

# CHAMBER ORCHESTRA CONCERT

*Xxxxx Xxxxx, Conductor*

*Xxxxx Xxxxx and Xxxxx Xxxxx, harpsichords*

**Bach**

**Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C major, BWV 1061**

(Allegro)  
Adagio ovvero Largo  
Fuga

*Xxxxx Xxxxx and Xxxxx Xxxxx, soloists*

**Stravinsky**

**Pulcinella Suite**

Sinfonia (Overture)  
Serenata  
Scherzino; Allegro; Andantino  
Tarantella  
Toccata  
Gavotta con due variazioni  
Duetto  
Minuetto; Finale

***INTERMISSION***

**Mozart**

**Divertimento for Strings in D major, K. 136**

Allegro  
Andante  
Presto

**Schumann**

**Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38, *Spring***

Andante un poco maestoso; Allegro molto vivace  
Larghetto  
Scherzo: Molto vivace  
Allegro animato e grazioso

## SEPTEMBER CHAMBER ORCHESTRA SERIES

### PROGRAM NOTES

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By Matthew Naughtin

#### **Concerto For Two Harpsichords In C Major, BWV 1061**

**Johann Sebastian Bach**

Born March 21, 1685 in Eisenach, Germany

Died July 28, 1750 in Leipzig, Germany

*The Concerto for Two Harpsichords was written in Leipzig sometime between 1732 and 1736.*

The next time you're in a coffee emporium downing a bracing jolt of java and, perhaps, enjoying some live music, consider this: you are carrying on a hallowed cultural tradition that goes back almost three hundred years, to the time of J.S. Bach, whose *Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C major* was given its first performance in a Leipzig coffee-house. The coffee bean was introduced to Europe in the seventeenth century, and the addictive joys of caffeine consumption soon led to a proliferation of coffeehouses throughout the continent. These establishments became popular gathering places for the middle class where people met to read the paper, play cards, talk politics, flirt, and hold informal musical jam-sessions. Although they lacked cappuccino machines and flavored syrups, the atmosphere must have been very similar to the coffee bars in bookstores and shopping centers today. The Collegium Musicum of Leipzig, a loosely-organized association of tradesmen and students who loved music, met regularly at Zimmerman's coffee-house (one of eight licensed coffee-houses in Leipzig) to play, sing and generally have a good time. Their informal performances were open to the public, and Bach, who was a member of the Collegium, found a congenial outlet for his instrumental music at these gatherings.

Bach had settled in Leipzig in 1723, and during his first years there he was under intense pressure to reform and revitalize the performance of sacred music at the school and church of St. Thomas, where he held the post of Cantor. After a long struggle with balky musicians and a stingy local government (some things never change), he eventually found himself with some spare time to indulge his love for the concerto form, especially concertos for the harpsichord, on which he was one of the greatest virtuosos in Europe. It is likely that all of his concertos for that instrument date from his time as a member of the Collegium Musicum in Leipzig. Until Bach wrote these works, the harpsichord had been thought unsuitable to be a solo instrument in concertos. The thin, delicate sound of the instrument had little carrying power, and was easily lost in the fabric of a string orchestra accompaniment. Technological advances in harpsichord construction in France and Germany during the 1700's made the instrument more powerful, and Bach began to experiment with its potential as a concerto instrument. First he wrote three concertos using two harpsichords, possibly to make sure that the soloists would balance the string ensemble. Except for the *Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C major*, these concertos were transcribed by Bach from concertos he had originally written for other instruments. Bach hated to waste good music, and if he found an opportunity to pull a piece out of his music trunk, dust it off and rewrite it a bit to fit a new venue, he never hesitated to do so. Even the C major concerto probably began life in a different form, as a solo piece for two harpsichords. It is likely that Bach added the string orchestra accompaniment later, since the orchestral fabric is so spare and sketchy in outline that the concerto can be played without the orchestra and still sound very effective.

The C major concerto is unusually long, rich and complex in style, even for Bach, who never stinted or cut corners in his music. The first movement is a vigorous, animated discussion between the two solo instruments, with the orchestra acting as an interested observer, occasionally interjecting a comment or two, but mostly staying out of the way while the two protagonists toss melodic phrases back and forth and try to trip each other up with unexpected modulations. There are moments of sweet agreement when the soloists dovetail and intertwine flowing lines of sixteenth-notes, but then one harpsichord breaks off into an extended solo or flings some flashy scales and arpeggios out for the other to imitate, very similar to jazz musicians improvising in a jam session. In the second movement the orchestra is silent while the two harpsichords play a delicate *Siciliano*, a slow dance in 6/8 time that was very popular among Baroque composers. The final *Fuga* is a truly awesome display of Extreme Counterpoint. Most composers have no problem writing two melodic lines that fit together to make harmonic sense, and many can handle three, or even four lines and make them work together in pleasing concordance. But Bach was the contrapuntal *Master of the Universe*. In this movement, the first harpsichord starts alone, playing the fugue theme, then adding another line, then one more so that, after sixteen bars the performer is playing three independent melodic lines at once. Awesome. But wait—while the first harpsichord continues, the second harpsichord comes in with another line and then yet another, until we briefly have five lines going at once. Incredible! But Bach is just warming up. The orchestra comes in and eggs the soloists on until they eventually are juggling six lines at once without dropping a note. What a show-off! I personally find it impossible to mentally keep track of more than three contrapuntal lines at a time, but you don't really have to follow all the balls in the air to enjoy the delight of hearing a master musical juggler demonstrate his dazzling skill. This is a fugue that is as dancing, gay and brilliant as anything Bach ever wrote, and a superb ending to a masterful concerto that must have left the crowd at the coffee-house cheering in delight.

## **Pulcinella Suite (1922)**

**Igor Stravinsky** (*Ee-gore Strah-vin-skee*)

Born June 17, 1882 in Oranienbaum, Russia

Died April 6, 1971 in New York, N.Y.

*Stravinsky composed Pulcinella in 1919 and 1920. It was first performed by Diaghilev's Ballet Russe at the Paris Opéra on May 15, 1920, conducted by Ernest Ansermet. The concert suite Stravinsky adapted from the score was premiered in Paris under Pierre Monteux on December 22, 1922.*

Stravinsky was an amazingly mutable, chameleon-like composer as well as a chronic and resourceful musical thief. He ceaselessly reinvented himself so that at any moment in the turbulent political, social and technological upheavals of the twentieth century he never seemed out-of-date; he was always on the cutting edge, nimble and unpredictable. True to form, he startled the musical world in 1920. Of course, the musical world was used to being startled by Igor; the music of his early Russian-themed ballets—*The Firebird* (1910), *Petrouchka* (1911), and *The Rite of Spring* (1913)—had reached levels of frenzied abandon that shocked audiences and even frightened Stravinsky himself. But *The Rite of Spring* represented a turning point for him; he did not allow himself to surrender to such unrestrained impulse again. Feeling trapped by the stylistic excess of Russian nationalism, he sought a more rational, ordered, "Apollonian" approach to composition and found it in the music of the past. With the ballet *Pulcinella* Stravinsky invented himself anew as a "neo-classical" composer, reinterpreting the music of earlier centuries through the lenses of his own personal esthetic.

The idea came from the great Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev on a spring afternoon in 1919. While he and Stravinsky were walking together in the Place de la Concorde, Diaghilev suggested Stravinsky look at "some delightful eighteenth-century music" that had recently been rediscovered with the idea of orchestrating it for a ballet. When he added that the music was by the Neapolitan opera composer Giovanni Pergolesi (1710-1736) Stravinsky looked at him in disbelief. Pergolesi was a decidedly minor-league composer who had faded almost completely into obscurity. Stravinsky couldn't have been less interested, but grudgingly said he would look at the music. "I looked," Stravinsky recalled, "and I fell in love." Thus began a love affair with the eighteenth century that would last for over thirty years. Stravinsky wrote, "*Pulcinella* was my discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late works became possible. It was a backward look, of course...but it was a look in the mirror, too." Undeterred by the dismissive attacks of critics for writing *pastiche* (a work assembled from bits of music by other composers), 'musical time-traveling', deserting modernism and renouncing his 'true Russian heritage', Stravinsky persisted on this path. The neo-classical works he created in the three decades from 1920 to 1950 were destined to influence composers all over the world.

Stravinsky chose twenty excerpts from the manuscripts Diaghilev gave him (some of which later turned out not to be by Pergolesi after all) and arranged them for a baroque-style chamber orchestra with ten winds and the strings divided into a *concertino* quintet of soloists and a larger *ripieno* string orchestra. The operatic excerpts were sung by three vocalists who sat in the orchestra pit. The scenery and costumes were designed by Pablo Picasso, the choreography was by Leonid Massine. The story of the ballet comes from a Neapolitan manuscript dating from 1700. The protagonist is Pulcinella, the sly trickster of the traditional Neapolitan *commedia dell' arte*, with whom all the girls of Naples are in love. Four young men, mad with jealousy, plot to kill him. Pulcinella—cunning fellow that he is—discovers their plot and changes places with a double, who pretends to succumb to their attack. Thinking they've succeeded, the young swains borrow costumes like Pulcinella's and proceed to woo their sweethearts in disguise. The real Pulcinella, disguised as a magician, brings his double back to life, but his heart isn't set on vengeance. Rather, he appears at the very moment the four come to claim their betrothed and arranges all the marriages. He himself marries his beloved Pimpinella and everyone lives happily ever after. The cool, sweet-and-tart harmonies with which Stravinsky "updated" Pergolesi's delicious melodies make this one of his most immediately appealing works. Beside the suite of eight excerpts he arranged for orchestra in 1922, the music of *Pulcinella* provided Stravinsky material for two suites for violin and piano.

## **Divertimento For Strings In D Major, K.136 (1772)**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (*Voolf-gahng Ah-mah-day-oos Moh-tsart*)

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria

A Divertimento (an Italian word meaning "amusement") was, for composers like Mozart and Haydn, was the musical equivalent of potato salad. Such-and-such Countess, wealthy merchant or family friend is having a birthday or an anniversary. You're invited to the party, but they'll expect you to bring something—some new music. What can you whip together that's quick and cheap? A Divertimento, that's it! A quartet of strings, a couple of horns—oops, the horns are on tour with the army band. Well, a string quartet is good enough. Write three movements. Keep it short, you've only got a few hours. Stick in a musical joke—the musicians will get it. There. One freshly-made divertimento ready to go, and it's party time!

Mozart churned out 37 divertimenti in his career. Haydn whipped up 162 of them. (He must have gone to a lot of parties.) Divertimenti functioned as light entertainment at wedding and name-day parties among the gentility and the merchant class. Mozart's works in this category tend to be rather showy, with virtuosic writing for the first violin (Mozart probably played that part himself) and some unusually awkward or demanding figuration in the second violin part—probably Mozart's way of playing a joke on his musical colleagues.

The Divertimento in D major is typical of Mozart's style in these little musical cream puffs. We should keep in mind the fact that Wolfgang was sixteen years old when he wrote the three string divertimenti of which this is the first, probably while traveling with his father, Leopold in Italy. Wolfgang had been commissioned by the Austrian Empress to write an opera (*Ascanio in Alba*) to be performed in Milan as part of the festivities for the wedding of her son to an Italian princess. He wrote the divertimenti as party-music, perhaps with the option in mind of adding wind instruments later and turning them into symphonies. This divertimento begins with a brisk and brilliant Allegro that features lots of flashy scales for the first and second violins. There is a ten-bar episode just before the recapitulation in which the poor second violinist is forced to negotiate a really finger-twisting sequence of running sixteenth-notes while the first violin floats serenely above, playing a simple line that is mostly whole-notes. We can almost see Mozart playing the simple first violin part and watching with a smile while the second violinist knit his brow and struggled through this passage that Wolfgang had left waiting for him like a baited trap. The middle movement is one of Mozart's loveliest Andantes. It has some moments that so operatic that one could almost write words to the violin part and sing it. The final Presto is witty and brilliant, and, like the second movement, could be taken for an ensemble number from an opera. There is a bit of fugal counterpoint that flies by in the middle section and the movement ends with a flourish. This Divertimento and its two companions are the earliest orchestral pieces of Mozart's that are programmed regularly, and they introduce us to a musical master at the precise moment that he was developing his individual style and voice and showing signs of the greatness that was to come.

## **Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38, *Spring* (1841)**

**Robert Schumann** (*Row-beart Shoo-mahn*)

Born June 8, 1810 in Zwickau, Saxony

Died July 29, 1856 in Eindhoven (a suburb of Bonn), Germany

*The Spring Symphony was written in January and February 1841. Felix Mendelssohn conducted the first performance in Leipzig on March 31, 1841.*

They were newlyweds, and blissfully happy. Clara was an internationally renowned concert pianist who had toured throughout Europe since she was a teenager, and Robert was—well—Robert. She had loved him since he first began taking piano lessons with her father (she was nine years old.) An unenthusiastic law student at the University of Leipzig, he suffered from bouts of depression, was overly fond of cigars and champagne and quarreled with her father at his lessons. This didn't faze Clara—she fell in love with Schumann, and he eventually reciprocated that feeling passionately. The course of love wasn't smooth; Clara's father did everything in his power to keep them apart, even charging Robert with habitual drunkenness in court. But romance triumphed and Robert and Clara married in 1840. Now Clara Schumann, no stranger to success and fame herself, was ambitious for her new husband; she urged him to raise his sights beyond the songs and short piano pieces he had been writing and venture into the world of symphonic music. Perhaps then Robert wouldn't be embarrassed at receptions following Clara's concerts by aristocrats asking him whether he was a musician too.

The challenge of writing a large-scale work for orchestra was daunting for Schumann. He had so far only written just one symphonic movement that he abandoned in disgust when he heard it played. But Clara persisted, and in January 1841 the floodgates opened. Working, as usual, in a white-hot burst of inspiration, he completed the piano sketch of a complete symphony in just four days. He wrote his friend Ernst Wenzel: "Within the last few days I have completed, at least in outline, a labor which has kept me in a state of bliss, but also exhausted me. Think of it! A whole symphony—moreover a Spring symphony! I can hardly believe that it is finished." The trigger that evidently set off this creative explosion was a poem by another friend, Adolph Böttger, *Spring Awakens in the Valley*. In the concluding lines of the poem can be heard the rhythm of the symphony's magical opening fanfare:

*O wende, wende deinen Lauf— O turn, o turn and change your path—  
Im Thale blüht der Frühling auf! Now in the valley blooms the spring!*

Orchestrating the work took another month and left Schumann in a state of happy exhaustion, made more joyous by the news that Clara was pregnant. The symphony, written in the dead of winter, is a tribute to the emotional and creative blossoming Schumann was experiencing in his married life. He later wrote to a conductor: "Could you breathe a little of the longing for spring into your orchestra as they play? That was what was most in my mind in January 1841. I should like the first trumpet entrance to sound as if it came from on high, like a summons to awakening. Further on in the introduction, I should like the music to suggest the world's turning green, perhaps with a butterfly taking wing, and then in the *Allegro* everything to do with spring comes fully to life. But these are fantasies that came to me only *after* I finished the piece." Less than six weeks after it was completed, the symphony was performed by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under the direction of Robert and Clara's friend Felix Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn helped Schumann fix problems in the orchestration as the work was rehearsed, particularly the opening fanfare for trumpets, which sounded muffled on the valveless instruments of the day.

Schumann agreed to transpose the trumpet-call up a third, which gave it a more brilliant sound. This marvelous introduction, so vividly evoking the gradual quickening of life, also provides the melodic material for the following buoyant *Allegro*, which Schumann originally subtitled *Beginning of Spring*. In a magnificent gesture, the trumpet fanfare from the introduction reappears in shining glory before the movement heads into the reprise of its spirited opening material and a gorgeously singing coda. The second movement, originally titled *Evening*, is one of the loveliest moments all of Schumann's music. The violins present a graceful, arching melody whose shape is subtly related to the principal theme of the *Allegro*. After a darker, more agitated second theme, this melody returns richly in the woodwinds and horn and the trombones enter to create a softly mysterious transition passage into the Scherzo. The energetic, stamping tune that begins this movement (originally titled *Merry Playmates*) is a transformation of the graceful melody of the second movement. Two contrasting trio sections enliven this vigorous movement, which ends softly in anticipation of the exuberant finale. This enchanting, light-footed outpouring of high spirits was titled *Spring at Its Height* and begins with another brilliant fanfare for the full orchestra. Schumann later abandoned the subtitles he attached to the symphony's movements, but the feeling of youthful joy and vigor that pervades the work continues to be a testament to the carefree Springtime of Schumann's often troubled life.

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