be Sibelius's farewell to the opulent romanticism of his earlier works. While the symphony echoes elements of the magisterial eloquence and galactic monumentalism of the first two symphonies, it is much more cheerful and free-wheeling- and shorter – in its presentation. He seems to purposefully avoid the "excesses" of the symphonists of the time – Richard Strauss, Alexander Scriabin, and Gustav Mahler. One might even call this work Sibelius's "Classical" symphony in that he focuses on the development of his material in terms of "absolute music" in the mode of Bach, Mozart, and Haydn. There is nothing

“programmatic” in this symphony. To Sibelius, in fact, Mozart was the most genuine of composers:

To my mind a Mozart allegro is the most perfect model for a symphonic movement. Think of its wonderful unity and homogeneity! It is like an uninterrupted flowing, where nothing stands out and nothing encroaches upon the rest.

Symphony No 3 in C major, Op 52, is in three movements with the finale combining a scherzo and finale into a single movement. Sibelius said this movement is “the crystallization of thought from chaos”. The *scherzo* portion “plays with several short motifs, blending and juxtaposing them in a seemingly endless variety of combinations”. As the finale approaches, the cellos introduce a march motif that begins hesitantly, then grows in intensity until it becomes the dominant theme to the end of the symphony.

One might suppose that the symphony lacks the typical Sibelian fire and nobility of its predecessors. One would be mistaken. A conductor who had witnessed Sibelius himself conducting the Third Symphony had this to say:

[It] was played in a vigorous manner, with markedly emphatic accentuation, so that it gave an impression of the heroic rather than pastoral.