

Oakville Symphony Program Notes

November 5 & 6, 2022 at the Oakville Centre

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958): English Folk Songs Suite (1923)

Premiered in 1923, the piece was originally composed for the very popular military bands of early 20th century England. The version we hear today was orchestrated a year later by his pupil Gordon Jacob in a style very close to Ralph's orchestrations.

The three movements contain not only the tunes mentioned in the title, but also other famous melodies as *Dives and Lazarus*, *Pretty Caroline*, *Green Bushes*, *Blow Away the Morning Dew*, *High Germany* and more. The composer skillfully presents these themes simultaneously or juxtaposed in clever ways without affecting the simplicity of the mood and the pastoral atmosphere of the tunes. These melodies were known to the composer thanks to the field recordings made in the first decade of the 1900's a practice that not only served to create a historical archive but also as inspiration to many of Vaughan William's works.

by Lorenzo Guggenheim

Anna Clyne: PIVOT (2021) *Canadian premiere*

b. 1980

"PIVOT is inspired by my experiences at the Edinburgh Festival where I enjoyed an array of fantastic performances across the arts. It is this variety that I have tried to capture in PIVOT which, as the title suggests, pivots from one experience to another. The Pivot is also a former name of the 200-year-old folk music venue and pub in Edinburgh, The Royal Oak.

PIVOT quotes fragments of The Flowers of Edinburgh, a traditional fiddle tune of eighteenth century Scottish lineage that is also prominent in American fiddle music and thus bridges between Edinburgh and St. Louis, where this music was premiered. Thank you to Aidan O'Rourke for his guidance on folk fiddle bowings and ornaments, which are incorporated into PIVOT."

by Anna Clyne

Joseph Haydn: Symphony No. 104 in D major, "London" (1794)

1732–1809

Haydn made two visits to London (1791–92 and 1794–95) and composed 12 symphonies for performances there. Symphony No. 104 formed part of his benefit farewell concert in 1795 and is in fact the last of his prodigious symphonic output. By this time, Haydn had become famous, and he was rewarded handsomely for his efforts by packed concert audiences of affluent patrons.

A stark opening fanfare begins the proceedings, followed by a subdued slow section in the minor key, with further fanfare interjections. The allegro begins gently, and then a lively theme

in D major forms the rest of the movement. There is a sedate and peaceful melody in the second movement. Its middle section features intermittent comments by the flute and other woodwinds in D minor, before being overtaken by the strings in the major key once again. The third movement minuet is quite formal but includes a contrasting trio with brief solos for the bassoons and other winds.

The final movement is based on a Croatian folk tune which Haydn may have heard while living in Austria, but there is also some resemblance to merchants' street cries ("*Hot cross buns*", "*Live cod*") that could be heard in the English capital, and this is why Number 104 in particular has become known as *the* London Symphony.

by © Stephen Walter

Edward Elgar: Cello Concerto in E minor, op. 85 (1919) 1857–1934

The World War I years took their toll on Elgar: he was cut off from the friendship of European composers such as Richard Strauss, and many other acquaintances of his were lost in the war. His wife died in 1920, and this essentially signalled the end of Elgar's compositional career. The cello concerto was thus one of his last works, being completed in 1919.

Unusually for a concerto, it has the traditional four movements of a symphony (instead of the conventional three for a concerto), and they are all played without a break. Despite this symphonic approach, there is a general feeling of restrained chamber music, with considerable interchange between the soloist and groups and individual players in the orchestra. Although this concerto was initially not well received by Elgar's many admirers, it was later popularized through the famous performances and recording by Jacqueline du Pré, with Barbirolli conducting.

The first movement is introduced by a solo recitative that also forms a link passage between the first and second movements, between the third and fourth movements, and which also appears in the final coda. The second movement is essentially a scherzo in form of a perpetual motion theme. The *adagio* features a mournful solo. The finale begins with a brief explosion of energy in the orchestra, but the soloist slows the pace while modifying the orchestral theme. The main portion of the movement has a sonata form.

Occasionally we are reminded of Elgar's more familiar, lively style, such as in *Pomp and Circumstance*, but overall, this is an introspective work that bears the mark of a man who has recently endured much suffering.

by © Stephen Walter