FRANZ PETER SCHUBERT (1797–1828)
Fantasy in C Major for Violin and Piano, D. 934 (1827)

The Fantasy in C Major (D. 934), the most important of the small handful of compositions that Schubert wrote for violin, was composed quickly in December 1827 for a concert given on January 20 by the 21-year-old Czech virtuoso Josef Slavík (whom Chopin described as “the second Paganini”), at which the young violinist also planned to introduce a concerto of his own making. For the program, Slavík enlisted the assistance of a friend of the composer, the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet (to whom Schubert dedicated both the D Major Piano Sonata, D. 850 of 1825 and this Fantasy), and Schubert conceived the new piece as a display vehicle for these two excellent performers. The program won little praise. The reviewer for the journal Der Sammler wrote, “The Fantasy for Violin and Piano by Mr. Franz Schubert somewhat exceeded the duration the Viennese intend to devote to spiritual enjoyment. The hall emptied itself little by little, and the present writer admits that he is unable to say anything about the end of the piece.” Only the Vienna correspondent for the London Harmonicon found that the composition “possesses merit far above the common order.” Though there is a certain quotient of merely virtuosic note-spinning in the variations section of the Fantasy (Schubert himself was skilled both as a violinist and pianist), the difficulties encountered by the work’s first hearers probably stemmed more from the music’s formal originality and harmonic daring than from any deficiencies in its craft.

The Fantasy is arranged in seven continuous sections that bear only a tenuous relation to the traditional layout of the sonata form. The work opens with rustling piano figurations that underpin the lyrical flight of violin melody that prefaces a strongly rhythmic episode in quicker tempo, faintly tinged with Hungarian exoticism. There follows a set of elaborately decorative variations on Schubert’s song Sei mir gegrüsst (“I Greet You”), composed to a poem of Friedrich Rückert in 1821. The rustling figurations of the introduction return briefly to serve as the bridge to the “finale,” a brilliant showpiece for the participants. A shadow of Sei mir gegrüsst passes across the Fantasy before a brief, jubilant coda closes the work.

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M ICHAEL VO TTA JR. has been hailed by critics as “a conductor with the drive and ability to fully relay artistic thoughts” and praised for his “interpretations of definition, precision and most importantly, unmitigated joy.” Ensembles under his direction have received critical acclaim in the United States and Europe for their “exceptional spirit, verve and precision,” their “sterling examples of innovative programming” and “the kind of artistry that is often thought to be the exclusive purview of top symphonic ensembles.”

He currently serves as Director of Wind Activities at the University of Maryland where he holds the rank of professor. Under his leadership, the UMD Wind Orchestra has been invited to perform at national and regional conferences of the College Band Directors National Association, and has collaborated with major artists such as the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, eighth blackbird, Imani Winds and Daniel Bernard Roumain.

His performances have been heard in broadcasts throughout the U.S., on Austrian National Radio (ÖRF) and Southwest German Television, and have been released internationally on the Primavera label. Numerous major composers including George Crumb, Christopher Rouse, Louis Andriessen, Karel Husa, Olly Wilson, Barbara Kolb and Warren Benson have praised his performances of their works.

Votta has taught conducting seminars in the U.S. and Israel, and has guest conducted and lectured at institutions such as the Prague Conservatory, the Eastman School of Music, the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and the National Arts Camp at Interlochen. He has also conducted and taught at the Midwest Clinic, and at conferences of the College Band Directors National Association and the Conductors Guild.

He is the author of numerous articles on wind literature and conducting. His arrangements and editions for winds have been performed and recorded by university and professional wind ensembles in the U.S., Europe and Japan. He is currently the vice-president of the Eastern Division of the College Band Directors National Association, and has served as editor of the CBDNA Journal, as a member of the executive board of the International Society for the Investigation of Wind Music (IGEB) and on the board of the Conductors Guild.

Before his appointment at Maryland, Votta held conducting positions at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Duke University, Ithaca College, the University of South Florida, Miami University (Ohio) and Hope College.

Votta holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Conducting degree from the Eastman School of Music where he served as assistant conductor of the Eastman Wind Ensemble and studied with Donald Hunsberger. A native of Michigan, Votta received his undergraduate training and Master of Music degrees from the University of Michigan, where he studied with H. Robert Reynolds.

As a clarinetist, Votta has performed as a soloist throughout the U.S. and Europe. His solo and chamber music recordings are available on the Partridge and Albany labels.
MAURICE RAVEL
Born March 7, 1875 in Ciboure, Basques Pyrénées
Died December 28, 1937 in Paris
“La vallée des cloches” (“The Valley of the Bells”) from Miroirs
Instrumentation: Piano
Transcription: Wind Orchestra
Duration: 6 minutes
Composed: 1905
Premiere: 1979 by Donald Hunsberger
Premiere: Ricardo vines, piano in 1936

Origins:
Maurice Ravel composed a five-movement suite for the piano in 1905, which he dedicated to various members of a young artistic gathering called Les Apaches. The fifth movement, “La vallée des cloches,” was dedicated to Paul DeLage, who incidentally became his first pupil. In describing the work to his companions he stated that he was attempting to compose a work that would provide a sense of improvisation (an effort Debussy was undertaking at the same time). The opening and closing measures of “La vallée des cloches” indeed provide a sense of timeless floating while actually encased in a formal rhythmic structure.

Listen for:
“La vallée des cloches” suggests to the listener a light, airy feeling as though one were in a valley surrounded by fog-shrouded peaks. If one imagines a calm, stillness interrupted only by a gentle breeze through the branches, the approach to the composition will be with a freedom of expression that revolves about the ostinato of the metallic percussion instruments.

— Donald Hunsberger

FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY
Born February 3, 1809 in Hamburg
Died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig
Overture for Winds, op. 24
Instrumentation: Harmoniemusik
Edition: John Boyd
Duration: 10 minutes
Composed: 1824
Premiere: 1824 by the Doberaner Harmoniemusik in Bad Doberan near Rostock, Germany

Origins:
The op. 24 by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was composed for the court orchestra of Bad Doberan near Rostock, where the young musician was accompanying his father. Writing for the Boston Symphony, George Marke remarks, “Some artists develop their craft slowly, others seem to begin at the top. There is little difference between Mendelssohn’s early and his mature works.”

The original score was lost but recopied by Mendelssohn in July 1826. These two scores were entitled Nocturno and were written for the instrumentation of one flute, two clarinets, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, one trumpet and one English bass horn (a conical bore upright serpent in the shape of a bassoon).

In his correspondence to the publisher Simrock, Mendelssohn mentions his desire to have this 11-instrument version published, but apparently could not locate the score, as he never mentions it again to Simrock after March 4, 1839. Mendelssohn did send Simrock an Overture für Harmoniemusik (Overture for Wind Band) scored for 23 winds and percussion along with a four-hand piano score on November 30, 1838. The 1838 composition is a rescoring of the Nocturno for German Band of that era and was not published until 1852 following the death of Mendelssohn.

Several editions for modern instrumentation have appeared, all using the 1838 score as their source. However, the rediscovery of the 1826 autograph makes possible this edition based on the most authentic source known to date.

— John Boyd

Listen for:
In a letter of January 13, 1839, to Ignaz Moscheles, Mendelssohn stated his reasons for wanting op. 24 published “… because I thought it would give some people pleasure, and because it is easy and there are parts in it I like.”
DAVID MASLANKA
Born August 30, 1943 in New Bedford, Massachusetts
_A Child’s Garden of Dreams_

Instrumentation: Symphonic Wind Ensemble
Duration: 35 minutes
Composed: 1981
Premiere: February 26, 1982 in Pick-Staige Hall, Northwestern University Symphonic Wind Ensemble; John Paynter, conductor

Origins:
The following is from _Man and His Symbols_ by Carl Jung:

“A very important case came to me from a man who was himself a psychiatrist. One day he brought me a handwritten booklet he had received as a Christmas present from his 10-year-old daughter. It contained a whole series of dreams she had had when she was 8. They made up the weirdest series of dreams I have ever seen, and I could well understand why her father was more than just puzzled by them. Though childlike, they were uncanny, and they contained images whose origin was wholly incomprehensible to the father… In the unabridged German original, each dream begins with the words of the old fairy tale: ‘Once upon a time.’ By these words the little dreamer suggests that she feels as if each dream were a sort of fairy tale, which she wants to tell her father as a Christmas present. The father tried to explain the dreams in terms of their context. But he could not do so because there appeared to be no personal associations to them. … The little girl died of an infectious disease about a year after that Christmas… The dreams were a preparation for death, expressed through short stories, like the tales told at primitive initiations… The little girl was approaching puberty, and at the same time, the end of her life. Little or nothing in the symbolism of her dreams points to the beginning of a normal adult life. When I first read her dreams, I had the uncanny feeling that they suggested impending disaster. These dreams open up a new and rather terrifying aspect of life and death. One would expect to find such images in an aging person who looks back on life, rather than to be given them by a child. Their atmosphere recalls the old Roman saying, ‘Life is a short dream,’ rather than the joy and exuberance of its springtime. Experience shows that the unknown approach of death casts an ‘adumbratio’ (an anticipatory shadow) over the life and dreams of the victim. Even the altar in Christian churches represents, on one hand, a tomb and, on the other, a place of resurrection — the transformation of death into eternal life.”

I selected five of the twelve dreams as motifs for the movements of this composition:

I. There is a desert on the moon where the dreamer sinks so deep into the ground that she reaches hell.

II. A Drunken woman falls into the water and comes out renewed and sober.

III. A horde of small animals frightens the dreamer. The animals increase to a tremendous size, and one of them devours the little girl.

IV. A drop of water is seen as it appears when looked at through a microscope. The girl sees that the drop is full of tree branches. This portrays the origin of the world.

V. An ascent into heaven, where pagan dances are being celebrated; and a descent into hell, where angels are doing good deeds.

— David Maslanka
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MAY:
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17-18 Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion (location TBD)
29-1 Step Afrika!
(at CUA Hartke Theater)

JUNE:
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