

Program Notes for the Subscription Concerts

by April L. Racana

The 856th Subscription Concert

Suntory Hall, 13 January

The 90th Subscription Concert

Tokyo Opera City, 14 January

The 857th Subscription Concert

Bunkamura Orchard Hall, 18 January

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

Cello Concerto in B minor, op. 104

Opera City

Suntory

- I Allegro (ca. 16 min.)**
- II Adagio ma non troppo (ca. 11 min.)**
- III Allegro moderato (ca. 13 min.)**

“Why on earth didn’t I know that one could write a cello concerto like this? Had I known, I would have written one long ago.” This was Brahms’ reaction upon hearing Dvořák’s Second Cello Concerto. Both composers apparently struggled with how to feature the instrument with orchestra over the years, Brahms seemingly settling on his *Double Concerto*. Dvořák having previously explored the genre in his earlier years had determined it extremely difficult, if not impossible, stating: “The cello is a beautiful instrument, but its place is in the orchestra and in chamber music. As a solo instrument it isn’t much good... I have written a cello concerto, but am sorry... that I did so, and I never intend to write another one.” This first attempt at writing a cello concerto remained undiscovered for many years, and when it surfaced in

1925, all that existed was the solo part and a sketch for piano accompaniment.

It wasn’t until his sojourn to New York in the 1890’s that Dvořák would reconsider his position on the matter. As director of the National Conservatory of Music from 1892-1895, Dvořák not only had teaching duties, but also had the opportunity to compose (it was during this time his *New World Symphony* was written) and perform a number of his works. He also had the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues there, one of whom, Victor Herbert, was also a composer as well as a cellist. It was upon hearing Herbert’s Second Cello Concerto that apparently inspired Dvořák to change his mind about the difficulties of composing in the genre.

For years a renowned European cellist had been urging Dvořák to write a cello concerto for him, and finally in 1895 Wihan’s request was granted. Dvořák had decided to return to his homeland,

partly due to financial difficulties at the conservatory and partly because he was homesick. He had also gotten word that his sister-in-law, Josefina Kaunitzová had become seriously ill as well. Many years earlier, Dvořák had fallen in love with her and asked her to marry him. She declined and married another, while Dvořák instead married her younger sister. But apparently his feelings of affection remained as he paid tribute to her when he composed this *Cello Concerto in B minor*.

Writing the majority of the work before he left New York (1894-95), Dvořák would ultimately complete the piece after returning to his home country. The concerto is written in three movements: *Allegro*, *Adagio ma non troppo* and *Allegro moderato*. The second movement is where Dvořák makes his first tribute to Josefina. After a quiet opening section by the woodwinds, which are later joined

by the soloist in reminiscences of his Slavonic homeland, the full orchestra suddenly interrupts with loud chords in a minor key, as if to grab our attention for what is to come next: the melody from “Leave Me Alone”, which had been one of Josefina’s favorite from Dvořák’s *Four Songs, Op. 82*.

The last movement makes one final tribute to Josefina, (apparently added after Dvořák returned home, and learned that she had died) where near the end we hear the tune for “Leave Me Alone” once more, the cello playing one final emotional farewell – to Josefina and perhaps to his New World – before a triumphant finish welcomes him back to his homeland.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, strings, solo cello

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A major, op. 92

Opera City

Suntory

- I Poco sostenuto - vivace (ca. 12 min.)**
- II Allegretto (ca. 9 min.)**
- III Presto (ca. 8 min.)**
- IV Allegro con brio (ca. 7 min.)**

With his continually declining health in the summer of 1811, Beethoven was referred by the prominent Viennese physician, Dr. Giovanni Malfatti to retreat to the Bohemian town of Teplitz,

which was well-known for its spas that ‘cure’. Apparently the respite did some good, if only for the heart, mind and soul, as Beethoven returned to Vienna with sketches for two symphonies, the Seventh being the first he set to writing in the winter of 1811-12.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction, punctuated by emphatic chords before leading into the seminal

rhythmic motive that pervades the entire work in various forms. The traditional sonata form is adhered to, however it is thought that the repetitive rhythms and chromatic bass line found in the coda may have led to Carl Maria von Weber's claim that this was evidence that the composer was "ripe for the madhouse."

The *Allegretto* title may seem misleading at first for the so-called slow movement, however it seemed Beethoven wanted to be sure this section was not played as slow as previous 'adagio' movements. This movement came to be extremely popular with its extended version of the 'long-short-short' rhythmic motive over an intriguing A-minor melody, gradually building in intensity, to the extent that the entire movement was often repeated as an encore.

The third movement's scherzo and trio extends the usual ABA form, so that one hears the trio an additional time. The trio utilizes yet another version of the long-short-short rhythmic pattern in its main theme, the melody of which is apparently taken from an Austrian Pilgrim's hymn

heard when the composer was in Teplitz.

The final movement is also in the traditional sonata form and brilliantly develops the seminal rhythmic motive even further, leading to two immense 'tutti' climaxes at the previously unheard of extreme dynamic of *fff*. The composer himself conducted the highly successful premiere in 1813 in Vienna, at a benefit concert for Austrian and Bavarian soldiers who had been wounded in the Napoleonic Wars.

With as much, if not more emphasis on the rhythmic versus the melodic motives, the dance-like feeling found throughout the work perhaps led to Wagner's famous quote: "This symphony is the very apotheosis of the dance." He went on to say: "If anyone plays the Seventh, tables and benches, cans and cups, the grandmother, the blind and the lame, aye, the children in the cradle fall to dancing."

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) Piano Concerto in A minor, op. 54

Orchard

- I **Allegro affetuoso** (ca. 15 min.)
- II **Andantino grazioso** (ca. 5 min.)
- III **Allegro vivace** (ca. 11 min.)

While Robert Schumann was perhaps

known best as a music critic in his own day, his recognition as a composer of a great variety of genre, eventually came about as well, and influenced many European composers of following generations. He is most recognized for