

Triangle Youth Symphony Fall Concert 2019 Program Notes

March of the Meistersingers: A Piece Outside Wagner's Norm

Richard Wagner, born in Germany in 1813, was one of the world's most influential and controversial composers. Wagner was a masterful composer whose operas and music had a revolutionary influence on the course of Western music. He is famous for both his epic operas, including the four-part, 18-hour *Ring Cycle*, as well as for his anti-semitic writings. Most of his compositions were tragedies.

Wagner's "March of the Meistersingers" (also known as "Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg") is a marvelous opera that, as a comedy, is unique from Wagner's other operas. The work tells a story about a cobbler named "Hans Sachs" and a group of poets and musicians called the mastersingers. The mastersingers pursue their passion under a set of strict rules. A goldsmith promises his daughter, Eva, to the winner of the upcoming singing contest. However, Walther, a knight, falls in love with Eva and must learn the art of the mastersingers from Sachs in time for the contest. Walther must beat Beckmesser, the town clerk, who also pursues Eva's hand in marriage. In addition, the opera is unusual among Wagner's other works as it is set in a historically well-defined time and place, instead of a mythical or legendary setting. Furthermore, it is among the longest operas commonly performed, usually taking around four and a half hours.

The work rose to fame and became one of the most popular and prominent German operas during the Unification of Germany in 1871 because of its heavy emphasis on German patriotism. The opera was given several productions across Germany over the next two years.

The Triangle Youth Symphony will play the piece March of the Meistersingers from the opera. The piece does an excellent job of painting an image of Nuremberg, Germany in the 16th century with its development into a grand, majestic full tone. March of the Meistersingers is a unique piece that showcases Wagner's skills outside of his norm. Written in such a critical historical setting, it is known for its prominence and patriotism in the German world of opera.

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Mozart's Emotional *Idomeneo*
By Sherin Stanley

Mozart portrayed emotion in his music in a way unlike any other composer. This unique skill is showcased in his opera *Idomeneo*. As a lyrical tragedy, the opera is suspense and great sorrow. Two ways Mozart accomplished these intense levels of emotion was by using certain instruments to create a denser sound during the more suspenseful parts, and by contrasting the tense or sad moments of the opera with lighter, more hopeful melodies. Considered one of the greatest works of choral opera, the premiere was a notable success. People loved how Mozart captured the emotions of the characters in the opera with an intensity new to his time period.

In his overture to *Idomeneo*, Mozart pulls music from various moments of the opera, providing a preview of the coming action. The plot of the opera features a king who is lost at sea and must sacrifice the first person he sees in order to get back to land. Unfortunately, the first person he sees ends up being his son. The content of the opera is undeniably sad, and Mozart made sure to capture this mood in his overture. He accomplished this by picking music for the overture from the scenes that best conveyed the feeling of despair that dominate the main character's experiences throughout the opera.

Mozart's *Idomeneo* was a groundbreaking piece in that it introduced a new level of emotional intensity to orchestral compositions. Enjoy a taste of this brilliant opera with the Triangle Youth Orchestra's performance of the overture.

Sources: to come

Vaughan Williams' "English Folk Song Suite:" A Celebration of English Culture
By Mary Kolbas

Ralph Vaughan Williams was one of the first British composers to explicitly use English folk songs and Tudor influences in his pieces, unapologetically displaying his patriotism and making a cultural statement in a time when most music in England had heavy Germanic influences.

Vaughan Williams began composing after returning from military service during World War I, which he volunteered for at the age of forty-two. He became a student of French composer Maurice Ravel but created a completely different musical style than Ravel, showcasing the rich musical heritage present in England that had previously been hidden. His unashamedly patriotic approach to composing also spread to other English composers, reviving a sense of English cultural identity that coupled with the country's increasing diplomatic and cultural influence.

The "English Folk Song Suite" was originally written for the UK's military band, an important English tradition with origins tracing back to the sixteenth century, making it one of the earliest developed military bands in the world that still exists today. Military bands had both a ceremonial and social role, creating a sense of cultural unity and patriotism. As the title suggests, the English Folk Song Suite is heavily influenced by a variety of traditional folk songs, with accompanying stories ranging from biblical tales to tales of soldiers and their unrequited love. Vaughan Williams' success with this piece allowed his student Gordon Jacob to arrange the

suite for full orchestra, mixing the traditional band piece with the lyrical abilities of stringed instruments.

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Jean Sibelius' "Finlandia:" An Anthem That Could Not Be Silenced
By Stephen Chang

Jean Sibelius was a Finnish composer born on December 8th, 1865. Sibelius was alive during the Russification of Finland when the Russian Empire increasingly censored newspapers and other forms of communication, including music. Sibelius composed "Finlandia" as part of a covert protest against the increasing censorship from the Russian Empire in 1899. In order to escape censorship, "Finlandia" had to be performed under alternative names at various concerts.

"Finlandia" is an homage to Finland's past, revealing Sibelius's nationalism and pride for his country. The loud and exciting parts of the piece are a reference to the struggles that the Finnish people were experiencing at the time the composition was written and the various struggles they had faced throughout their history. The calmer part towards the end is a hymn written by Sibelius himself. The beautiful melody becomes more intense towards the end, with more moving notes in the strings and deeper notes played by the winds. This part is Sibelius reflecting on Finland's history, reminding himself of the reasons he loves his country and acknowledging his willingness to do anything for it.

"Finlandia" has become a recognizable part of Finnish culture, serving as a pseudo-national anthem for Finland. Although you may not be Finnish, embrace the patriotic spirit of the piece and feel the intense emotion expressed through the music during the Triangle Youth Symphony's performance of Sibelius' "Finlandia."

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