Rockford Symphony Orchestra
Steven Larsen, Music Director

ComEd Classics Series

"Italian Portraits"

January 13, 2007
8:00 PM

Franz Joseph Haydn Concerto for Cello in C major, H. VIIb:1

Moderato
Adagio
Allegro molto

Alexandre Bouzlov, cello

Pyotr Ilyitch Tchakovsky Serenade for Strings, op. 48
Piece in the form of a sonatina (*Pezzo in forma di sonatina*)

Andante non troppo - Allegro moderato - Andante non troppo
Waltz: Moderato
Elégie: Larghetto elegiaco
Finale (Théma russe): Andante - Allegro con spirito - Molto meno mosso - Allegro con spirito

INTERMISSION

Ottorino Respighi Three Botticelli Pictures (*Trittico Botticelliana)*

Spring -- Allegro vivace
The Adoration of the Magi -- Andante lento
The Birth of Venus -- Allegro moderato

Felix Mendelssohn Symphony No. 4 in A major, op. 90 "Italian"

Allegro vivace
Andante con moto
Con moto moderato
Saltarello: Presto

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The performance will be broadcast by WNIU/105.7 on February 12, 2007.

Program Notes
By Steven Larsen

Concerto for Cello in C major, H. VIIb:1*
Franz Joseph Haydn (b. 1732, Rohrau Austria; d. 1809, Vienna)

Haydn's name is often followed by encomia praising him as Father of the Symphony and Father of the String Quartet. He could also rightly claim distinction as Father of the Modern Concerto. Concertos (orchestral works featuring one or more instruments as soloists) had abounded in the earlier Baroque period, but Haydn recast them using the forms and conventions of the Classical era.

Forty years has biblical implications of exile and wilderness, but Haydn's forty years of service with the Esterházy family (1761 – 1791) were the exact opposite. Though his status was technically only that of a servant, he headed the aristocratic family's excellent musical establishment, for which he was appreciated and supported. He composed and led numerous operas, cantatas, masses, symphonies, and chamber music, playing keyboard where required, coaching singers and assuming all administrative tasks. The Esterházy estate was close enough to Vienna to assimilate the exciting musical trends there, but distant enough to allow - or enforce - an artistic isolation that provided an ideal "greenhouse" for his talents.

Regular features at the concerts performed for his employers were concertos featuring the men of his orchestra. Haydn took care to write works that not only pleased the ear but also displayed the skills of his musicians in the most flattering light. Many of these concertos have been lost. An early one, written for cellist and close friend Joseph Franz Weigl was first performed in 1765 – and then disappeared for 200 years. The only clue to its existence was an entry by Haydn in his catalog from that year.

After World War II the Czech government confiscated all private collections of music manuscripts, creating a gargantuan task for musicologists. In 1961 the great Haydn scholar, H.C. Robbins Landon uncovered a complete set of parts for the missing concerto; the world was now blessed with two cello concertos from the master. "Here," wrote Landon, "is the major discovery of our age, and surely one of the finest works of the period."

The C major concerto has one foot in the Baroque and the other in the "modern" Classical style. While Haydn's later concertos would standardize sonata-allegro form for the first movement, therefore limiting the palette to two or so basic melodic ideas, this concerto follows the Baroque pattern of introducing abundant thematic material. Also unusual, for either Baroque or Classical concertos, is Haydn's decision to use the same form for all three movements, as if he were experimenting with its potential.

The role of orchestra and soloist is Baroque, in that each take turns in presenting the material: four for the orchestra enveloping three for the soloist. However, Haydn breaks new ground by giving the three cello sections duties of exposition, development and

recapitulation, just as in the Classical sonata-allegro form. What is more, the cellist's music sings with sentiment and vitality that is unmistakably Classical, throwing off the formality of the Baroque.

A particular joy of this concerto is hearing the cello soar above its historic role anchoring the *basso continuo* with the basses and harpsichord. One feels as if the drab, earthbound caterpillar has finally emerged from its cocoon and can float freely on the breeze in colorful freedom.

* H. VIIb:1, or Hob. VIIb:1 is part of the numbering system used to catalog the works of Haydn. Developed in 1957 by Anthony Hoboken, the Roman Numeral refers to the genre of the work (in this case, concertos), the letter to the instrument ('a' is Violin, 'b' is cello), and the numeral to the order (this is the first of two cello concertos).

Serenade for Strings, op. 48
Piotr Ilyitch Tchaikovsky (b. Kamsko-Votkinsk, 1840; d. St. Petersburg, 1893)

It is often remarked upon that composers write music in pairs, and that these pairs often provide marked contrast of mood and resources. The contrast between Tchaikovsky's noisy and bombastic *1812 Overture* and the suavely sophisticated *Serenade*, both written in 1879 – 1880, is particularly amusing.

The overture was intended to honor the silver jubilee of the coronation of Czar Nicholas II by commemorating Mother Russia's glorious defeat of Napoleon at Moscow. From the start, Tchaikovsky was embarrassed by his creation. He warned his patron, Mme. Nadezhda von Meck, that "The overture will be very noisy. I wrote it without much warmth or enthusiasm; therefore it has no great artistic value." If only he knew it would be his most enduring work!

Almost as artistic penance, or perhaps to cleanse his own compositional palette, he simultaneously wrote an intimate and genial work for string orchestra. His love for Mozart's elegance and classical perfection guided him as inspiration. Even the subtitle is meant to strip away any semblance of pretense: a "piece in the form of a sonatina," or "little sonata", would by definition avoid the portentous magnitude invested in so many works of the era.

It was to be one of Tchaikovsky's favorite works. As he wrote it, he toyed with the idea of making it into a symphony, then a string quartet, possibly a suite for orchestra, before settling on a "serenade". This word had many implications, none of which should be overlooked. The word is taken from the Italian *serenata,* with roots in both *sera* (evening) and *serena* (serene). It can be an instrumental work sung as an expression of admiration or love; it can also be work for smaller ensemble in several movements, all of which may be laid over with the soft patina of the night.

Tchaikovsky intended the first movement to be homage to Mozart and an imitation of his style (although few listeners detect any Mozartian elements there). A stately slow

introduction both opens and closes the movement, framing a lyrical, lilting theme that flits lightly around the string orchestra. The second movement may be Tchaikovsky's finest waltz – high praise for a composer whose skill with that graceful dance was matched only by Johann Strauss Jr. The *Elégie* that follows is properly elegiacal, but touches deep emotions without succumbing to bathos or anguish. The Finale is typical Tchaikovsky – the vast and lively trove of Russian folk music yields up homespun tunes, which throw off the elegant silks and brocades of the preceding movements, giving freedom to leap and spin in exuberant, athletic dance. The slow introduction of the first movement momentarily restores decorum, but inevitably is overpowered by the spirit of the dance.

Three Botticelli Pictures
Ottorino Respighi (b. Bologna, 1879; d. Rome, 1936)

Pity the poor Italian composer who came of age at the turn of the 20th century. The footsteps in which you hoped to follow were made by giants. Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, and now Puccini stood like Colossi over not only the World of Opera, but World Opera itself. Many vowed to carry on the mantle of Italian opera, but it was destined to end with Puccini. But what of the glorious history of Italy's instrumental music? Hadn't Italian artisans perfected the violin? Didn't Italian composers literally define string instrument technique in the Baroque period? Wasn't the orchestra itself an invention of Italian composers?

Ottorino Respighi finished his conservatory training at a time when German composers virtually owned the world of non-operatic concert music. Torn between pursuing a career as composer or one of a concert violinist, he worked at both until landing a job playing viola with the St. Petersburg opera orchestra. This could have signaled the end of his aspirations as a composer, but he became a study of Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose coloristic style had an enormous influence on him. From there he went to Berlin to study violin and composition with Max Bruch, also touring as a concert violinist and playing viola in the Mugellini String Quartet.

His first great success as a composer came with his 1917 *The Fountains of Rome,* which in combination with his 1924 *The Pines of Rome* would be his best-known works. But during this period he was forced to confront a crisis facing all composers. Many believed that tonality – that cornerstone of Western Music style inherited from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and their descendants – have been played out. Around 1920 a new "successor" to tonality had emerged, created by Arnold Schoenberg and his disciples. It was called "serialism" and claimed to supersede tonality by organizing pitches in an equal, mathematical way.

Many composers, even Italians steeped in a history of lyrical melody, followed this so-called "New Viennese School." But Respighi turned to the past in order to reinvigorate the present. In the years following World War I, vigorous research had begun, exploring the music of forgotten composers from the Baroque and Classical eras. Many composers, including Stravinsky and Respighi, were invigorated by the freshness of this "ancient"

music, and used them as the basis for new musical styles. Respighi's first foray were three suites of transcribed lute music entitled *Ancient Airs and Dances*, and in 1927, a five-movement suite transforming keyboard pieces into an amusing portrait called *The Birds.*

Respighi's inspiration was not confined to old music. He saw a connection between the ethos of the old Italian master painters and the artists (musical and visual) of his day. The works of Florentine Renaissance painter Sandro Botticelli (1445 – 1510) particularly appealed to him. Like those neglected composers of the Baroque, Botticelli had been largely forgotten until the late 19th century. Respighi chose three paintings, all of which hang in Florence's Uffizi Gallery.

Oddly, the impetus for this triptych came from across the Atlantic Ocean. In February of 1927 Respighi was on the second of his United States tours. He was so moved by the generous patronage of Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (who had donated a chamber music hall to the Library of Congress) that he promised to dedicate his next work to her. After returning to Rome he began work immediately. Later that year the premiere took place in Vienna, with Coolidge in attendance.

Each movement is a miniature tone poem inspired by a Botticelli painting. *Spring* (*La primavera*) burbles and frolics with ecstatic trills and horn calls, projecting an image of bucolic rejoicing at the return of warmth and sunshine. *The Adoration of the Magi* (*L'adorazioni dei Magi*) is quietly reverent, and the modal plainchant *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* gives listeners a feeling of both time (the ecclesiastical season of Epiphany) and place (the Magi being, by legend from the Orient). The final movement, *The Birth of Venus* (*La Nascita di Venere*) reproduces the undulating lines of the painting with brilliant orchestral colors that attempt to match the exquisite light of the canvas.

Symphony No. 4 in A major, op. 90
Felix Mendelssohn (b. Hamburg, 1809; d. Leipzig, 1847)

Do you relish the romantic (or more accurately, romanticized) image of the composer as Tragic Hero, who suffers while struggling mightily to bring Artistic Truth to the world, winning fame and renown only after death? If so, you will be disappointed with Felix Mendelssohn. But though his life may have lacked drama, his stature as one of music's most influential figures merits investigation.

The greatest child prodigy since Mozart but with far greater gifts of intellect and personality, he would tragically live only thirty-eight years. Born into privilege and wealth, he belonged to a distinguished, artistically inclined and well-educated Jewish family that, in the face of pervasive anti-Semitism, converted to Lutheranism and adopted the name "Bartholdy". Both he and his sister Fanny were prodigies, and were tutored in piano, violin, composition, foreign languages, painting and literature. Their doting parents funded weekly salon concerts attended by the intellectual elite of Berlin, allowing the children to perform with professional orchestras. His childhood was happy, and he wanted for nothing.

At age twelve the young genius so impressed the great Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that he invited him to stay for two weeks. A friendship bloomed between the boy and the old man that

lasted until Goethe's death in 1832. Felix was not only blessed with wealth, social standing, intellectual genius and musical talent, he also possessed a geniality and personal warmth that others found irresistible. Among his many admirers were Sir Walter Scott, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert; it seems he had no enemies.

Also at twelve years old, he published his first compositions. Mendelssohn's first acknowledged masterpiece was the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written when he was 17 – a precocity that bested even Mozart. Two years later he conducted J. S. Bach's *St Matthew Passion,* its first performance since Bach's lifetime, thus spurring the revival of interest in his music that continues today. Extensive tours and travels spread his reputation throughout Europe, and at the tender age of 27 he was appointed conductor of the celebrated Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, quickly becoming one of history's greatest conductors. His leadership and influence were responsible for Germany's rise to undisputed supremacy in the musical world by the end of the 19th century. In addition, he founded the prestigious Leipzig Conservatory of Music, persuading Robert Schumann to join the faculty.

When he was twenty-eight he married Cecile Jeanrenaud, the beautiful nineteen year-old daughter of a Swiss pastor. Their ten years of marriage were happy, and they brought five children into the world. The shock of Mendelssohn's death at age thirty-eight reverberated around the world, and many clubs, societies, choruses and scholarships were created in his name (Rockford's Mendelssohn Club was established in 1884). His music's enduring popularity and Jewish ancestry threatened the Nazis enough that they banned his music and expunged his name from history books.

The origins of his "Italian" symphony go back to 1830, when the twenty year-old Mendelssohn embarked on a grand tour of Europe. Delayed a month by an outbreak of measles, he left Berlin in May, finally arriving in Venice in October.

As have many before and after him, he fell in love with Italy. The beautiful countryside, historic ruins, friendly people, ancient churches, wonderful food – everywhere he went his senses and intellect found vivid stimulation. For days he wandered the galleries of Venice and Florence, marveling at the glories of Italian Renaissance and Baroque art. Extended stays in Rome and Naples stretched his Italian sojourn to nine months. Naturally, his enthusiasm found musical expression. His letters to his sister report his excitement at the new "Italian" symphony he was writing, based on his impressions of Italian life and culture. In July of 1831 he began a slow journey back that took him to Paris and London, finally returning to Berlin in April of 1832.

The exhilaration of inspiration gave way to frustration when Mendelssohn found he could not finish the work to his satisfaction. But when London's Philharmonic Society commissioned him to write a symphony he returned to the unfinished score. Mendelssohn himself conducted the "Italian" symphony's premiere on May 13, 1833 in London. Its success did little to quiet his misgivings. He refused to allow it to be published, and was not performed again until after his death.

It should be stressed that the work is a symphony, not a tone poem. There is no "program" to the music, no plot, no attempt at musical landscape-painting. It is not, as some have claimed, a "musical postcard." Mendelssohn was a conservative composer, more attuned to ideals of classical form and proportion than Romantic expression and innovations. Elements of the score that can be clearly identified as "Italian" are few. The effervescent first movement seems to be inspired by the cries of street vendors in a busy Italian marketplace. The second movement suggests the solemn march of Catholic pilgrims, or penitents in a rural village's Good Friday

procession. The inspiration for the symphony's most unusual movement, the Finale, was Mendelssohn's visit to the 1831 Roman Festival. There he witnessed wild dancing to traditional *saltarello* tunes. The two themes of this movement authentically recreate the frenzy of the dance, even though its minor key was highly unusual for a symphony designated as being in A major.

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