

## **Program Notes**

### **July 25, 2010**

#### **Concerto in E flat (Dumbarton Oaks)**

#### **Stravinsky**

Igor Stravinsky, great Russian born, French, and later American composer, exercised a profound influence on twentieth century music through the emancipation of rhythm, melody, and harmony. Made famous by his innovative ballet music, *Petroushka*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Le Rossignol*, and *Les Noces*, he was adept in composing for all genres of music.

*Concerto in E flat (Dumbarton Oaks)* was written for the Dumbarton Oaks estate of Robert Woods Bliss who commissioned Stravinsky to write a work for his thirtieth wedding anniversary. It is scored for fifteen instruments and is one of only two chamber works by the composer. At the time of the composition, (1937-38), Stravinsky was in Switzerland with his daughter, Mina, who was in a tuberculosis sanitarium. He spent a great deal of his time listening to the works of J.S. Bach, particularly the *Brandenburg Concertos*. The neo-classical style of the work, its three movements, *Tempo giusto*, *Allegretto*, and *Con moto*. which are performed without pause, show the influence of Bach and contain fugal episodes in the first and third movement. The premiere in May, 1938, was conducted by the outstanding composition teacher Nadia Boulanger at Stravinsky's request.

#### **Double Violin Concerto in d minor, BWV 1043**

#### **Bach**

Most of Bach's chamber and orchestral music date from his employment as *Kapellmeister* for the court of Cothen, 1717-1723. His duties necessitated a regular supply of instrumental works for his patron Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cothen. When Bach arrived in Cothen he already had a good knowledge of French and Italian secular music of the time. He assimilated the forms and processes of these two schools and made them his own and it was here he developed the form of the concerto.

The *Concerto for Two Violins in d minor* was written in 1720 and is one of his most beautiful works in this form.

The opening *Vivace* has two themes – the first boldly presented by the tutti in fugal style, and the second with wide skips of tenths for the concertina in dialogue form.

The second movement, *Largo ma non troppo*, is one of the most melodic and memorable of slow movements. The voices of the solo instruments intertwine and echo each other.

In the *Allegro* the close imitation is in scurrying triplets which gives the movement a bustling effect. A more deliberate contour marks the development section. The entire concerto is characterized by the subtle but expressive relationship between the two solo violins.

#### **Brick**

#### **Mellits**

Born in Baltimore, Marc Mellits is one of the leading American composers of the day. His unique musical style has won him performances all over the world, many prestigious awards, and recordings. He was writing music long before he started formal lessons at age six. He went on to study at the Eastman School of Music, Yale University, Cornell University, and the Tanglewood Music Festival. His musical style is direct and draws in the audience with its driving rhythms, glorious lyricism and colorful orchestrations. *Brick* has seven short movements and was composed as an homage to his mother and grandfather. All the movements have provocative titles.

*Refrigerator Wisdom* was written for the philosophical notes his mother used to post on the refrigerator. Written on one of his frequent visits to Romania, he was coming home one night and saw a gypsy woman and her children sleeping on the street. She had two little children with her – one a toddler and one an infant. He was reminded of his own daughter at home in her crib, and here were these children with basically nothing. It brought to mind one of his mother's notes about children growing up. The music is introspective with lovely combinations of harp and woodwinds.

*Red Hammer* is a tribute to his grandfather who built a lot of his own tools. This big, heavy red hammer was his grandfather's favorite and now is Mellits' favorite.

The movement is a scherzo with dynamic celli in repetition of the violin theme and a pizzicato passage reminiscent of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*.

*Cinderblock Pudding* recalls a time when Mellits and his grandfather rebuilt the steps outside their kitchen door. He learned to mix cement for the blocks and thought it was not much different than his mother mixing pudding. Learning how to make cement or learning how to make pudding seemed very similar to composing music using skill and simple ingredients.

## **Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat Major, Op. 73**

**Beethoven**

This concerto was Beethoven's last piano concerto. Written between 1809 and 1811, it was dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's patron and pupil. The term "Emperor" was given the work by Johann Baptist Cramer, the English publisher of the work.

The first movement, Allegro, is deceptively complex. The work begins with three full orchestra chords each followed by a short piano cadenza. These short cadenzas appear intermittently throughout the movement. Aside from these opening cadenzas, the movement follows Beethoven's three theme sonata structure. The orchestral exposition is in two themes, but the second exposition with the piano has a triumphant virtuosic third theme. The Coda at the end of the movement is quite long which is typical of Beethoven's works.

The second movement, Adagio un poco mosso in B Major, is a complete contrast to the spirited first movement. It is calm and reflective and moves into the third movement without pause. Beethoven creates a clever bridge by having the piano play the opening theme of the third movement in slow tempo, pianissimo while the bassoon plays the tone of B and then drops it to B flat.

The final movement of the concerto, Allegro ma non troppo, is a seven part rondo form (ABACABA). It bursts into life with the piano playing the main theme, then followed by the full orchestra. The B section has the piano playing scales which are repeated in the orchestra. The C section is much longer presenting the A theme in three different keys leading to a piano cadenza. A trill ends the cadenza and the introductory theme appears in the piano and then the orchestra. In the last section the theme is heard in a set of variations before the concerto comes to a close.

Program Notes by Annette Albright