

# The Fine Art of Concert Programming

## The Conductor as Artistic Director

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### I The problem stated

In “Nurturing Your Inner Artist-Conductor” I pointed out that, in contrast to singers and instrumentalists, conductors have only their gestures – the way they use their bodies – for expressing their “musicality.” There is, however, a very important avenue open to them for the expressing of their *artistry*, above and beyond the existential realization of a musical score by means of an orchestra (or band, or choir) – an avenue *not* available to the players or singers they direct. That avenue is the art of concert programming, an essentially creative endeavor which unfortunately receives relatively little notice in the curriculum that shapes young conductors. It is perhaps the most completely neglected aspect of ensemble directing: it probably ought, instead, to be one of the most closely and thoughtfully examined.

As listeners, we have all experienced concert programs that left us deeply fulfilled without, perhaps, knowing exactly why; conversely, we have all left other concerts disappointed – knowing that the disappointment really had little to do with the quality of music-making, but without being able to put our finger on precisely what it was that failed to satisfy.

It is also likely that all of us have directed concerts, the content of which was absolutely convincing to us; while other programs we’ve assembled finally left us doubting whether we had exercised good musical judgment. This may or may not have had anything to do with the vexing discovery that our students were still struggling with the music an hour or so before the public downbeat! It seems likely to me that in such cases our audiences also left vaguely disenchanted, and that the concert program itself had much to do with that particular aesthetic outcome.

In this article I will examine facets of concert programming that remain largely unexplored and misunderstood. I will first set forth the following as a guiding premise: *the music director, when choosing the concert program, is fulfilling exactly the same function as the curator of a museum or art gallery, who devotes much thought to the question of what painting to hang between which two other paintings, so that each of the artworks contributes an enhancing context for the others and the whole exhibition becomes more than the sum of its parts.* In other words, the concert program itself ought to be a multi-faceted work of art – the conductor enjoying thereby, in a limited sense, the status of “composer.” It is in the act of concert programming that he becomes “artistic director” of his ensemble. This responsibility is not to be taken lightly: we are, after all, deciding what our ensembles will perform and *what our audiences will hear*: we are making judgments on their behalf.

In the interest of full disclosure, it is probably important to acknowledge that what’s under consideration here is the issue of “taste.” I’d like to offer a few words about that, since the invocation of *taste* is sometimes a source of mischief. I have on occasion met people who, upon learning what

it is that I do for a living, have enthusiastically told me “I like all kinds of music: classical, jazz, rock, country – you name it, I like it all.” When I meet such a person, I know I’ve just made the acquaintance of someone who *loves* absolutely *no* music. I know that he has instead learned spectacularly well how to *ignore* the ambient music that everywhere surrounds us and that can make even a trip to the grocery store a hellish experience for the fully-aware musician – who, unlike the “average listener,” most assuredly *does* love *some* music but lacks the ability to “turn off” the rest. Lest this strike some readers as a little over-precious, let me offer a couple of analogies. If you run across someone who tells you that he likes all foods equally, you can safely deduce that you’ve just met a person who has no taste buds. Without being judgmental, you could then say that he has no “taste” – for food, at least. Anyone who ingests Little Debbie Zebra Cakes® and *poulet a l’érable* with equal zest is not to be trusted in gustatory matters. You will not be able to have a worthwhile conversation about food with such a person. Anyone for whom a bottle of Boone’s Farm Strawberry Hill® will do just as nicely as a 2000 *Chateau Tausinat L’Hermitage St. Emilion* is going to be no help at all in the selection of a table wine for your next dinner party (in the course of which you intend to serve *poulet a l’érable* – and something besides Zebra Cakes® for dessert). Let it be noted: this is not a question of snobbery – taste, in its precise meaning, never is.

One more analogy: I live in Fayetteville, Arkansas, home of the much-touted Razorbacks. Unless I arrive on campus to do some extra work on Saturday and discover that I cannot park in my accustomed spot on account of a home game, I usually have absolutely no idea whether or not the fightin’ Hawgs are playing – or if they are, what other team they’re meeting on the field that day – nor, for that matter, do I care (it really never occurs to me to ask the question). You could accurately say that I have no taste (buds) for football. I wouldn’t take umbrage at the charge: I know that I have pretty good taste in some matters and absolutely none in others, and that’s a condition we all share.

Those whose retinas include the standard cones and rods – who are not, in other words, color blind on account of missing ocular structures – can be *taught* “taste” in questions of color coordination should they wish to learn: there are some time-honored principles which do seem to have broad application and predictably yield good outcomes. The same is true for those whose tongues are equipped with the taste buds more-or-less standard in the human population regardless of ethnicity or culture: they can be taught to distinguish first between a *Cabernet Sauvignon* and a *Shiraz*, then between a *Cabernet Sauvignon* aged in an oaken cask and one aged in a pottery crock, etc. It may take some time and careful application, but if the student of wines is convinced that the exertion is worthwhile (and what exertion, after all, could be more enjoyable!), finely-tuned discriminatory abilities will eventually follow. With sufficient effort, it is conceivable that one might even, like James Bond, be able to distinguish between “shaken” and “stirred!”

Well-developed powers of discrimination – i.e. “taste” – can likewise be brought to bear on the hanging of an exhibition of paintings, the organizing of a variety show, the landscaping of an acre of lawn and the programming of your spring concert.

## **II The principles illustrated by means of some real-life examples**

As I can think of no better way to proceed, I will cite some concert programs that I have assembled and conducted over the past decade, and explain why it is – as I understand it – that they “worked.” Since I am an orchestral conductor, the majority of those programs will be comprised of orchestral works; I will try to make my descriptions sufficiently clear, however, that even if some

compositions cited are unfamiliar to the reader, the principles behind the selection will be readily grasped.

The inaugural concert of the Chamber Orchestra of the Ozarks, a professional ensemble I founded in 1997 and which enjoyed a nine-year residency at Drury University, consisted of the following:

<i>Simple Symphony</i> , Opus 20.....	Benjamin Britten
Violin Concerto in E major, BWV 1042.....	Johann Sebastian Bach
Serenade in B $\flat$ major, K. 361, <i>Gran Partita</i> .....	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

My wife Rossitza was the soloist in the Bach concerto. A 15-minute intermission followed that concerto.

All three of these works are multi-movement compositions; they consist of four, three and seven movements respectively. The first two compositions are for strings only (including solo violin and harpsichord for the Bach); the final work is for 12 wind players plus string bass. The key of the Britten work is D minor, with a D major coda in the final movement; the keys of the other two works are listed in the program. The two halves of the concert were of roughly equal length.

In the first half of the concert, the progression was from a (modestly) symphonic work to a concerted one, from a (barely) 20th-century work to an 18th century one, from a relatively dark key (D minor) to one that is quite bright (E major), and from an orchestral posture that “owns the stage” to one that is to some extent accompanimental (not to say subservient): these are a few of the differences. Other points of contrast include the formal layouts of movements in the two compositions: Britten, in writing a modest work with symphonic pretensions, constructed his movements in ABA form with an inserted development, full-fledged ABAB form, ABA form with a poignant coda based partly on “B,” and extended sonata form respectively; Bach wrote his first movement in *da Capo* form, a through-composed second movement partly indebted to the *chaconne*, and the most regular, dance-like rondo finale imaginable. Bach’s tonal argument through the course of the concerto is very tightly constructed – “closely reasoned,” one might say; Britten’s is much looser. The points of commonality are equally important: both Britten and Bach were contrapuntists, even if the latter exercised his polyphonic predilections in a much more thoroughgoing way than the former. Both Bach and Britten established their primary key, then “researched” it by moving ever farther afield, and eventually found their way back to the tonic, to end as they had begun. They were both committed, in other words, to the tonal “rounding” of compositions (composers have two options: they can either start here and go there, or they can start here, go there and come back here).

After the intermission, the audience filed back into the concert hall to see an entirely different ensemble gathered onstage, prepared to present a very different kind of music. In order to reinforce the striking visual and timbral contrast that this changing of the guard afforded, I selected a work whose key center is precisely as far away from that of the Bach concerto as one can get. In the process, I also chose music that agreeably “splits the difference” between Bach’s early 18th-century “baroque” style and Britten’s early 20th-century “neoclassical” approach – that is, Mozart’s full-fledged Viennese classicism (Mozart composed this serenade not too long after his move to Vienna in 1781, and was so fond of it that he had it played at his own wedding party). Here, the posture of the performing ensemble is that of “occasional music” – the music was intended, practically speaking, to be played as a sonic backdrop for a party outdoors. (One of the great ironies of Western music is that Mozart could have produced such an exquisitely-crafted composition, understanding all the while that it was fated

to be mostly ignored.) Our programming of the piece was in a sense an attempt to “rescue” this extraordinary music and restore it to its rightful place: onstage, before an attentive audience.

In its general layout, the *Gran Partita* resembles the orchestral dance suite of the preceding Baroque era (J.S. Bach’s four extant orchestral suites furnish good examples). Its opening movement begins with a grand slow introduction, and the main body of the movement is a monothematic sonata-form structure, during the course of which a great deal of attention is paid to the timbres of the clarinet family, at last available to the young composer upon his move to cosmopolitan Vienna from provincial Salzburg. The six movements that follow are mostly dance-like; occasionally, however, they aspire to more nearly “symphonic” stature.

One of my reasons for programming the *Gran Partita* was to “set the bar” of audience expectations where the newly-organized Chamber Orchestra was concerned: I wanted them to know at the outset of my intention to program for a range of ensemble types that could arguably fall under the “chamber orchestra” rubric. Another motive was purely economical: by programming this way, I could keep rehearsal time to a (less-expensive) minimum for each of the groups, with only the bassist involved in all three works. (This last is the kind of practical concern that may very well be taken into account when setting the concert program, but which must never be allowed to trump *musical* considerations.)

If I had this program to do over again, I would retain the primary organizational structure intact, for I believe it worked very well. I might, however, consider substituting Charles Gounod’s *Petite symphonie* – also for winds – for Mozart’s *Gran Partita* (the respective titles alone probably furnish a clue as to why I might entertain this change). The program as it stood was about ten minutes too long. The Gounod would have solved that problem, while still furnishing an agreeable B $\flat$ -major “foil” to the E-major concerto (I would far rather leave an audience wishing they’d heard more, than wishing they hadn’t heard quite so much). And I would also, by means of that substitution, have produced a concert program that both began and ended with modest “symphonies.”

In defense of the original conception, however, be it noted that by ending with the Mozart work, the concert’s “center of gravity” was shifted markedly to the second half of the program (that music, as its apocryphal title suggests, is very grand). The Gounod *symphonie* would not have accomplished this: playing it would, in fact, have left that gravitational center in the Bach concerto. I could have lived with that outcome – there are arguments to be made in favor of both approaches; however, if I were given a choice of hearing two otherwise identical concerts as described, but with one ending with the Mozart work and the other with the Gounod, I would unhesitatingly choose the former as a better way to spend my evening. This, of course, is purely a matter of *personal* taste (buds).

I’m pretty sure that by now, some reader has protested that those works’ key centers can’t *possibly* have the effect that I think they have. I would suggest that such a reader revisit the second paragraph of this article (he might also want to listen to a lot of compositions in E major and B $\flat$  major, and notice how different from each other they sound!). It is precisely those factors that audience members probably can’t identify, but which nevertheless contribute to or detract from their aesthetic experience, that interest me. I believe they constitute a real and vital dimension of that experience, and I am concerned to achieve as much coherency in that dimension as in any other. In fact, what I’ve suggested so far could very easily be stated as a null hypothesis and tested without insurmountable difficulty, should any reader be interested in making the effort (as a research project for an M.Ed. program, say).

Let's look at another concert program. This one was also played by the Chamber Orchestra of the Ozarks, several years later:

Concerto in C minor for Piano, Trumpet and Strings, Op. 35.....Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony in C major, K. 425 ("Linz").....Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
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The two works listed constituted the whole of the program: a 15-minute intermission separated them. The soloists for the concerto were William Brown and Tijuana Julian, respectively.

In this program, the tonal center – C – doesn't budge: the contrasts between these two works are already so striking that it seemed wise to avoid aesthetic overload (one of the most important "tricks" of painting is to be able to recognize when the painting is finished – when *not* to add another single brushstroke!).

As in the program I cited earlier, the chronological motion is from newer music to older. A good case can be made for the opposite approach, but a concert is after all not a music history lecture. My concerns had less to do with the two composers' relative temporal position than with the spirit and content of these particular works. Played in the order in which I presented them, Mozart's classicism furnished an agreeable corrective to Shostakovich's neoclassicism, as if something left askew at the close of the first half of the concert were put right during the second.

In contrast to the first program explored above, this program contained two *masterpieces*. A program consisting entirely of masterpieces is a risky venture, because not all masterpieces belong in the same room together (I would recoil at seeing a Caravaggio canvas displayed alongside an Anselm Kiefer installation in the same gallery at an art museum – for much the same reason that I would rather not eat rare roast beef topped with shaved Belgian chocolate – although I surely enjoy both in isolation from each other). This particular combination of masterpieces, however, seems to me to work extraordinarily well.

Shostakovich's concerto is a personal testament. It was written in 1933, a year before his *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* came to the attention of Soviet authorities and landed the composer in hot water. At the time he wrote this concerto, Shostakovich could see what was coming: already, some of his friends and associates had been sent to Siberian exile or murdered outright. The charge against them was the elusive one of "formalism," a term slippery enough to be used with impunity against any artist who, for whatever reason, had fallen out of favor with the regime. Despite his awareness of the danger in expressing himself directly, Shostakovich was constitutionally incapable of extracting his thumb from the eye of officialdom. In the present concerto, he cast the Soviet overlords in the strident voice of the trumpet, painting them as arrogant, treacherous and banal (which, of course, they were). In the sounds of the piano he gave voice to his own predicament (he was, after all, a pianist). There's no question which of the soloists "wins" in the end – and which has been forced into lockstep complicity. (That Shostakovich's personal fortunes followed the trajectory of his concerto is one of history's great injustices.)

The concerto moves from C minor in the opening movement, through a sort of *valse triste* in E minor, through a modulatory third movement consisting mostly of a piano solo, to a C-minor finale finally *compelled* to end in C major. The forms of the movements are all classically conceived, but the language is that of the early 20th century. That language consists not only of its acerbic harmonies: there are musical *gestures* that belong unmistakably to the century of genocide, as well.

The “Linz” Symphony (named for the city) was conceived and written down in a white heat of inspiration: upon his arrival there for a brief visit in 1783, Mozart discovered that he had neglected to bring a symphony along, so he simply had to compose one in order to satisfy public demand. This he accomplished in three days! The result is, for my money, the first of Mozart’s *great* symphonies, destined to be followed by the even more astonishing D major “Prague” and that final amazing trilogy of symphonies (written in the course of about six weeks), the E $\flat$  major, the great G minor, and the C-major “Jupiter.” There is absolutely nothing about the “Linz” Symphony that suggests the haste of its writing, except perhaps the uncharacteristic regularity of its recapitulations.

Its four movements are as unlike those of the Shostakovich concerto as may be imagined. Mozart opens the symphony with the first of his great symphonic slow introductions – a formal device he learned from Haydn. He begins in a declamatory, heraldic way, invoking the dotted rhythms and jagged intervals of the French-style overture from a generation earlier. Little by little, he unfolds supple lines that offer a foretaste of the main body of the first movement, a large-scale sonata-form structure perfectly proportioned, closely reasoned and chockfull of Mozartian lyricism. It is music of the utmost mastery, and could only have been written in a century when it was still possible to believe in the basic goodness and reasonableness of humankind and the likelihood of unlimited progress in human affairs.

The second movement is cast in the subdominant key: it, too, is a sonata-form essay, dominated by lullaby-like *Siciliano* rhythms and featuring a surprisingly spectral development section. At its recapitulation, the beautiful first theme is adorned as only Mozart could have done. The symphony’s *Menuetto* movement is actually a *Ländler*, all four of its strains ending decisively in C major (a compositional pedestrianism that suggests *Lederhosen* more than powdered wigs). And the finale is another splendid C-major sonata-form dissertation, with a much more extended second theme than in the case of previous movements, and a development section that moves far enough from the primary orbit to border on the fantastic. This symphony is unquestionably a masterpiece, and the fact that it was composed so quickly makes it almost miraculous. Unlike the (very personal) Shostakovich concerto, the “Linz” Symphony’s embrace is universal.

Now, consider the psychological trajectory of the concert program under examination (the harmonic trajectory is not an issue in this case). We move from a concerted work in the first half of the concert to a symphonic work in the second; from C minor to C major (the same modal route taken in Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony); from a work edged with paranoia and bristling with sarcasm to one informed throughout by optimism and goodwill. Both of these compositions were written by musicians who exhibited extraordinary promise at a very young age: when only 19, Mozart produced his five violin concertos; at the same age, Shostakovich issued his astonishing First Symphony. They were the same age (27) when they wrote the present two masterpieces – between which lies the entire 19th century and the first third of the awful 20th. The two works on this concert program reflect nothing less than the difference between an era dominated by totalitarian regimes, ruinous wars and soul-eroding nihilism, and one informed by Enlightenment ideals and graced by burgeoning democracies. That human beings are capable of surviving – and even flourishing – in such radically different *milieux* is one of the great miracles of life. That music can give expression to both equally well is one of the few facts that lifts the human condition from the merely farcical and lends it some of the dignity and grace of tragedy.

As Gustav Mahler said of the symphony, “it must be like the world: it must contain everything!” The foregoing concert program came pretty close to realizing that all-encompassing ideal.

My third example is the first concert program I conducted with the University of Arkansas Symphony Orchestra upon the assuming of my position here:

Symphony No. 6 in D major, <i>Le matin</i> .....Joseph Haydn
<i>Octour</i> .....Igor Stravinsky
Concerto in E minor for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 64.....Felix Mendelssohn

The soloist for the Mendelssohn concerto was Rossitzka Jekova-Goza, who had likewise just joined the Music Faculty of the University of Arkansas. A 15-minute intermission was observed following the Stravinsky composition.

My reasons for beginning with the Haydn Sixth were somewhat “autobiographical:” this particular symphony, “Morning,” was the first of a trilogy of such works (including “Noon” and “Evening”) written by Haydn for his new employer, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, upon assuming the post of *Vice-Kapellmeister* at Eisenstadt in 1761. To present this very work seemed to me an appropriate and auspicious way to begin my own term of service to a University I had long admired.

The “Morning” Symphony is very much a concerted work, practically a *sinfonia concertante*. The reason for this is logical enough: a number of Europe’s finest musicians joined the orchestra of the Esterházy court at the same time Haydn was brought there, and Haydn wisely elected to afford them an opportunity to show off their skills to their new employer.

When I first came to the University of Arkansas, the string-playing student population was fairly sparse, so I had to be sure to select music that would work for them. We did enjoy the services of a very fine concertmaster, who has since completed the Masters program and moved on, as well as good wind soloists, a strong principal cellist and an outstanding young bassist; these are all necessary for a performance of Haydn’s Sixth Symphony. Otherwise, small sections of string players suffice. This is to say that my choosing of this work was also somewhat driven by necessity – which is reputed to be the mother of invention.

The four movements of Haydn’s Sixth are harmonically conservative and formally proscribed: they are all bipartite structures with the two large sections repeated; sonata form (with its expected tonal trajectory) predominates; most of the thematic material consists of highly-chiseled motives – which prove useful in formal development sections. There are innovations, however (as Michael Steinberg so aptly put it, Haydn wrote *only* “surprise” symphonies): the slow introduction to the first movement is one of the earliest ever composed (appropriately enough, it represents a sunrise); the second movement, a kind of slow minuet, is framed by musical “bookends” (closely-related prologue and epilogue); the Trio of the Minuet proper is for a most unusual assemblage of solo instruments and cast in the tonic minor; above all, there is much *concertante* writing, especially for the concertmaster. Structurally, it is unquestionably a “classical” work, but it does have one foot planted in an earlier era (it is worlds apart from the full-blown classicism of Mozart’s “Linz” Symphony).

The University Symphony Orchestra performed this work standing – only the cellists and harpsichordist were seated. This approach, of course, works only for compositions of modest dimensions, employing limited performance forces.

The Haydn symphony’s classicism was set in high relief by the early 20th-century work that followed it. The *Octet for Winds* (1923) was Stravinsky’s first thoroughly neoclassical composition –

often cited as the very paradigm of musical neoclassicism. Its three movements (the final two of which are connected by a bridge passage) make a very convincing bow to their classical models (sonata form, theme and variations and rondo, respectively), then set out to offer the most wildly creative “interpretations” of those models imaginable. The first movement, then – although it adheres more or less closely to E<sub>b</sub> major and is undoubtedly “sonata-form movement with slow introduction” more than it is anything else – offers a clever conflation of sonata and arch-form procedures (the recapitulation is reversed), with a tonal scheme that is, to my knowledge, unprecedented (E<sub>b</sub> major first theme falling to D major second theme; recapped E major second theme falling to E<sub>b</sub> major first theme: astonishingly enough, this large-scale tonal scheme was anticipated in the tight chromatic “changing tone” figure that began the Introduction a perfect fifth higher – and in inversion!).

The second movement’s theme is cast in D minor with a notable octatonic bias; the variations that follow are set forth in such a way as to marry variation form with rondo (the first variation recurs twice after its initial appearance, serving as a refrain). The final variation is a powerful, slow-moving fugue set primarily in 5/8 time, and the (mostly C-major) rondo finale affords a jocular contrast to the foregoing seriousness. The “progressive tonality” of the *Octet* (E<sub>b</sub> to D to C) is a “modern” feature – one of those instances where the composer elected to “start here and go there.”

Almost needless to say, the Stravinsky *Octet* furnished striking visual and timbral contrasts to the opening work, in almost every conceivable detail. These overt contrasts were corroborated by the equally arresting disparities of harmonic language and musical gesture in those respective works. And the members of the Stravinsky ensemble, of course, played seated.

Thus far, the temporal trajectory of this concert program had been from older music to newer; as has come to be my custom, I “split the difference” with the work that filled the second half of the program – a work far larger in its dimensions and more ambitious in its aims than either of the compositions that preceded it. Again, there were practical reasons for including this concerto: even as I was introducing myself to a concert-going public in Fayetteville, I seized the opportunity to introduce my wife’s beautiful playing to that same audience and – as a performing artist of the highest caliber – to the violin students sitting in the orchestra, most of whom were beginning formal studies with her. There were equally strong *musical* reasons for including the work: it is for good reason that many listeners consider the music of certain 19th-century composers – especially Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Brahms – to constitute music’s highest attainments, the fullest realization of its expressive possibilities, its aesthetic pinnacle. I would not hesitate to declare the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, dating from 1844, to be the single great masterpiece on this concert program. Not only is it one of the most important violin concertos ever written: it is one of the finest dissertations on musical *romanticism* ever conceived. In a word, it provided everything that had been lacking in the music of the first half. To hear those three works together, in the order we presented them, will confirm this claim for any listener (to hear them in any *other* order will amount to a travesty; try it, and you’ll see what I mean). I could not possibly have chosen a better composition to finish that concert.

No other University Orchestra concert program I conducted during my first year in Fayetteville came anywhere close to that one, in terms of programmatic integrity. There’s a reason for this: the remaining concerts were driven by commitments made the year before I got here: to other ensembles, to a guest composer, to a hodgepodge “cast of thousands” concert that featured no fewer than five large ensembles in a single, endless evening (!!!), and to the annual Concerto/Aria Competition, the outcome of which is not decided until December (the resultant repertoire therefore a great unknown

until after initial programming decisions, for practical reasons, have to be made). Some programming matters, of course, will always lie beyond our control; I have taken steps, however, to reduce some of these confounding variables where the University of Arkansas Orchestras are concerned, and extraneous commitments are now kept to a decent minimum so that *integral, artistic programming* – the kind I wish my conducting students to learn to do – can prevail.

I now set forth for consideration a program which, as of this writing, the University of Arkansas Symphony Orchestra (its ranks now swollen with capable string players) is rehearsing in anticipation of a performance later in the semester:

Overture to <i>La gazza ladra</i> .....	Gioacchino Rossini
<i>In the Steppes of Central Asia</i> .....	Alexander Borodin
<i>Rumanian Folk Dances</i> .....	Béla Bartók
Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68, <i>Pastoral</i> .....	Ludwig van Beethoven

A 15-minute intermission will be observed between the Bartók and Beethoven works.

This concert is a kind of travelogue, more in space than in time. The journey begins in Italy, in 1817, with an overture that history has judged the finest aspect of an otherwise lackluster melodrama. *The Thieving Magpie* is hardly ever performed in its entirety today, but its overture has garnered a place in the standard orchestral repertoire, thanks to Rossini’s engaging melodies and skillful handling of vast architectonic musical structures (often underpinned by the famous “Rossini crescendo”). The overture’s opening E-major march is a strutting, cocksure thing with curious phrase extensions affording some attractive but very difficult solos for some of the wind players. An accelerating bridge passage transports us to the main body of the overture, which begins in E minor and follows the standard sonata-form harmonic trajectory. Upon its return, the second theme is cast in the tonic major and the coda remains there, affording a very bright beginning – harmonically-speaking – to this concert.

The tone poem that follows will take up the tonal project where the Rossini overture left it: on high Es in octaves, played by two violinists. Other colors gradually join the mix, and an old Russian song is intoned, first on the clarinet in A major (the work’s primary key – “resolving” the Rossini overture’s E major), then on the horn, in C (E serves as a common tone for both of these tonal centers). Borodin’s masterful (1880) tone poem then proceeds with a sort of “caravan” music against all those high Es, and finally opens out onto a plaintive English horn solo in a much more “oriental” style. Geographically, we have moved very far to the east – and somewhat north – of Italy. *In the Steppes of Central Asia* is justly celebrated for its artless, apparently effortless and utterly convincing juxtaposition of Russian and “oriental” themes, for its unruffled calm and its glowing orchestral colors. Its fading final strains are profoundly beautiful, and the panorama is vast and timeless. This is not music that can be properly listened to by anyone who’s in a hurry.

To begin bringing the music back “home,” we will finish the first half with Béla Bartók’s *Rumanian Folk Dances*, a set of seven traditional village tunes harmonized in Bartók’s inimitable style and colorfully orchestrated, with notable solos for clarinet, piccolo and solo violin. The final cadence, as in the Borodin work that preceded it, is on A major – but the approach to *this* cadence is through music of frenzied, *furioso* character.

In Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony – one of the great wonders of 19th-century symphonism – we enjoy a synthesis of elements present only in isolation in the preceding three works. Here there is much landscape painting, as in the Borodin tone poem. There is tight harmonic argumentation, as in the Rossini overture. There is also the element of folk dance, especially in the symphony's third movement – a musical portrayal of a “merry gathering of country folk.” Above all, there is the prevailing sense – characteristic of much of Beethoven's music – that every single note is in exactly the right place at the right time, and couldn't possibly be otherwise without diminishing the composition. And for those who are paying attention, this F major symphony resolves all those Es in the first half of the concert, as leading tone to ultimate tonic.

In terms of the actual chronology of composition, there is barely more than a century between the oldest (the Beethoven, 1808) and the newest (Bartók, 1917) (however, several ruinous wars lie between the two, to say nothing of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and Max Planck) – moreover, since Bartók was actually pouring older wine into newer wineskins, that temporal interval is for all practical purposes greatly reduced. In this concert, the focus is clearly on national styles (instead of historical style periods) and the great variety of musical expression that can be engendered by them – but with sufficient connective tissue in the “extra-musical” dimensions of the program to make it coherent on at least a couple of levels. The length is also about right.

The four concert programs I have listed and described above all seem to me to strike an appropriate balance between audience expectations (the concert hall is, after all, a sort of museum), players' needs, and aesthetic coherence; I trust my reasons for that assessment have emerged in the discussion of each of those programs in turn. I could very easily list programs I've assembled that I'm *not* so proud of, but I believe counter-examples can be readily enough “constructed” by the reader, by simply throwing the names of a large number of well-known compositions into a hat and drawing them out at random in groups of three or four.

### III A test of coherency: can you write about it?

I've long made it a policy to provide program notes for the concerts I conduct. There are at least two good reasons for doing this. First, until I have written about a piece that I'm studying, I don't always know exactly what I think of that piece – or at least, I don't always have my thoughts about that piece in *good, usable order* until I've taken in hand the task of elucidating it for an imagined reader. You might say that such writing “keeps me honest.” Second, it really is the case that many of the people who come to concerts I conduct have never heard the Beethoven “Pastoral” Symphony, or any of those other works – and if I can be of any help to them as they attempt to come to terms with some demanding and dauntingly unfamiliar material, I certainly owe it to them to try (I am an educator, and proud of it).

I've also long suspected that the ease or difficulty I have in writing the notes for a particular program reflects the coherency of the program itself. If my writing seems to come more or less effortlessly, I've probably made good programming decisions; if I must struggle with it, there's more than likely a wrench somewhere in the wheels of coherency.

I'd like to close this article by citing one final concert program, again played by the Chamber Orchestra of the Ozarks. This time, rather than discussing the program, I will allow the program notes that I published for the audience do the talking:

<i>The Unanswered Question</i> .....	Charles Edward Ives
Concerto Grosso in F major, Op. 3 No. 4.....	George Frideric Handel
Sinfonia Concertante in E $\flat$ major, K. 364.....	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The trumpet soloist for the Ives was Tijuana Julian; Rossitza Jekova-Goza and Amy Muchnik were the violin and viola soloists, respectively, for the Mozart composition. A 15-minute intermission was observed after the Handel work.

Here are the notes I furnished for the occasion:

When Charles Ives wrote his *Unanswered Question* in or around 1906, he probably never expected to hear it performed. It was one of several experimental works dating from that first 20th-century decade, in which – to satisfy his own curiosity – he toyed with the idea of having multiple layers of sound moving at different speeds in a single composition. The challenge, in such a project, is to make a work which is a unified whole rather than three different things which just happen to be going on simultaneously, in the same room. In *The Unanswered Question*, this challenge is met partly by means of an extramusical program, which was set forth by Ives himself in a note published in the score. The note reads, in part:

The strings play *ppp* throughout with no change in tempo. They are to represent “The Silences of the Druids--Who Know, See, and Hear Nothing.” The trumpet intones “The Perennial Question of Existence,” and states it in the same tone of voice each time. But the hunt for “The Invisible Answer” undertaken by the flutes and other human beings, becomes gradually more active, faster and louder through an *animando* to a *con fuoco*. . . . “The Fighting Answerers,” as the time goes on, and after a “secret conference,” seem to realize a futility, and begin to mock “The Question”—the strife is over for the moment. After they disappear, “The Question” is asked for the last time, and “The Silences” are heard beyond in “Undisturbed solitude.”

During the 1930s, Ives became interested once more in those several unperformed experimental works, and undertook revisions with a view to publication. *The Unanswered Question* was finally brought out in print in 1953, and has since become his most frequently performed orchestral work.

In 1973, Leonard Bernstein used *The Unanswered Question* as a point of departure for a series of lectures at Harvard University, published three years later under the same title. For Bernstein, the “unanswered question” asked at the turn of the century, was “whither music?” The history of music in our time has of course provided the answer, an answer which has become increasingly unsatisfactory, as the tradition of Western art music has splintered into multiple (and largely disagreeing and disagreeable) factions, held dear by a diminishing population of practitioners and listeners, and finally capable, perhaps, of saying little to the world at large. So Ives’ best-known work is offered at the beginning of this concert as the stimulus for an alternative line of questioning: one that focuses rather on “whence,” and, perhaps more importantly, “why.” It is left to the listener to make the connections and draw the necessary inferences. Suffice it to say that the remaining two works on the program are presented, in part, as “answers,” and that while their key tonalities represent falling whole steps from the final G major chord of the Ives, their content engages both head and heart on an increasingly equal basis.

As in Ives’ case, a span of decades lies between the writing of Handel’s Opus 3 concertos and their publication. The writing probably took place around 1715; the publication in 1734. Concerto No. 4 uses the same basic orchestra as the other five of this early set: two oboes, one bassoon, the usual

strings and harpsichord. Although additional solo instruments are included in some of the Opus 3 concertos, Handel is more economical in the present work, drawing his soloists out of the orchestra.

The first movement is an overture based on the French model. Its repeated opening section, which modulates to and finishes in A minor, is set in a stately tempo, and the rhythms are mostly dotted. The *allegro* which follows begins with a *fugato* and employs the full orchestra consistently (unlike the overtures to Bach's orchestral suites, there are no solo passages here). A return to the stately tempo and dotted rhythms of the opening furnishes the conclusion of the overture, and this second large section (*allegro plus lentamente*) is repeated.

Movement two is a sort of lullaby for solo oboe with a "rocking" accompaniment in the strings. Its ending, an abrupt and rather severe-sounding modulation to D minor, sets up the vigorous third movement. This D-minor movement is the most rigorously-constructed fugue of the entire concerto, and features solo interludes for the wind players and the two principal violinists.

The concerto concludes with one of the most charming minuets ever written.

The *sinfonia concertante*, as its name suggests, is a genre which fits more-or-less midway between the concerto and the symphony. The representative works are usually for multiple soloists and orchestra. Many such "concerted symphonies" were produced in the European capitals during the third quarter of the 18th century, but by the time (1779) Mozart wrote the undisputed masterpiece of the genre, the genre itself was fading from popularity. Perhaps this is just as well, for it is hard to imagine how one could go beyond the present work: it is, in a word, the best piece of music I know.

K. 364 was composed during one of the most difficult times of Mozart's life: he had just returned home after a heartbreaking tour of Paris and Mannheim, where he had had to endure not only his own failure to secure a position for himself, but the death of his mother as well. To return to provincial Salzburg (and an increasingly distant and unsupportive father) after visiting such important musical centers, must have been a bitter pill for the young composer to swallow. The writing of this unparalleled musical masterpiece surely reflects Mozart's growing enchantment with the viola – increasingly his personal instrument-of-choice – as well as his father's considerable skills as a violinist. Although there is no mention of the work in the family's correspondence to establish the work's practical significance, it seems likely that the present *Sinfonia Concertante* represents a last collaboration between the two performers (or perhaps a final conciliatory gesture on the son's part), before Wolfgang's departure for Vienna for that final and greatest era of his creative life (leaving behind the tattered remains of his by now completely alienated birth family).

The *Sinfonia Concertante* opens with a conventional orchestral figure, in which a long-held chord is sliced into smaller and smaller pieces. This is followed by five unforgettable ideas in rapid succession, all of them pregnant with implications for what is yet to come:

- an imitatively-presented subdominant figure so cross-phrased as to make the location of structural downbeats purely conjectural
- a vigorous, ascending, celebratory figure passed from treble to bass strings and concluding with a half cadence
- a highly entertaining call-and-response dialog between horns and oboes, which more than hints at contrasting gender roles
- the longest, most impressive crescendo-with-trills that had been written to that date
- an imposing syncopated closing figure, with 'cellos and basses divided, which finally makes way for the entrance of the soloists

The material presented thus far constitutes not so much a tutti exposition (for none of it explicitly forecasts the soloists' thematic material) as an extended introduction, surely the most imposing ever written for a *sinfonia concertante*.

When the soloists do finally enter they do so discreetly, in octaves, against a fading orchestral backdrop, and gradually unfold a flowering, diatonic melody. Their entrance is one of equals, and so it goes throughout the work, with parity achieved by duet playing alternating with balanced call-and-response writing.

The cadenzas of movements 1 and 2 were supplied by the composer (they are surely models of cadenza writing – quite unlike the tongue-in-cheek cadenza of his *Musical Joke*, presented by the Chamber Orchestra earlier this season). The C-minor second movement may constitute the first of Mozart's deeply autobiographical orchestral movements, and the Finale provides the listener with the most welcome relief imaginable, coming as it does on the heels of such an unrelentingly dark utterance.

One could multiply a thousandfold such analytical insights as those few offered above, and never scratch the surface of this music – the deepest and, again, *best* known to me. The proof of this pudding is in the eating, and I know of no more delicious musical dish to serve up than this, to top off the second full season of the Chamber Orchestra of the Ozarks.

–David Goza

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