



NATIONAL FESTIVAL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 2015 . 8PM
ELSIE & MARVIN DEKELBOUM CONCERT HALL

PROGRAM

Baljinder Sekhon

Sun

Dmitri Shostakovich/
Rudolf Barshai

Chamber Symphony, Op. 83a
Allegro
Andantino
Allegretto –
Allegretto

- *intermission* -

Frank Martin

Concerto for Seven Wind Instruments, Timpani,
Percussion and String Orchestra
Allegro
Adagietto: Misterioso ed elegante
Allegro vivace

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Symphony No. 35 in D Major, K. 385 (“Haffner”)
Allegro con spirito
Andante
Minuetto – Trio
Finale: Presto

Sun

BALJINDER SEKHON

Born August 1, 1980, Fairfax, Virginia
Now living in Tampa, Florida

This work for percussion trio was composed in 2010–2011 under a commission from the Volta Trio, which introduced it in a concert at Georgetown University in Washington DC on November 4, 2011. The score calls for marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, large cymbal and “indeterminate skins, metals and woods.” Duration, 12 minutes.

Baljinder Sekhon received his MA and PhD at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music, and now is an assistant professor of composition at the University of South Florida's School of Music. His works, in various formats, have been performed throughout Europe and Asia as well as at Carnegie Hall and numerous other venues in our own country. His saxophone concerto called *The Offering* had its premiere in Thailand in July 2011. Among other recent works are *Ancient Dust*, for orchestra, introduced at the Cabrillo Festival, and *Lou*, for cello and percussion quartet, which the McCormick Percussion Group recorded on Ravello Records. Among his numerous prizes and awards are three Howard Hanson Orchestral Prizes, the Wayne Brewster Barlow Prize, New Music USA's Composer Assistance Grant, a Boehmler Foundation Commission, a Met Life Creative Connections Grant, the Morton Gould Young Composer Award and various others from ASCAP. He has also taken part as a percussionist in festivals and concerts such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Green Umbrella Series, the Festival Spazio in Cagliari and the Bang on a Can Marathon in New York.

The composer has provided a note of his own on the work that opens this evening's concert:

“Sun explores a variety of musical energies. From tired phrases to extended climactic passages to short-lived bursts of sound, many segments of music are intertwined and overlaid in a way that creates a singular event (the piece itself) with various ‘flares’ of sound on its surface. These segments are frequently separated by silent moments, each of which, because of its particular context, expresses a different type of energy. Each of the individual percussionists is assigned a very similar

array of instruments; that is, each player has a keyboard instrument (a marimba, a xylophone, a vibraphone), ‘skin’ (containing a drumhead), wood and metal. In addition, the three performers share a single large cymbal that is central to the staging. At times the three percussion parts are treated as one large instrument with three performers working toward a single musical character. Thus the orchestration and interaction alternate with each performer executing his/her own layers of sound to create a heterophonic texture, the percussionists using a multitude of techniques to create a palette of nuanced sounds. In addition to common performance practice, they are called upon to use their hands, fingers, knuckles, arms and fingernails to muffle, modify and create a broad diversity of characteristics.”

Chamber Symphony, Op. 83a

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg
Died August 8, 1976, Moscow

Orchestrated by Rudolf Barshai (1924–2010), from the String Quartet No. 4 in D Major, Op. 83

The fourth of Shostakovich's 15 string quartets was among the several works composed between 1948 and Stalin's death five years later which the composer put away during that period to wait for a more propitious time for presentation to the public. It was given its first performance on December 3, 1953, in Moscow, by the Beethoven Quartet, the ensemble most closely identified with Shostakovich at the time. Rudolf Barshai created his orchestral version some two dozen years after the composer's death; he conducted it for the first time on July 20, 1990, in a broadcast recording with the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra in Cardiff, and conducted the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester in the first public performance on January 10 of the following year. Barshai subsequently recorded this work, together with his similar version of the Quartet No. 3, with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe for Deutsche Grammophon.

Barshai's score calls for flute, oboe, English horn, clarinet in A, bass clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, whip, field drum, 4 tom toms, tam-tam, xylophone, marimbaphone, celesta and strings. Duration, 25 minutes.

The idea of using orchestral strings to perform string quartets is hardly a novelty. Gustav Mahler created string orchestra versions of Beethoven's F Minor Quartet (Op. 95) and Schubert's D Minor. Dimitri Mitropoulos gave us a similar treatment of Beethoven's C-sharp Minor, Op. 131. Wilhelm Furtwängler and Arturo Toscanini performed and recorded individual movements from other Beethoven quartets. Toscanini also gave us a string-orchestra version of Mendelssohn's string octet — and Mendelssohn himself created a stunningly brilliant full-orchestral treatment of the scherzo from that work, originally to serve as replacement for the minuet in his Symphony No. 1. Tchaikovsky himself was the first to produce a version of the slow movement of his First Quartet in an arrangement for orchestral strings; Sir Malcolm Sargent undertook a similar treatment of the corresponding movement of Borodin's Second Quartet. What is different about the present work is that (a) Rudolf Barshai obtained Shostakovich's approval for orchestrating his quartets, and (b) in some of them, including this one, he did not limit himself to the orchestra's strings.

Barshai was one of the most significant of the numerous outstanding musicians in Russia during the Soviet years. As a young violist at the Moscow Conservatory, he was a member of a student quartet, and he wrote to Shostakovich to invite him to the group's rehearsal of his first Quartet. The composer eagerly attended that rehearsal, and began a lifelong friendship with Barshai, whose student foursome became the famous Borodin Quartet. In 1955 Barshai left the quartet to create the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, which he conducted at home and on tour, and with which he made some splendid recordings, until 1977, when he gave up on his contentious relationship with the Communist regime and settled for a time in Israel. Eventually he set up a base in Switzerland and began conducting full-sized orchestras. He had productive relationships with orchestras in the UK and on the Continent, and from 1985 to 1988 served as music director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in Canada. He left us some insightful recordings of the symphonies of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Mahler, and produced his own performing version of the Mahler Tenth. Shortly

before his death, at his Swiss home at the age of 86, he completed an ambitious orchestral setting of Bach's *Art of the Fugue*.

In undertaking orchestral settings of Shostakovich quartets, Barshai obtained not only the composer's permission but also his imprimatur in granting him the use of the original opus number of each of the expanded quartets, with the addition of the letter "a." Barshai completed expanded versions of five of the quartets as "chamber symphonies": No. 8, Op. 110, was the first one he undertook to expand, as Op. 110a, for string orchestra. The Quartet No. 10, Op. 118, became the Chamber Symphony Op. 118a. Quartet No. 1 became "Eine kleine Symphonie," Op. 49a; Nos. 3 and 4 became, respectively, Opp. 73a and 83a.

As already noted, the Fourth String Quartet was one of the compositions that Shostakovich put away during the period 1948–1953 to wait for a more propitious — which is to say, a safer — time to be heard. The composer's reaction to those darkening postwar years, following the official denunciation of himself, Prokofiev and other prominent composers by Stalin's spokesman Andrei Zhdanov, and by a new strain of anti-Semitism, among other distressing signs, made him wary of introducing any of his works other than those "made to order" to accommodate the official guidelines — such obvious gestures as *The Song of the Forests*, a choral work glorifying Stalin, and the scores for patently propagandistic films. Among the honest and downright urgent musical declarations Shostakovich put away until the death of Stalin (on March 5, 1953, the same day Prokofiev died), were the Violin Concerto No. 1 (eventually given the dual opus number 77/99 to signify its delayed presentation to the public) and the song cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* as well as the Fourth Quartet.

Like the song cycle, the Fourth Quartet itself contains a pronounced Jewish character. This was by no means incidental to the overall character of this work, or to the others of its period that reflect a similar influence. As so many commentaries on these "delayed release" works remind us, Shostakovich is on record as declaring, "Jews became a symbol for me: all of man's defenselessness seemed to be concentrated in them." There are no concrete citations of actual folk tunes in this work, but the character

is fairly unescapable, and Barshai may be said to have intensified it in his instrumentation, particularly in his use of the clarinet and other wind instruments. In general, an overall character of deep suffering and lamentation permeates and defines the work, and the penultimate of its four movements has been described as nothing short of an impression of a pogrom, though the concluding *Allegretto*, in the form of a theme and variations, seems to carry within its general mood of resignation a stubborn hope for eventual peace, if nothing more than that.

Concerto for Seven Wind Instruments, Timpani, Percussion and String Orchestra

FRANK MARTIN

*Born September 15, 1890, Geneva
Died November 21, 1974, Naarden,
the Netherlands*

This concerto, one of Martin's most frequently performed works, was composed in 1948 and '49, and had its premiere in Bern on October 25 of the latter year. The seven solo instruments are flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet and trombone; the orchestral complement comprises timpani, side drum, cymbals, bass drum and strings. Duration, 21 minutes.

Despite the English/American appearance of his name on the printed page, Frank Martin was French Swiss, and this has to be remembered when the name is spoken. His family originated in France and, as Huguenots, took refuge in Geneva a century and a half before he was born there — the youngest of the ten children of a Calvinist minister, and the first in his family to become a musician. He began his studies early, and produced his first compositions at age eight. In his thirties, after living in Paris for a few years, he became a close associate of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and taught at his institute in Geneva. After World War II Martin took up residence in Naarden, a Dutch coastal town a little to the east of Amsterdam. In the 1950s he taught composition at the Cologne Conservatory. If the public was too little acquainted with his works, his fellow musicians did not fail to acknowledge him: he was showered with honors and awards, and toured actively as a conductor and pianist.

Martin was one of the most open-minded, inquisitive and energetic of musical creators. He eagerly exposed himself to every style, every influence and "school," and sifted out what might be of interest and use to him in developing a truly personal creative approach — an approach characterized by great intellectual vigor and, among other factors, a productive fascination with unusual combinations of instruments (as well as a distinctive use of individual instruments). He composed thoroughly contemporary works for harpsichord and clavichord (both of which he played himself), at a time when, even in performing music of Bach and his contemporaries, those instruments were by no means as widely used as they are now. Some of his works reflect an interest in jazz, or in Asian music, or Bulgarian folk music. He found what we came to call "neo-classicism" a generally comfortable mold, and at the same time developed his own kind of "twelve-tone" procedure that rejected both the rigor of Schoenberg's dodecaphonic system and, as he put it, "above all, his principle of atonality. I have always sought after the sense of tonality and the functional relation of the notes among themselves; however, the general effect of my music has always been strongly chromatic."

Composition was never a facile procedure for Martin. He could not simply toss off a piece of music or, as Saint-Saëns said of himself, "produce music as an apple tree produces apples." Each undertaking, whether large or small in scale, was a matter of intense absorption and application and self-criticism. Martin was remarkably prolific, but he worked hard, and the effort was apparently self-renewing. He wrote concerted works of one sort or another — some called concertos, some "ballades" — for virtually every instrument, and at least one of these, the *Petite Symphonie concertante* for harpsichord, harp, piano and double string orchestra, has come close to establishing itself as one of those single works on which a composer's entire reputation might rest.

Martin, however, composed steadily in almost every form — opera, oratorio, songs, piano pieces and chamber music as well as a great deal for orchestra — to the very end of his long life. (In his last years he was also busily engaged in recording many of his works himself, as conductor, with orchestras in Lausanne and Luxembourg.) The present work, which followed the *Petite Symphonie concertante* by four years, might have

borne a similar title, or might even be regarded as a “concerto for orchestra,” since so many instruments are given prominence. It is, in any event, another piece that ought to have established itself as a “classic” by now.

The Concerto is in three concise movements, headed *Allegro*, *Adagietto* and *Allegro vivace*. The color opportunities provided by the seven solo wind instruments, and the foregoing comments on Martin’s broad-minded but focused approach, may give the listener an idea of what to expect, in a very general sense, but the music itself, wonderfully transparent in its textures, is full of happy surprises and illustrations of Martin’s further rejection of formula — and of novelty for its own sake.

Symphony No. 35 in D Major, K. 385 (“Haffner”)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS

MOZART

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

Mozart composed this symphony in February 1783 — or rather, he assembled it then, from material he had composed for a larger work six months earlier — and conducted the first performance on March 23 of that year, in a concert of his new works, in Vienna. The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets in pairs, with timpani and strings. Duration, 18 minutes.

Two of Mozart’s happiest and most lovable large-scale orchestral works came out of the cordial relations his family enjoyed with the family of Siegmund Haffner, a prominent Salzburg banker and merchant who served for a time as the city’s mayor. His children and Wolfgang were childhood friends, and it was for them that he composed his “Haffner” music. In 1776, for the wedding of Haffner’s daughter Elisabeth to Franz Xaver Späth, Mozart composed an elaborate eight-movement serenade (No. 7 in D Major, K. 250), with a little march (K. 249) to precede it. Six years later, at the time of his own wedding in Vienna, he composed a second “Haffner Serenade” in celebration of the elevation of Haffner’s son, also named Siegmund, to the nobility. It is from the latter work that he subsequently arranged the well-beloved symphony that closes this evening’s concert.

Mozart had been living in Vienna for more than a year when he received his father’s request for the new Haffner work, in early July 1782; the ceremony was to take place in Salzburg on the 29th of that month. Although he was engulfed in other commissions and was preparing the premiere of his first opera for Vienna, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (which took place on the Burgtheater on the 16th), and was about to be married, he did his best to fulfill the request, writing at feverish speed and sending the score to his father one movement at a time. He did not manage to complete the work until August 7, nine days after the event for which it had been ordered — and three days after his wedding to Constanze Weber.

There were six movements in that serenade, including an introductory march and two minuets; the orchestration included oboes, bassoons, horns, trumpets and timpani as well as strings, but at that point neither flutes nor clarinets. The following February, when Mozart retrieved the score for his own use, he wrote to his father, “My new Haffner Symphony has positively amazed me, for I had forgotten every note of it. It must surely produce a good effect.”

To turn the serenade into a symphony, he withdrew the march (codified now as K. 408, No. 2, or, in the latest edition of the Köchel Catalogue, K. 385a) and the first minuet (which originally preceded the slow movement and now is presumed lost), and added flutes and clarinets in the two outer movements. In the first performance of the symphony as it now stands, the first three movements opened the program and the finale closed it; among the intervening works were two piano concertos, two sets of keyboard variations, the concertante movements of the Posthorn Serenade (No. 9 in D Major, K. 320) and four arias for soprano. That procedure — breaking up a symphony to serve as the frame for an entire concert — was not at all uncommon at the time: some of Haydn’s London symphonies were introduced that way a decade later, and in the earlier part of the 18th century Georg Philipp Telemann composed orchestral suites that were performed the same way.

The Haffner Symphony definitely produced the brilliant effect Mozart had predicted. He directed that the first movement be played “with great fire”: it exudes the festive air of its

original function, the athletic first theme commanding the stage almost without interruption. It can hardly go unnoticed that the clarinets added when the serenade was turned into a symphony make a particularly effective contribution to this movement’s color and excitement.

The slow movement, warmhearted but not effusive, is typical of similar andantes in Mozart’s big orchestral serenades — except that its remarkably appealing themes are far from “typical,” even for him. While the sturdy minuet, with its endearing trio, might have been one of his beloved *Teutsche* (as he called his German dances), it is the spirit of Osmin, in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, that informs the vivacious *Presto* finale. As already mentioned, the premiere of that work took place only a few days before he received his father’s request for the Haffner music, and must have been in his mind as he responded. Osmin’s aria “O, wie will ich triumphieren” is strongly recalled, though not directly echoed, in this movement’s theme, and Mozart directed that it be played “as fast as possible.”

Notes by Richard Freed © 2015