

Oakville Symphony Program Notes

May 7 & 8, 2022 at the Oakville Centre

Featuring guest conductor Geneviève Leclair and guest artist Leslie Ashworth

Francis Haworth (1905 – 1994): *Avalon* Concert Overture

Haworth was self-educated in music. He taught in schools in England and the West Indies, then was employed in radio in Jamaica, before moving to Canada in 1956. Here he worked for the CBC and contributed to the *Globe and Mail* and other media. Haworth described his own compositions as ‘community music’. The *Avalon* overture was written in 1936.

Karl Stamitz (1745 – 1801): Concerto for viola in D major

I: Allegro non troppo II: Andante moderato III: Rondo

Born in Mannheim, Stamitz played violin in the orchestra there for some years before moving to Paris, where this concerto was composed in 1774. Stamitz travelled often throughout Europe giving virtuoso concerts while also composing prolifically – he wrote about 50 symphonies and 60 concertos, very few of which are performed today. Despite his early fame, Stamitz died in poverty.

The viola repertoire is relatively limited, and concertos, particularly in the 18th century, were most often written for other instruments. However, this particular piece has endured to become a popular choice for contemporary violists. The orchestration is unusual, with two clarinets and two horns as the only wind instruments, and two separate parts for the orchestral violas. The more conventional flutes, oboes and bassoons are absent. This arrangement might be to provide a warmer tonality, to match the soloist.

In the first movement, a long orchestral introduction provides two main themes. There follows a series of dialogues between the orchestral strings and the soloist, with some technical demands on the latter. The original cadenza has not survived, and players can choose from an array of composed solos or create their own.

The second movement is languid and darker, mostly in the middle and lower registers of the viola, but later becoming higher. There are interesting major-to-minor key modulations.

The final rondo movement is energetic, and again features orchestra-soloist dialogue. The viola initiates with the rondo theme, which is repeated by the orchestra. The device of major to minor variations is used again, but always returning to a re-statement of the opening theme.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827): Symphony No. 6 in F, Op. 68 (“Pastoral”)

Written in 1807-08, and inspired by frequent country walks near Vienna, this is the only one of Beethoven’s nine symphonies that has a programmatic basis, with a tone poem format that was adopted by many later composers in the 19th century. Beethoven indicated that the music’s meaning would be obvious to anyone with a sense of country life, but he nevertheless provided interpretive titles for the five movements:

I: Allegro ma non troppo. "Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the country". The whole of the first movement is based on its opening 4-bar phrase, which pops in and out of focus – like the play of light and shade in nature. In one section, Beethoven manages to repeat the rhythm of the 5 notes in the movement's second bar (*da didi da da*) 80 times without interruption while still retaining the listener's interest.

II: Andante molto mosso. "Scene by the brook". In addition to the movement of water, we later hear chirping insects (from the violins), the quail (oboe), nightingale (flute) and cuckoo (clarinet).

III: Allegro. "Merry gathering of country folk". This movement assumes the role of the traditional symphonic *scherzo*, with rustic band tunes and stomping dance steps. The jollity is interrupted without pause by the storm in the next movement.

IV: Allegro. "Thunderstorm, tempest". There is a period of suspense before the storm breaks, with wind gusts, raindrops, and then thunder, lightning and high wind (*piccolo*).

V: Allegretto. "Shepherd's song: happy, thankful feelings after the storm". Continuing again without a pause, the dissipating thunder is answered by the shepherd's pipe (clarinet) and a horn. (Beethoven actually observed shepherd's pipes in use but could not hear them because of his increasing deafness). The finale is a hymn of thanks for Nature's gifts.

Program notes © Stephen Walter