

Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra  
Bach Is Back: May 4, 2018

**PROGRAM NOTES**

**Escapade, by Jan Bach (b. 1937)**

Notes by the composer

The school year 1983-84 was one of my highest compositional productivity, writing eight duets for flute and bassoon, *Concert Variations* for euphonium and piano, *Helix*, for solo saxophone and wind/percussion octet, *Horn Concerto* for solo horn and large orchestra, a little suite for harp, an hour and a half of incidental music for the theater department's production of *Romeo and Juliet*, and this work, *Escapade*. The woodwind duets and harp suite were written for the senior recitals of favorite NIU students of mine; all the rest were commissioned works.

*Escapade* was commissioned by the Minot (N.D.) Symphony in commemoration of its twentieth anniversary. Thus, the work is celebratory in nature, straight ahead, and intended to be exciting and easy to listen to while making few demands upon its audience. These features are implied by the name of the work, but there is another meaning to its title as well.

One melodic feature of traditional music is called the "escape tone," in which the path of a musical gesture is embellished with pitches that lie outside its direction. As an example, a descending scale like C-B-A-G, etc. would be embellished with interpolated pitches such as C-D-B-C-A-B-G, etc. My whole piece is built on just one theme, a descending chromatic scale decorated by these escape tones and occasional other embellishments. This theme moves through several variations until the chaotic interruption of an insolent brass section forces it into the world of Brahms, as initiated by a solo cello. This is yet another variation of the

original theme, a totally unexpected one (until now!) that leads to the noisy conclusion.

There are other surprises along the way, but I won't give them away here. I hope you enjoy *Escapade*.

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## **Concerto for Two Trumpets in C Major, RV 537, by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)**

The year 1703 saw both the priestly ordination of Venetian composer Antonio Lucio Vivaldi and the beginning of his long association as a violin teacher with the *Ospedale della Pietà*, a convent and school in Venice for orphaned and abandoned girls. His lifelong battle with what was then called a "chest ailment," but is now thought to have been asthma, cut his career as a priest short because he struggled for breath throughout the few times he celebrated mass.

In 1723, the governors of the school decreed that Vivaldi should in the future provide two new concertos each month and, if not in Venice to deliver them, he was to send them by post at no cost to the school! With at least four sets of his concertos already published in Amsterdam (and some in both London and Paris), Vivaldi was already famous throughout Europe. But his devotion to the school and love of the concerto form led him to follow his orders. In fact, he often provided more than the required number of concertos. The more than 500 concertos composed over his lifetime once led a rather unkindly critic to say that Vivaldi had not composed hundreds of concertos but rather composed the same concerto hundreds of times. It is true that he borrowed movements from prior works of his own for "new" works, but highly-revered Johann Sebastian Bach did the same thing! Very few have ever complained about Bach's autoplagiarism, so it seems a bit unfair to apply the judgment to Vivaldi's work.

One of the concertos that stands alone is his Concerto in C Major for Two Trumpets, Strings and Continuo. Very little is known about its provenance, and it wasn't until 1950 that the work was published. Trumpeters around the world lament the fact that Vivaldi never left behind – at least as far as we know – a concerto for a solo trumpet, but they are certainly happy to have the Two-Trumpet Concerto.

The work consists of three movements, although the Largo, or slow, middle movement is but six measures long and only serves as a bridge between the two joyful and almost heroic outer movements. These two movements are both marked Allegro, or fast, and act as supreme tests for the trumpet duo and their technique.

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### **Concerto for Two Trumpets, by Carl Roskott (1953-2008), arranged by Jan Bach**

Using notes from Ronald Modell and Jerrold Zar:

Carl Roskott had a distinguished career as an orchestra conductor, beginning at age 15 with the Peabody Symphony Orchestra at the Peabody Conservatory of Music (Baltimore). Among many subsequent appearances as conductor he was music director of the Northern Illinois University Philharmonic from 1980 to 1991. He won many conducting awards, including the 1980 *Downbeat Magazine* Award for Best Symphony Orchestra shortly after coming to NIU.

His orchestral compositions include symphonies and concertos, including the *Concerto for Two Trumpets* performed today.

The *Concerto for Two Trumpets* had its premiere performance at the 1985 International Trumpet Guild

conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The first and second trumpet soloists were Northern Illinois University Professor Ronald Modell and Professor Betty Scott from the University of Missouri, respectively. NIU Professor Stephen Squires provided piano accompaniment, as orchestral parts had not yet been written. The performance received a fine reception by the audience of nearly 1,000 trumpet players from around the world.

The concerto is written in the style of both Béla Bartók and Gustav Mahler. It contains a lot of call and response, and dovetailing in the most technical sections, and is a challenging piece for trumpeters to perform. The second performance was given in Springfield, Illinois, for Governor Jim Thompson in 1986. The piece was arranged for soloists and orchestra by NIU Professor Jan Bach.

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## **Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27, by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

Today many of us only consider Sergei Rachmaninoff a Russian composer. But, like Leonard Bernstein, he was regarded as a composer, a conductor, and a concert pianist. And, also like Bernstein, he constantly fought for time to compose. When he realized that the chief conductor position at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in the early 1900s distracted him from fulfilling what he was certain was his God-given destiny, he quit and moved his small family to Dresden, Germany. He was running from more than just distraction, though. A fear of his family being caught up in the fast-developing political turmoil that would soon grip all Russia and turn the Czar's empire blood red also motivated him to move and move quickly.

Strangely, the fear he felt in Moscow didn't thwart his family's annual summer pilgrimage to his in-laws' estate, Ivanovka, in the

Russian countryside. It was here, surrounded by the peace and beauty of his homeland, that he composed most of his early works. And it was here, between 1906 and 1907, that he gathered the courage to complete his Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27. He had suffered a terrible bout of depression and questioned his talents as a symphonist after what many considered an utter disaster at the 1897 première of his First Symphony.

There are very few works in the orchestral repertoire that exude more romanticism in music. Like his countryman Tchaikovsky's symphonies, Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony lays out countless moments of ravishing, mostly melancholic, melody. Rachmaninoff's detractors believe this symphony to be too sickly sweet, but perhaps it is this overtly emotional display and sweetness that has brought so many non-classical listeners into the fold.

The hour-long work was victim to considerable editing and cuts in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, it was whittled down to 35 minutes in some revisions! Fortunately, though, the cuts have been restored and the work is now usually performed as originally intended by the composer.

The four-movement Second Symphony was premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia, on February 8, 1908, with the composer conducting, and is scored for full orchestra with three flutes (the third doubling on piccolo), three oboes (the third doubling on cor anglais), two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, and a large complement of strings.

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