

PROGRAM NOTES

Hector Berlioz (1803 – 1869) wrote the opera *Benvenuto Cellini* in 1838, but it was a failure due in part to its extreme technical demands on singers and the orchestra. Rarely performed nowadays, the two overtures drawn from it have long been concert favorites. The overture known as *Roman Carnival* was originally the introduction to the second act. The carnival refers to events surrounding Mardi Gras. The overture was first performed in February, 1844.

That **Maurice Ravel** never wrote a full-length concerto for any instrument save the piano is surprising, for he had at his disposal all the most eminent instrumentalists of his time. He didn't get around to a concerto until near the end of his life when he wrote two concertos for the piano simultaneously. The Piano Concerto in G Major, was started in 1929. The composer wrote later, "The G Major Concerto took two years of work, you know. The opening theme came to me on a train between Oxford and London. But the initial idea is nothing. The work of chiseling then began. We've gone past the days when the composer was thought of as being struck by inspiration, feverishly scribbling down his thoughts on a scrap of paper. Writing music is seventy-five percent an intellectual activity." The Concerto is light, breezy, heavily jazz influenced and in the style of a divertimento. The Concerto was dedicated to, and first performed, by Marguerite Long January 14, 1932, with Ravel conducting the Orchestre Lamoureux.

During the last half of the 19th century, the musical world was deeply split between two opposing sides: some supported the progressive ideals of Richard Wagner and Franz Liszt and others were adherents of the more conservative style led by **Johannes Brahms**. So strong were feelings that following the first performance of the Third Symphony of Brahms on December 2, 1883 in Vienna, the then-unknown composer Hugo Wolf wrote a vicious article calling Brahms's symphonies "disgustingly stale...and fundamentally false and perverse," adding that "a single cymbal stroke of a work by Liszt expressed more intellect and emotion than all three symphonies of Brahms and his serenades taken together." Despite the best efforts of the Wagnerites, they did not succeed in bringing about the failure of the Third. It was soon played throughout Europe and the symphony's greatness was immediately recognized. Critic, and Brahms supporter, Eduard Hanslick dubbed it Brahms' "Eroica" Symphony. If today the Third Symphony is probably the least performed of the composer's four, part of the reason, no doubt, stems from the fact that it is the only one of them that doesn't have a rousing, triumphant final climax to "bring down the house."

The symphony was mostly written in the summer of 1883 at a friend's villa outside Wiesbaden. There he would go on long, solitary walks in the mountains and through the forest. He must have felt quite happy and content, judging from the mood of the first two movements. "The working on a symphony he kept strictly a secret", not sharing even with close friend Clara Schumann whom he visited in nearby Frankfurt.

The Third is introduced by a motto; this at once provides the bass for the grandiose principal subject of the first movement, and dominates not only this movement, but the whole symphony. The motto returns at the very end of the symphony

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to close things out in a most satisfactory way. This motto became a musical signature of the composer and can be found in many of his works. It began in 1853 when the composer and others would meet at Richard Schumann's home in Düsseldorf. There, Brahms, composer Albert Dietrich and Schumann would write what they called the F.A.E. Sonata after the motto F.A.E. (*Frei aber einsam*, free but solitary). Brahms decided that he, too, must have his own motto and chose F.A.F. – (*Frei aber froh*, Free but joyful). Both mottos would appear in his music, but his F.A.F. had special meaning. The downward moving theme in the third bar is brought back in the Coda of the Finale to close the symphony, and also was a theme used by his late friend and supporter, Schumann, in his own works, including the first and third symphonies.

~Marty Haub