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ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

presents

The Erie Philharmonic Orchestra
The Erie Philharmonic Chorus
The Choir of Allegheny College

HOWARD HANSON
GUEST CONDUCTOR

JOHN GOSLING
CONDUCTOR



JANUARY 28, 1969

8:30 P. M.

Meadville Area Senior High School

[2008.01.0677]

ERIE PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

John Gosling, *Musical Director and Conductor*

ERIE PHILHARMONIC CHORUS

Andrew Flanagan, *Director*

THE CHOIR OF ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

W. S. Wright North, *Director*

Program

Suite from the "Music for the Royal Fireworks" Handel
(arranged by Sir Hamilton Harty)

New England Triptych William Schuman

Cherubic Hymn Howard Hanson
(conducted by Mr. Hanson)

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 2 in D major, op. 73 Brahms

PROGRAM NOTES

by Dorothy J. Smith, Assistant Librarian, Allegheny College

Suite from the "Music for the Royal Fireworks" George Frideric Handel

"London, April 27, 1749. A large-scale disaster was narrowly averted here tonight when Chevalier Servandoni's elegant pavilion, especially constructed for the occasion and finished only yesterday, caught fire during the King's fireworks display to celebrate the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. Although numbers of people were hurt and the report is circulating that at least two were killed, the tragedy might have been much greater in view of the immense number of persons crowded into Green Park."

So a modern reporter might have covered the story of one of the wildest nights in the London of Samuel Johnson — and of George Frideric Handel, who like his Hanoverian rulers George I and George II was a German transplanted to England. Handel enjoyed royal patronage in return for music for such official celebrations as this ill-fated fireworks exhibition. If anyone triumphed this time, it was he. The architect was angry over the destruction of his building, the spectators fled in panic, and the treaty which was being celebrated was short-lived. But Handel's music has endured as one of his most frequently played works for orchestra. It was originally scored for trumpets, horns, oboes, bassoons, and percussion — as was in keeping with a martial occasion where the Master General of Ordnance was in charge and the other delight for the ears was a huge volley of cannon. Part of the music accompanied a general display of fireworks, while other numbers were played in connection with elaborate set pieces representing "Peace" and "Rejoicing."

After the night of the fireworks, Handel rewrote his music, adding strings. This version, revised for modern chamber orchestra by Sir Hamilton Harty, is now the standard form. The overture is the longest section. It begins in broad, stately style and includes an allegro keyed by trumpets. The slow movement is the peaceful one, and the bourree provides contrast; its rhythmic staccatos, especially when played by the winds, are faintly mysterious. The suite ends with a minuet, actually a combination of the two original minuets: a vigorous one in major, and the other, in minor, more subdued. Perhaps the alternation, throughout the score, of band instruments and strings, loud and soft, major and minor, represents war and peace — both of which were being celebrated by the royal display of fireworks.

New England Triptych

William Schuman

As head of the Juilliard School of Music from 1945 to 1961 and of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts since 1962, William Schuman has exerted great influence in the musical life of twentieth-century America. He came late to his career in serious music but, once decided on it, readily made up for lost time. At twenty he had not settled on a life work; at twenty-five he began teaching at Sarah Lawrence College, where he remained for ten years. In academic life he always has insisted on two rights: to teach in his own way, unrestricted by tradition, and, despite administrative duties, to remain first of all a composer. Soon he began to reap his rewards, of which the most celebrated was his winning, in 1943, the first Pulitzer Prize for music. In addition to the Juilliard presidency, Schuman for a time assumed the directorship of publication at G. Schirmer. This was the first time a major music publisher had hired a major American composer in an editorial capacity. Schuman thus was able to bring a composer's outlook to both the education of young musicians and the publication of new music.

That Schuman sometimes looks backward to the American musical past as well as forward to its future is suggested by the eighteenth-century source material of **New England Triptych** and its twentieth-century treatment. This work, first performed in 1956, is based on three hymns by William Billings, one of the earliest American composers. Billings was a tanner by trade. He had a great love for choral singing, picked up the rudiments of music from the singing-instruction pages of various hymnals, and began to write his own hymns. Several of these, especially the warlike ones that combined piety with Revolutionary patriotism, were popular in his lifetime. Billing's work as a pathfinder in American music has been of interest to a number of recent composers and critics. The three hymns chosen by Schuman for **New England Triptych**, "Be Glad Thou America," "When Jesus Wept," and "Chester," alternate revolution and reverence. The third is the most famous; it served as a marching tune for the Continental Army. The words celebrate the holy wrath of participants in a just war:

Let tyrants shake their iron rod
And slav'ry clank her galling chains,
We'll fear them not; we trust in God,
New England's God forever reigns!

The Cherubic Hymn

Howard Hanson

Howard Hanson's career has been in some respects similar to that of William Schuman, with Hanson, more than a decade the elder, as the pioneer. These men have headed the two largest music schools in the country, and they have been in the forefront of the struggle to recognize, listen to, and publish the work of American composers. One important difference is Schuman's origin as a New York City boy and Hanson's as a small-town Midwesterner. Both elements are important in American music, as are various national strains. Hanson, with his Swedish background, honors from the Swedish government, and usually cool style, has often been considered a Scandinavian musician in America, with Grieg, Sibelius, and Nielsen hovering about his pages. He is, nevertheless, a thoroughly American composer; surely no one has done more for the cause of American music.

In Hanson's boyhood in Wahoo, Nebraska, the Lutheran congregation joined in singing chorales in their church and the great oratorios were performed at annual music festivals. By the time he was twenty-one, Hanson had been a professional instrumentalist, graduated from college and the Institute of Musical Art in New York City, and taught at Northwestern University and the College of the Pacific. In 1924 he became head of the Eastman School of Music, where he stayed for forty years. He was the first American to win the Prix de Rome for music and has earned many other honors, including the Pulitzer Prize. The American Composers' Concerts (now the American Music Festivals) which he began in Rochester have encouraged many young composers. A few years ago he toured Europe, the U.S.S.R., and the Middle East with an orchestra of Eastman students.

While Hanson's orchestral works, particularly his symphonies, dominate the list of his compositions, his output of choral music also has been significant. The rich choral tradition of his youth has remained with him. His skill in writing for voices and his apparent deep fondness for their music are evident in "The Cherubic Hymn," composed in 1949. The text is taken from the Greek Catholic liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom as arranged by Stephen A. Hurlbut. Its mysticism and passionate power seem far removed from Lutheran chorales, but the love of the vocal line and the instinct for fitting together words and music transcend creeds. The piece begins quietly ("It is meet and right to hymn thee") and almost at once climbs to a peak of excitement and strength ("For Thou are God ineffable"). Sometimes the words are followed literally ("And when we had fallen away/Thou didst raise us up again"). A quiet, flowing, reverent passage introduces words of humble gratitude for the kindness of God in accepting the tribute of worship from men, "although there stand before Thee . . . archangels . . . angels . . . Cherubim . . . Seraphim/Soaring aloft on their wings/Singing the triumphal hymn." The words are made to soar and sing indeed here; the crescendo is rhythmic, overpowering in its depiction of the majesty of heaven. The piece closes with a lyrical, yet positive, setting of the Sanctus.

Symphony No. 2 in D, Opus 73

Johannes Brahms

In his role as Beethoven's heir apparent, Brahms took the writing of a symphony very seriously. He did not finish his first one until he was middle-aged, although he had begun it twenty years earlier. Then in the very next year, 1877, he wrote the Second Symphony. The First had been received with respect, but the Second was immediately loved. It is not really a joyful work in the way Bach or Schubert can be joyful, but it represents Brahms at his most contented. He began it during a pleasant summer at Portschach on the Alpine Lake Worth. If the Second came honestly to its reputation as Brahms's pastoral symphony, this is not to say that everything about it is crystal clear. If it were, it would not be Brahms. His most heartfelt melodies serve also as carefully managed thematic materials, worked into the complex texture of his music. Most listeners find their pleasure lessened by too close analysis, preferring to absorb each theme thoroughly so that the ear will pick out repetitions and echoes. For example, in the present work, watch those three first quiet, low notes (D, C#, D) and see what happens to them later; what does happen is very nearly the whole symphony!

The first movement is carried along by its strong, swaying rhythm and richness of melodic invention. It ends in that mood of cautious Brahmsian optimism which dominates the entire work. This affirmative quality comes closest to breaking down in the slow movement, which has its murky, doubtful moments. The two motifs that begin the movement, one moving upward and the other downward, create a sense of uneasiness as they wander through various instruments in involved patterns, groping toward each other but failing to establish a positive combined statement. The third movement relieves the tension; it is pastoral, unpretentious, and contented. Written for a smaller ensemble than the other movements, it is lightweight and yet contains many points of interest, such as the interplay of duple and triple rhythms and the restless commentary of the strings — their "excited chatter," as it has been called. The finale, especially its coda, is one of Brahms's most brilliant and successful orchestral pieces. Its mood, while not carefree, is confident. It is the work of one who has, for the moment, decisively triumphed over difficulties rather than one who never has encountered any.