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PROGRAM NOTES
by Geoffrey Decker

Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV 1046
by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in the shadow of the imposing middle-age castle known as the Wartburg in the town of Eisenach, smack-dab in the middle of modern Germany. Prior to his birth, though, the Wartburg already had its own notoriety having housed and protected Martin Luther in 1521-1522 while he translated the *New Testament* from Latin to German. After losing both parents by the time he was ten, Bach left Eisenach to live with his older brother, an organist in the town of Ohrdruf. Once there, he was given an intense lesson in music performance and composition, and he learned the great works of the previous generations of organ masters.

In early 1700, Bach enrolled in St. Michael's School in Lüneberg. Musicologists believe that he and a friend made the nearly 240-mile journey in about two weeks on foot! At St. Michael's, Bach was exposed to a much wider range of music than he could have learned from his brother and, in early 1703, he graduated. In 1708, after holding posts of various levels in Sangerhausen, Weimar, Arnstadt, and Mühlhausen, he returned to Weimar. Here he composed his first sacred music for the Lutheran Church, his first concertos for solo instruments, and his two books of the Well-Tempered Klavier. He also spent a month in jail for some minor infraction against the authorities. After these nine years, he was ready for change.

In 1717, Bach was hired as Kapellmeister (Master of the Chapel) by Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Being a Calvinist, Leopold did not appreciate elaborate church music but did appreciate the fine orchestra he had assembled on his estate. It is here that Bach was given nearly complete freedom to compose works for orchestra and works for various virtuosi from within the orchestra. For the former, he composed the Four Orchestral Suites and the Six Brandenburg Concertos and, for the latter, he composed the Six Cello Suites and the Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin. Bach must have been very happy at Cöthen to have produced purely instrumental music of the high level as exhibited by these four spectacular sets of compositions.

When Bach traveled to Berlin to purchase a new harpsichord in autumn of 1718, he performed in the palace of Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, the son of the then Great Elector. Being a great lover of music, the prince probably commissioned several concertos for his own musicians. Bach obliged by sending the six concertos he had probably already composed and dedicated them to the margrave. They were later designated by an early biographer as “The Six Brandenburg Concertos”.

Titled on the copy given to the Margrave as “Concerto 1^{mo} à 2 Corni di Caccia, 3 Hautb: è Bassono, Violino Piccolo concertato, 2 Violini, una Viola col Basso Continuo”, what we now know as “Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV 1046”, is in four movements. The first movement is without tempo indication by Bach himself although it is often performed fast or moderately fast (*Allegro* or *Allegro moderato*). The second movement is a slow, or *Adagio*, tempo, the third movement is a fast, or *Allegro*, tempo, and the fourth movement – almost as long as two of the previous movements put together – is an elegant and elaborate multi-tempo movement in seven sections. They are, in order, Menuet – Trio I – Menuet *da capo* (meaning back to the top of the Menuet) – Polacca (a movement with a rhythm based on the Polish dance known as a polonaise) – Menuet *da capo* (back to the top of the Menuet again) – Trio II (different than the first) – Menuet *da capo* (and back to the top for a final time!). This concerto is the only one of the six with four movements, and its baroque instrumentation is for three oboes, bassoon, two *corni da caccia* (natural “hunting” horns), *violino piccolo*, two violins, viola, cello and *basso continuo*.

Ask anyone who only dabbles in classical music what piece or pieces he or she knows and they will often mention the Brandenburg Concertos of Bach. What makes these works so popular? Well, they are the most played. Listen to any music by Bach and you might begin to realize why he and George Frideric Handel represent what many consider to be the two quintessential Baroque composers. Perhaps it is because Bach’s music appeals almost equally to our analytical left brains as it does to our artistic right brains; in other words, it gets “equal billing” on both sides.

For many, Bach's music satisfies both sides of our personalities. Bach even more so than Handel, though, because he was more mechanical and mathematical – i.e., the left-brain stuff. Handel, a composer of primarily music for public consumption like opera, was more tuneful, outgoing, and full of spectacle. Instead, Bach, who was writing for private performances, smaller venues, and the Lutheran Church,

was more restricted in how he expressed himself. But, as we know very well, these restrictions did nothing to diminish the quality of his music and the satisfaction we derive from listening to it.

In case you are curious about what the BWV followed by a number means when you see Bach's works listed, it stands for Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis, the cataloging system used for Bach's works first published 1950 by the Polish-born German musicologist Wolfgang Schmieder. Although it has undergone several revisions since then, the numbering of the Six Brandenburg Concertos, the Four Orchestral Suites, and other more familiar Bach works has remained the same. Similar cataloging and numbering are the K., or Köchel, numbers for Mozart's works, first published in 1862 by Austrian musicologist Ludwig Ritter von Köchel and notated with KV, or Köchel-Verzeichnis, in German. And, finally, the D., or Deutsch, cataloging and numbering for Schubert's works developed by Austrian musicologist, Otto Erich Deutsch, in 1951 and revised in 1978. There are others too: HWV for George Fredrick Handel's works, RV for Antonio Vivaldi's works, Hob. for Joseph Haydn's works, etc. Some are more frequently used than others.

Recommended Recordings

There are hundreds of performances of the Brandenburg Concertos available on CD or for download. As with any work written before 1900 (and some even since then), there are two types of recordings: those that are on period instruments and those that are on modern instruments. There are even subdivisions of these two categories. For example, modern instruments playing in strict period manner, what is called "big band" modern versus chamber-style modern, etc., etc. The different ways of playing the Six Brandenburg Concertos are myriad. To satisfy both camps – period performance and modern performance – several examples of recordings of each are recommended here.

Of the period performances, the 2012 recording by the Dunedin Consort, a Scottish period-instrument group under the direction of harpsichordist John Butt, on the British label Linn Records (CKD 430), is an excellent example. It is available to order on Amazon as a Super Audio CD (SACD) but is also downloadable for a pittance in CD quality format at www.linnrecords.com. Other examples of period-instrument recordings are the excellent and affordable boxed set including not only the Six Brandenburg Concertos but also Bach's Four Orchestral Overtures, offered on the Harmonia Mundi label with the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (HMX 2908074.77). If you wish to watch the concertos played on period instruments, the EuroArts DVD with the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra cannot be beat for skill on the

sometimes treacherous instruments and for musicality. One small complaint about the DVD, though, is that the players don't look to be having enough fun, although you can't tell this in the wonderful music they make.

Among all of the modern-instrument versions in the catalog, the two by the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields and their famed violinist conductor, Sir Neville Marriner, are hard to beat. A personal favorite is the set on Deutsche Grammophon with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan recorded in 1978-1979 (DG 415374-2). Although considered "out of style", "big band" and the antithesis of the period-instrument versions, the concertos are so well and musically played that one is tempted to believe that Bach would have preferred the recording himself. Karajan's 1964 recordings, made with members of the Berlin Philharmonic while vacationing in St. Moritz, Switzerland, show the conductor as even more sympathetic to the period style. Many people don't know that, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Karajan astonished the musical world with his very period-informed performances at the Vienna Bach Festival. The former set mentioned above is newly remastered and available in the highly-recommended 82-CD Deutsche Grammophon set titled *Karajan 1970s* and featuring all of the conductor's DG orchestral recordings made in the 1970s (DG 28947915775). And, by the way, the 1964 recordings are also available in another highly-recommended set titled *Karajan 1960s*.

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

In 1823, when he began his work in earnest on his Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, the 52-year-old Beethoven was in seriously declining health, both mentally and physically. His early onset of increasing deafness helped lead to decades of alcohol abuse which took their toll and left him jaundiced and plagued by cirrhosis. And even though Beethoven had been known for his eccentricities since his youth in Bonn, the intense and gut-wrenching legal battle for full control over his late brother's son, Karl, left him mentally bereft.

When he began publicly railing against the nobility, the courts, and even the emperor himself, the Viennese began to believe that he was something more than eccentric. As THE great Beethoven, he was so renowned that the authorities ignored him in what was at that time a strict police state. His money problems did not help either. When composer Gioachino Rossini asked friends among the

Austrian court aristocracy to help relieve Beethoven's financial distress, most replied that there was no point in doing so. They not only suspected his deafness but generally thought him to be a misanthrope, a recluse, and mentally unbalanced.

So, we ask, how did a man in this terrible mental and physical state conceive and compose two of the greatest works in all western musical history? And that's not all! Both of these works, the *Missa solennis* in D major, Op. 123, and the Ninth Symphony, were composed alongside the astounding and highly revolutionary last three Piano Sonatas, Opp. 109, 110, and 111. Perhaps the answer to our question can be found in the fact that all of these works were a part of Beethoven's reconciliation with himself, his life, and his god in his last five or six years.

Maynard Solomon, one of Beethoven's most significant biographers of late, says, "Beneath the simple, even prosaic, 'surface' events [described above], a profound shift in Beethoven's psychological makeup was taking place." Beethoven was finally able to bring the powerful emotional forces affecting him in the late 1810s and early 1820s under control and, as Solomon says, "... they seem to have set in motion an irreversible process of self-analysis that affected the deepest layers of the composer's personality."

The Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, sometimes referred to as the "Choral Symphony" was, alongside the *Missa solennis* in D major, Op. 123, and his final and most personal statements among all his compositions, the last five String Quartets, Opp. 127, 130, 131, 132, and 135, a direct result of Beethoven's reconciliation with himself and resolve to complete his last years on earth working at the highest level of his art. And he did just that!

As Stefan Kunze writes, Beethoven's now-beloved Ninth Symphony "burst the bounds of instrumental music for the first time in the history of the symphony." So violently and unexpectedly did it burst those bounds that the work has, as Kunze says, "been the object of controversy from the very first." But why? It seems so perfect and so normal to our ears, and even to the ears of most who have heard it since! The answer is simple. Learned audiences, musicians, and critics of Beethoven's day did not understand his use in the symphony's fourth movement of Friedrich Schiller's 1786 ode *An die Freude* ("Ode to Joy"), sung by a four-part choir and four vocal soloists. To those supposedly "in the know," neither "Papa" Haydn nor Mozart had used sung text in their symphonies, so why should Beethoven?!

The criticism did not cease after Beethoven's death. In fact, composer Giuseppe Verdi, thought the Ninth's first three movements glorious but was baffled by the last movement. We can probably understand this criticism simply because Verdi spent his entire career working with the human voice and, upon hearing the ruthlessness with which Beethoven treats the singing voice in the final movement of the Ninth, he must have been horrified. The vocal parts, especially those of the sopranos in the choir, are extremely taxing and difficult to sustain for any length of time.

Originally commissioned by the Philharmonic Society of London in 1817, Beethoven completed the Ninth Symphony on February 1824 while living in the house at Rathausgasse 10 in Baden bei Wien, a suburb of Vienna in the Vienna Woods. His opinion that Vienna had been too under the influence of Italian composers working in the city nearly lost that city the premiere. But, after receiving an open letter from his most devoted Vienna admirers, the groundwork was laid for the greatest public event of the later period of his career. On May 7, 1824, the public packed into the Kärntner Theater to see Beethoven make his first on-stage appearance in more than 12 years and hear a sort of monster concert that included not only his Ninth Symphony but also the *Consecration of the House* Overture, Op. 124, the *Kyrie, Credo*, and *Agnus Dei* of his *Missa solemnis* in D major, Op. 123.

During the performance of the Ninth, the composer was on stage not far from conductor Ignaz Schuppanzigh. Throughout the performance, he furiously turned pages of his score, beating time, and grunting. Although some accounts recall a scrappy performance with too few rehearsals, others are glowing about the success of the work. One of the more moving accounts is that by violinist Joseph Böhm who played in the orchestra. Although they had all been warned to ignore Beethoven's gestures, Böhm confirms that the orchestra was devoted to the composer. He wrote, "Beethoven directed the piece himself; that is, he stood before the lectern and gesticulated furiously. At times he rose, at other times he shrank to the ground, he moved as if he wanted to play all the instruments himself and sing for the whole chorus. All the musicians minded his rhythm alone while playing." At the end of each of the Ninth Symphony's movements, the audience jumped to its feet and, although Beethoven was still conducting, legend has it that contralto Caroline Unger walked over to him and turned him around so that he could at least see the ovation and all of the hats and kerchiefs that were in the air in celebration of his work. It was most certainly an affirmation of his success in self-reconciliation.

Beethoven's orchestra for the Ninth Symphony consists of piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, bass drum, triangle, cymbals, and strings. Of these, the piccolo, contrabassoon, three trombones, bass drum, triangle, and cymbals are only used in the fourth movement. Additionally, the fourth movement solo vocal quartet consists of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass, and the choir is made up of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses with the tenors briefly divided.

After Beethoven's death, the Ninth Symphony quickly gained legendary and almost mythical status, something which created a huge obstacle which Germanic composers that followed could not easily overcome. Arguably the most prominent composer among them, Johannes Brahms, born just a little more than six years after Beethoven's death, struggled for 21 years of his professional life to publish his Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68. He himself cited the overwhelming shadow of Beethoven and the perfection and reputation of that composer's work as steering him clear of the symphony genre.

The wonderment with which we hear Beethoven's powerful Ninth Symphony, and the fact that it seems to renew and be renewed with each hearing, perhaps proves the work's greatness and why it leaves such an indelible mark on all who hear it. Much like Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, Beethoven's Ninth renews the human spirit and tells us that, although men continue to war on one another and peace and brotherhood more often escape us, we can indeed bind up each other's wounds, care for those that are broken and eventually live in peace and brotherhood.

So significant is the work that, in 2001, Beethoven's original, hand-written manuscript of the score, held by the Berlin State Library, was added to the United Nations Memory of the World Programme Heritage list, becoming the first musical score so honored.

What a wonderful and fitting way to celebrate the end of the Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra's 40th Anniversary Season! With the final D-major chords of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the choir and solo quartet intoning the final stanza of Schiller's *Ode to Joy*, we say thank you to everyone who has made the last 40 years possible!

Recommended Recordings

There are many, many great and inspired recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Probably 99% of all conductors seek to show their mettle with a performance and recording of it. Some show it extraordinarily well and some not so well and, sadly, the majority are very average.

Perhaps the finest recording ever put down is that for Deutsche Grammophon by Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic in Berlin's Philharmonie in October 1976 and January 1977. The concentrated conducting of Karajan and almost possessed and extraordinarily powerful playing of the Berliners are more than adequate reasons to love this recording, but, employing a superb quartet of soloists – soprano Anna Tomowa-Sintow, alto Agnes Baltsa, tenor Peter Schreier, and bass-baritone José van Dam, all at the height of their careers – and the Wiener Singverein, the concert choir of the Musikverein in Vienna, raises it far above any of the competition. Plagued by a somewhat hollow acoustic when it was first released on vinyl in 1977 or 1978, several recent releases on CD – and one on hybrid CD/SACD – have clarified the inner voices and warmed the acoustic around the orchestra, soloists, and choir. Absolutely superb! It is available in a very worthwhile 6-CD ambient surround-sound remastered set of the Nine Symphonies on Deutsche Grammophon (442 9924) or, if you can find it, the Deutsche Grammophon SACD mentioned above (471 640-2).

Another great recording with an extraordinarily joyous opening to the vocal part of the Fourth Movement is the second one made by Sir Georg Solti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for Decca in September and October of 1986. The playing of the famed Adolph "Bud" Herseth leading the trumpets in the *tutti* (full orchestra) section of the *Ode to Joy* theme just before the bass soloist's entrance is absolutely infectious. It is currently available on the Decca Label (417 800-2), and a newly remastered version of it will be released on 30 June 2017.

Although one could go on and on about great recordings of Beethoven's Ninth, there are three more especially worth mentioning, all conducted by the eminent Wilhelm Furtwängler and recorded in performance between March 1942 and August 1954, the latter just three months before Furtwängler's death. Each recording is deeply imbued with the circumstances under which it was recorded. The first was recorded in Berlin during the height of the Third Reich which was about to suffer its first big setbacks during the Second World War. Furtwängler suffered greatly emotionally under the Nazis and his anger and frustration at what was happening to his beloved country comes out in the performance. It is available in many incarnations but one of the best releases is that on the Music & Arts Label (CD-653).

The second was recorded by the Bayreuth Festival Orchestra on the stage of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth on 29 July 1951 during the first season of the annual Bayreuth Wagner Festival that followed the Second World War's conclusion in 1945. It was a momentous occasion and the celebratory feelings are thoroughly conveyed. It is best heard on the Orfeo Label (C 754 081 B).

The third was recorded on 22 August 1954 with the Philharmonia Orchestra from London on tour in Lucerne. It is a truly powerful and beautifully played – and sung – performance and serves as a sort of swan song for Furtwängler. It can be had in an excellent remastering on the Audite Label (95.641) or, if you can find it, an even better remastering on the Tahra Label SACD (Furt 2001).

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