

NOTES for FEBRUARY 28, 2019

In past years we have had a number of successful *Music in the Afternoon* concerts with the format "X and Friends." In some cases the friends have included a bassist, but this is I think the first time that a bassist has been the X. Indeed the double bass is not an instrument that we hear very often as a part of a chamber ensemble. Apart from an important role in a couple of well know Schubert works, another by Beethoven and some divertimenti by Mozart, the bass has not played a large part in WMCT concerts. Even rarer is its appearance as a solo instrument. The repertoire you will hear today is of two kinds. First there are works that were originally written for other instruments and are here transcribed for double bass. It should be added that in each case the composer authorized versions for instruments other than the original, although it must be admitted, not envisioning the bass as a possibility. The second group contains works that were conceived from the outset as works for bass, and here, not surprisingly, we find a number of works by composers who were themselves bassists. The works by Schumann, Korngold and Schubert all belong in the first category.

Schumann's Adagio and Allegro Op. 70 was written originally for horn and piano and published with versions for violin, viola or cello. It is one of the many works written in 1849 when the composer was director of music for the city of Dresden; one source refers to the years 1848-50 as those of "*unbounded creativity*" for Schumann and this is remarkable given the unstable state of affairs in Europe during and after the revolutions of 1848. The composer saw cause and effect operating here, telling Ferdinand Hiller in a letter that 1849 had been his most fruitful year; "*it seemed as if the outer storms compelled people to turn inwards.*" The first performance was given by the first horn of the Dresden orchestra, Julius Schlitterlau, with Clara Schumann at the piano. She wrote in her diary after the event, "*The piece is splendid, fresh and passionate, just as I like it.*"

Until fairly recently, if you knew Korngold's music at all, it would have been through the scores that he wrote for Hollywood films in the '30s and '40s; such works as *Captain Blood*, *Anthony Adverse*, and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. Gradually, however, some of his concert, operatic and other works have started to find a place in the repertoire. Born in Austria in 1897, he showed remarkable musical abilities early on, with a ballet score, written at the age of 11, a piano sonata a couple of years later, and two one act operas when he was 19, their premières conducted by Bruno Walter, all receiving lavish praise from audiences and critics. In 1919 he was commissioned to write incidental music for a production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* that was given in the Vienna Burgtheater. The composer later turned five of the original fourteen pieces into a concert suite for full orchestra. For a

second production of the play, when orchestral musicians were not available, he re-arranged the original music for violin and piano. In turn he took four of these pieces to form a Suite for Violin and Piano. The *Garden Scene* is the third movement of the four.

A walk through any museum collection of musical instruments will reveal a number that never quite took on, despite in some cases attracting the attention of famous composers: the lira organizzata, the baryton, the glass harmonica, all come to mind. And we must include the arpeggione, which would be completely forgotten now if it weren't for today's sonata by Franz Schubert. The instrument was invented in the early years of the 19th century by the Viennese guitar maker, J. G. Stauffer, its alternative names, guitar cello, or bowed guitar giving some idea of its hybrid nature. It looked like a cello, but had six strings, tuned in guitar fashion with the fingerboard fretted like a guitar, and was played with a bow. Its tone is delicate, more akin to that of the gamba family than the cello. Schubert's composition, which demonstrates a real appreciation of the special, rather gentle qualities of the instrument, was written in 1824. It is most often heard these days played on the cello, but the music transfers remarkably well to the bass.

For the remainder of the concert we will be taken on a guided tour of *Bass Masters through the Ages* by the musicologist and bassist Jeffrey Stokes.

John Mayo

Each year the Women's Musical Club of Toronto gives a \$5000 commission to a Canadian composer for the world première of a new work. On February 28th 2019, the WMCT is extremely proud to present a new chamber work by **Bramell Tovey**.

Mr. Tovey is a GRAMMY® and JUNO award-winning conductor and composer. He is the Principal Conductor of the B.B.C. Concert Orchestra and Music Director Emeritus of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra where he was formerly Music Director from 2000 to 2018. In September 2018, his appointment as Artistic Advisor of the Rhode Island Philharmonic was announced and most recently, he was named the Artistic Director of the Calgary Opera Company.

His Concerto for Orchestra will receive its world première in April to commemorate the VSO's centenary, and a new violin concerto for James Ehnes has been commissioned by the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Ottawa, and will receive its première at the NAC in March.