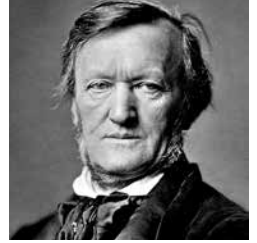


# Classical Series 7 - Program Notes

## Richard Wagner

May 22, 1813 – February 13, 1883



### **Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg***

On the surface, Wagner's comic "music drama" *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is the lively story of a medieval song contest during which the good guy prevails over the bad guys and walks off with the town-beauty as a prize. In fact, Wagner used the plot as a thinly-veiled vehicle to caricature, to attack, and to mock his dogged critics. He went so far as to create a despicable principle character – Beckmesser – in the image of his most antagonistic detractor – Edward Hanslick – just to unmask Beckmesser/Hanslick as an incompetent thief, a cheater, a bumbler, a terrible singer, and a loser. Ouch. So much for the critic Hanslick. Revenge is sweet, especially when it is on stage for all to see.

The tale takes place in the 16th Century in Nuremberg, Germany. The conservative Guild of Mastersingers exists to preserve the musical traditions of the local culture. The Guild plans to host its Annual Summer Song contest, but this time, the prize will be the hand in marriage of the lovely Eva, the daughter of the town's goldsmith. Enter Walther, a traveling knight. One look at the ravishing prize and he decides to enter the contest. In contrast to the staid Mastersingers, Walther represents the competing progressive or modern musical forces. In the contest, Walther and his song vanquishes his rivals – including Beckmesser – to the dismay of Eva's local suitors.

Wagner was so insistent on breaking with tradition and changing the essence of music that he refused to call his stage works operas, choosing "music dramas" instead; and he replaced the standard overture with a "Prelude." As to style, he invested each character or significant idea with a recognizable musical signature or theme called a "leitmotif." This Prelude consists of elaborations of the drama's main leitmotifs, or signature themes.

First, we hear the stately reserved, confident, and haughty Meistersinger's leitmotif supported by a distinctive fanfare. Following this episode, Wagner treats us to his Awakening Love theme suggesting Walther's and Eva's initial meeting. More Meistersinger music, then the violins introduce the essential melody of Walther's famous prize-winning song, the Prize Song, ending with a theme called Love's Ardor.

At this point, the fun begins. Wagner presents a bouncy burlesque version of the Meistersinger theme in mincing tones led by the oboe. He is lampooning the conservative musical forces he battled throughout his lifetime, making fun of the old guard and thumbing his nose at their pomposity.

Now that we are familiar with all his themes, Wagner ingeniously interweaves them into a brilliant and superb ending. His genius is on full display as he turns this ten minute tour de force into a masterpiece. As a man, Wagner may have been a bigoted skunk and a scoundrel, but few have been able to match his artistic accomplishments.

## Michael Daugherty

April 28, 1954



### **Tales of Hemingway for cello and orchestra (2015)**

Michael speaks:

Tales of Hemingway evokes the turbulent life, adventures, and literature of American author and journalist Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961). His terse, direct, accessible writing style, combined with a mastery of dialogue and brilliant use of omission and repetition, made him one of the most influential and original writers of the 20th Century. Hemingway's distinctive body of work was also informed by his larger-than-life experiences.

In his youth in Oak Park, Chicago, Hemingway was surrounded by music, where his mother was a prominent music teacher. He played the cello in school orchestras. Hemingway's family owned a remote summer home on Walloon Lake near Petoskey, Michigan, where hunting, fishing, and camping were a family ritual. As an adult, Hemingway's passion and expertise for deep-sea fishing in the Florida Keys and Cuba, big game hunting in Africa, bullfighting in Spain, and boxing were legendary.

Hemingway experienced the horrors and ironies of war as a Red Cross ambulance driver in World War I (1918) and as a journalist on the front lines of the Spanish Civil War (1937) and World War II (1944-45). In the 1920s, Hemingway was part of Gertrude Stein's "Lost Generation" in Paris and haunted the bars and cafés with F. Scott Fitzgerald. During his lifetime, many of his works were made into Hollywood films, and his journalism and literature were syndicated in magazines and newspapers.

around the world, making Hemingway an international celebrity and a household name. 25 minutes in duration, my cello concerto is divided into 4 movements, each of which is inspired by one of Hemingway's short stories or novels:

#### I. Big Two-Hearted River (Seney, Michigan, 1925)

In this story, Nick Adams is an emotionally scarred and disillusioned soldier from World War I who treks to Northern Michigan for a camping-fishing trip to try to regain control of his life. I have composed serene and passionate music that evokes a leitmotif in Hemingway's writing: his belief that one can be healed by the power of nature through exploring isolated outdoor terrains.

#### II. For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940, Spanish Civil War)

Hemingway tells the tale of the last three days in the life of Robert Jordan, an American teacher turned demolition expert who has joined the anti-fascist Loyalist guerillas in Spain. Jordan accepts a suicide mission to blow up a bridge only to fall in love with Maria, a young Spanish woman of the Loyalist guerilla camp. The cello strums and plucks, leading the martyr's march to battle the Fascists and to Jordan's eventual death. As the chimes explode at the conclusion of the movement, the epitaph of the novel rings forth: "And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

#### III. The Old Man and the Sea (1952, Cuba)

In Hemingway's Nobel Prize-winning novella, Santiago is a poor, old fisherman whose luck changes when he takes his small boat deep into the Gulf Stream. After an epic struggle, he catches a gigantic marlin, the largest fish of his career. As he makes the long journey home, sharks relentlessly attack his boat and devour the marlin. As a musical response, I have composed an elegy to the struggle of life and death between man and nature. The cello represents the old fisherman's journey as he searches for the truths of man's existence with dignity and grace.

#### IV. The Sun Also Rises (1926, Pamplona, Spain)

The main character in this ground-breaking novel is Jake Barnes, bitter and wounded by war, living in Paris as an unhappy expatriate journalist. Aimless in life, he makes a journey to the Festival in Pamplona, Spain. Along the way, he is joined by other adrift souls of the "Lost Generation," such as Lady Brett, a promiscuous divorcée with whom Barnes was involved before the war. For the final movement of the concerto, I have created an exciting and dramatic sound world where I imagine Jake Barnes, his entourage (and Hemingway) in Pamplona at the Fiesta, watching the running of the bulls and reveling in the spectacle of the bullfights. We also hear musical illuminations of the novel's enigmatic epigraph: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose."

—Michael Daugherty

## Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

February 03, 1809 – November 04, 1847

### **Symphony No. 3 in A minor "Scottish Symphony"**

When Felix was twenty-one years old, he made his first of ten trips to England. Not only was he looking for adventure, but also for inspiration for his muse. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "I am going to Scotland with a rake for folk songs, an ear for the lovely fragrant countryside, and a heart for the bare legs of the natives." He struck pay dirt at the ancient ruins of an historic castle in Edinburgh. In a letter to his family, he said, "In the evening twilight, we went today to the Holyrood Palace where Queen Mary lived and loved: a little upper room is there with a winding staircase leading up to its door. That is where they went and found Rizzo hiding in a dark corner, where they pulled him out, and three rooms off they murdered him. The chapel beside it has lost its roof and is overgrown with grass and ivy, and at the broken altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything there is ruined, decayed, and open to the clear sky. I believe that I have found there today the beginning of my Scotch Symphony." He proceeded to write down the sixteen somber bars of music that he would use thirteen years later to open this work.

Rizzo was Mary's lute-playing Italian lover. Mary's husband ended Rizzo's playing days when he discovered his wife's affair. The assassins hacked him to death and threw his body from a window to the ground below. Mary later ran afoul of her first cousin and rival, Queen Elizabeth I of England. Mary was imprisoned for eighteen years after which she was beheaded for plotting to assassinate her cousin. And we think Special Counsels are dangerous?

There it is, a symphony inspired by a trip to Scotland and the country's fertile history. So imagine Robert Schumann's embarrassment when someone misinformed him about the origins of this symphony, and after listening to it, he wrote a review which demonstrates how tricky it can be to divine the intentions of a composer just from his music. Schumann wrote, "We learn from a third-party that the beginning of the new symphony was written during Mendelssohn's residence in Rome. This is interesting to know in view of its special character. Just as the sight of a yellowed page, unexpectedly found in a mislaid volume, conjured up a vanished time and shines in such brightness that we forget the present, so must many lovely



reminiscences has risen to encircle the imagination of the master when among his papers he rediscovered these old melodies sung in lovely Italy. In this tender tone picture, Mendelssohn places us under sunny Italian skies.”

Humm. I wonder if we had no knowledge of this symphony’s origins whether we would have spotted it as Scottish? Oh well, Schumann was right about one thing. He said that Mendelssohn harmoniously fused the classical traditions with the Romantic spirit, that he used the traditional forms as bottles for his new Romantic wine. As for the music, Mendelssohn originally marked the fourth movement “allegro guerriero,” guerriero meaning warlike. Two themes, possibly clans, battle each other, culminating at the end in a glorious victory.

One final note. Nowadays, the word “Scotch” refers to products made in Scotland, like “Scotch Whiskey.” Mendelssohn called his symphony The Scotch. Currently most annotators call it The Scottish. Whatever. Cheers!