ROCKFORD SYMPHONY 2007-8 Classics 3 (Jan 12)

STRAVINSKY ***Danses concertantes***

Marche—Introduction
Pas d'action: Con moto
Thème varié: Lento
  Variation I: Allegretto
  Variation II: Scherzando
  Variation III: Andantino
  Variation IV (Coda): Tempo giusto
Pas de deux: Risoluto
  Andante sostenuto
Marche—Conclusion

DAVID **Concertino in E-flat for trombone and orchestra, Opus 4**

Allegro maestoso
Andante Marcia funèbre
Allegro maestoso

SIBELIUS **Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Opus 82**

Tempo molto moderato—Largamente—Allegro moderato
Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
Allegro molto

PROGRAM NOTES
By Steven Ledbetter

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Danses concertantes

Igor Stravinsky was born at Oranienbaum, Russia, on June 5 (old style) or June 17 (new style), 1882, and died in New York on April 6, 1971. He composed his Danses concertantes *between 1940 and 1942 and conducted the premiere in Los Angeles on February 8, 1942. The score calls for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, two horns, trumpet, trombone, timpani and strings. The duration is about 19 minutes.*

During the early 1940s, Stravinsky mixed large works, such as the Symphony in C, with a number of smaller pieces, each of which captured a particular aspect of his personality while also showing links to the major pieces that preoccupied him. The *Danses Concertantes* proclaims its character in the very title: music that reflects traditional dance genres, composed in a concertante style, which is to say with much solo work from the various corners of the small orchestra that the piece calls for. Of course, Stravinsky had written music for the ballet many times, and with notable success. His musical approach is fundamentally through rhythm; even in the earliest sketches for most of his pieces, the music seems to evoke, to demand gesture.

Thus it is not surprising that, soon after the completion and performance of the *Danses concertantes*—commissioned by the Werner Jansson Orchestra of Los Angeles and premiered there in 1942—it should attract the attention of Stravinsky's long-time friend and occasional collaborator George Balanchine. But Stravinsky explicitly intended the score as an abstract concert piece, though filled with references to and parodies of the ballet tradition he knew so well.

Stravinsky wrote some of the early sketches for the variations movement in 1940, while he was completing his Symphony in C, and the smaller piece shows a number of motivic links to the much larger one. It also reflects a particular passage in his 1936 ballet *Jeu de Cartes*, of which it is a kind of inverse conception (*Jeu de Cartes* having been conceived as a ballet with a score that developed dance textures as a symphonic entity). The opposition of concertino-ripieno textures in *Danses concertantes*, evoking the Baroque concerto grosso, also recall another recent Stravinsky score, the *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto.

The rhythmic gestures that gave Balanchine his cue to the dance-like nature of the score involves two kinds of rhythmic play: passages barred in straightforward meters in which the interrelationship of melody and accompaniment figures often seem to disregard the external meter and break it up within the bar, though with an ongoing pulse that nonetheless evokes the dance character; and the kind of constantly-changing patterns of meters that had been so signal an innovation in certain passages of Stravinsky=s epochal 1913 score, *The Rite of Spring*. Each movement consists of a traditional type of ballet dance. These were usually, in the 19th century, so regular in shape as to become monotonous except in the hands of the greatest masters. Stravinsky wittily undercuts the listener=s expectations of regularity by varying phrase lengths at will.

The five separate movements of the score are played without pause. The *Marche—Introduction* provides a mock military opening to the piece, though within the

steady and insistent march rhythm, Stravinsky plays many little tricks on the ear. The *Pas d'action* has a theme that seems drawn, or at least remembered, from the last movement of the Symphony in C. Its rondo form surprises us with strong cadences in unexpected places. The *Thème varié* presents its theme in two parts—solo woodwinds, then solo strings. It is followed by four variations, each a semitone higher in key than the one before. (This seems to be a conscious inversion of the variations in *Jeu de Cartes*, the tonal pattern of which descended by half-step.) The *Pas de deux* alternates music of contrasting characters, alternately stately and dignified with lively and fun-loving. The *Marche—Conclusion* restates material from the opening movement in briefer form, to close one of Stravinsky's wittiest and most charming scores.

FERDINAND DAVID
Concertino in E-flat for trombone and orchestra, Opus 4
Ferdinand David was born in Hamburg on June 19, 1810, and died in Klosters, Switzerland, on July 18, 1873. He composed the trombone concerto (which he called a "Concertino") in 1837 for Carl Traugott Queisser, who no doubt gave the first performance, but the date is not certain. In addition to the solo trombone, the score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. Duration is about 13 minutes.

Ferdinand David=s greatest claim to fame in the history of music is surely his connection with the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, which was written for him, and for which he served the composer as what we would call a "technical consultant" about the violin writing. He premiered the work in 1845.

But David was far more than just a violinist. He was a distinguished teacher (Joseph Joachim was among his pupils) and a busy composer himself, though the present Concertino is one of his few works that remains consistently in print. His output includes no less than five concertos for his own instrument, a pair of symphonies, a viola concerto, and an opera, as well as songs and choral works. And then there is the Concertino, written for an instrument that had relatively few proponents at the time. Indeed, the orchestra of the Leipzig Gewandhaus, of which David was concertmaster, did not even have a trombone section at the time. When a trombone solo was required, it was performed by Carl Traugott Queisser, the principal violist of the orchestra, who also happened to play the trombone! (As time went on, and composers called for trombones in the symphony orchestra more frequently, Queisser switched permanently from the viola to the brass instrument, when the orchestra established a permanent trombone section in 1842.)

David composed the Concertino in 1837. (Today it is often referred to as a "concerto," which it certainly is in its character and layout, but David probably used the diminutive "concertino" because of its rather short duration for a three-movement work composed in the middle of the 19th century. For reasons of practicality (since virtuosic trombonists were few and far between), he made an arrangement for solo violin with orchestra—about as different a sound as one can imagine!—and he probably thought of that version as a showpiece for himself.

Like most concertos, it is particularly designed as a bravura piece, to show off what brass players call the "chops" of the performer, the players ability to negotiate extremes of pitch, speed, and dynamics. There are three movements (the last two are

played without a break) and, as is typical in concertos, the first and last make the most athletic demands on the performer=s skill, while the middle movement emphasizes lyric expression.

JEAN SIBELIUS
Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Opus 82
Jean Julius Christian Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna (then known by the Swedish name Tavastehus), Finland, on December 8, 1865, and died at Järvenpää, near Helsingfors (Helsinki), on September 20, 1957. He composed the first version of his Fifth Symphony late in 1914 and introduced it at a concert on his fiftieth birthday, December 8, 1915, in Helsingfors (the Swedish name for Helsinki). A year later he tried a second version on December 14, 1916. He withdrew the score again and led the third, and definitive version, only on November 24, 1919. . ; a first version was performed the following year, but Sibelius reworked it twice, achieving the definitive version only in 1921. The symphony calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

Though Sibelius's Fifth Symphony shares with the Second the distinction of being his most popular work in that genre, it underwent a long and painful progress from the first version, begun in 1914 and performed the following year as part of celebrations of the composer=s fiftieth birthday, and the publication of the third and final version in 1921. Sibelius's musical language is deeply rooted in late nineteenth-century romanticism, yet his mature music sounds strikingly modern.

This has a great deal to do with his treatment of the orchestra (he scoffed at Wagner's habit of blending the instruments from different orchestral families to produce a mixed sonority, and greatly preferred to isolate the woodwinds, brass, and strings often into different kinds of musical ideas. This created various levels of activity which frequently in the Fifth Symphony seem to be operating to two different rhythms at once or even going their own way. Yet while doing so--and generating a powerful nervous energy--they are unfolding a fairly small number of thematic ideas that change character as they change their rhythmic pattern and orchestral coloration.

It is worth remembering two things about this symphony: It was composed mostly during the horrors of World War I (and it is the only major work that Sibelius worked on in those years), and it follows the Fourth Symphony, which was in many ways the most "advanced" work that Sibelius ever composed, at least in the sense of employing complex harmonies that put Sibelius in the group of forward-looking modern composers. The Fifth seems in some ways to be a step back, especially by the time of the powerful close of the last movement. Yet it also can be seen as a work that demands sanity in a world gone insane. And even though its harmonies seem "easier" than those of the Fourth, Sibelius poses harmonic challenges that are answered in novel and imaginative ways.

One recent musical analyst has declared that Sibelius is the truest descendant of Beethoven as a symphonic composer, and a work like the Fifth Symphony, with its emphasis on a handful of abstract musical ideas made over into a vast range of musical experiences, is an excellent case in point. And though Sibelius's Fifth lacks a chorus, we find, upon reaching the celebratory final pages, that there are echoes in musical character (though not quotations!) of Beethoven's Ninth: darkness and tension resolving into brilliant transfiguration; a central movement built largely out of a single rhythmic pattern

repeated hypnotically (though slower in Sibelius than Beethoven=s demonic Scherzo), and finally a feeling of uplift and heroic conquest. In both composers, one can find a "profound logic" that may not be evident at first hearing on the surface of the music, but leaves the listener feeling fulfilled for reasons that perhaps cannot be put into words.

The first version of the symphony, the one that was performed for his fiftieth birthday, had four movements. Soon Sibelius decided to fuse the original first and second movements into one. He tried this plan, then undertook a more complete reworking, rewriting the first two movements so what had been the independent second movement becomes a central episode in the first. In doing this, Sibelius frequently hints at older forms and causes the listener to expect some particular kind of music event, then undercuts that expectation and surprises us.

The complex opening movement grows out of a horn call figure that Brahms had loved and often used, but here with a slight rhythmic surprise that hints at the rhythmic complexities to come. From this point on, one thing grows from another with seeming naturalness (just as it does in the *Pastoral* symphony of Beethoven). The former second movement seems to appear as a kind of fast waltz in the middle of the movement, but this activity proves to be another view of the opening, and it builds to a sonorous conclusion.

The middle movement is based almost entirely on a single rhythmic idea (in this respect it has some similarity the third movement of Beethoven's Seventh or the second movement of the Ninth. It has the effect of a period of relative calm between two movements of gigantic power, but it offers its own interest in progressively developing the basic rhythm and the figure that express it.

The finale begins with a rapid buzzing in the strings that builds to a tolling figure in the brass that finally reaches the sonorous and heroic home key E-flat with a glorious sound and a sense of finality that casts aside all earlier doubts.

© Steven Ledbetter (www.stevenledbetter.com)