

Oakville Symphony Program Notes

February 4 & 5, 2023 at the Oakville Centre



Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713):

Concerto Grosso in G minor op. 6, No. 8 “Christmas Concerto” (1690)

Arcangelo Corelli is not a usual name in symphonic orchestras' concerts. This is not because of the quality of his works, which are of the highest calibre, but because orchestras like ours are rooted in a tradition that is built from the classicism of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. Corelli was an exponent of the musical baroque, a generation earlier than Johann Sebastian Bach. He was extremely influential during his lifetime as a composer and most interestingly, one of the first composers to be famous as such. He only published six sets of works, but they were interpreted and admired even after his own time. For example, the concerto we will hear today is part of a set of twelve, which were utterly famous in Europe and especially in England well into the 19th Century.

The “Christmas Concerto” is known as such as it bears the subtitle *fatto per la notte di Natale* (“made for Christmas Eve”). His masterful op. 6 set the standard for the concerto grosso with two violins and a cello as soloists (the *concertino*) that alternate with the larger group of strings (the *ripieno*). The interchange between these two groups can be compared to the chiaroscuro technique present in paintings of the time, where light and dark elements are contrasted to great effect. In the concerto grosso, there also was the *continuo*, which is the bass line that drives the harmony, and for which today we have the cellos, basses, one bassoon and the harpsichord. At the time they also used the lute, the oboe, organ and harp for this role.

Corelli was a tremendously influential figure in music. Every contemporary of his borrowed his new style and made it so commonplace that today we think of Corelli's music as being perhaps predictable. But this is only due to the amount of imitation it suffered consequently. The work is presented in six movements, the first five are relatively short, each presenting a different effect and mood. The final and longest one, the *Pastorale*, is a rare addition, perhaps related to the ceremonious occasion for which it was written.

by Lorenzo Guggenheim ©

Franz Anton Hoffmeister (1754-1812):

Viola Concerto in D major (ca. 1790)



Franz Anton Hoffmeister was born in Rothenburg am Neckar (Further Austria) in May 1754. He travelled to Vienna when he was only 14 to study law. However, inspired by the rich life of the city he decided to dedicate his life to music after his graduation. He succeeded as an

incredibly prolific composer, with more than 50 symphonies, dozens of concertos (at least 25 written for the flute), 8 operas and large quantities of chamber works. He was also well known for his career as a businessman in the rising music publishing world of Vienna. In the catalogue of his firm *F. A Hoffmeister & Co.* he counted with works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and other major composers. However, after 1791 he dropped the business and made composition his main priority.

His Viola Concerto in D major is one of the most performed works for the instrument, for its simple beauty but also because of the lack of concertos written for the instrument in the classical period. As the best example of a classical concerto for the viola, it has become an obligatory piece in viola auditions and competitions, allowing performers to show the characteristics of the classical style in music written specifically for their instrument.

There is not much certainty about the circumstances surrounding the composition of the concerto other than the fact that it was offered for sale on a music catalogue in 1799. Nonetheless, the piece was likely composed during the late 1780s or early 1790s. This work, written in the typical three movement alternation of fast-slow-fast movements, is nurtured by a constant outpouring of beautiful melodies that are intertwined with the appearance of the virtuosity of the viola.

The first movement is structured in the typical sonata form of concertos where the themes are first introduced by the orchestra and later by the soloist. The second movement is a moving Adagio with delicate melodies, in three sections (rounded binary form). For the finale, Hoffmeister chooses a danceable Rondo, which intercedes a refrain (also known as a “catchy tune”) in between each new section.

by Lorenzo Guggenheim ©



**Antonin Dvořák: Symphony No. 8 in G major (1899)
1841-1904**

This symphony was written in 1899, three years before the famous 9th (the *New World*). It is firmly rooted in the Slavonic idiom, particularly reflecting Dvorak's native region of Bohemia. At the time, Dvorak was being pressured by his publishers to write a second set of Slavonic Dances for piano, and not to spend his time in composing supposedly “less profitable” orchestral works. Nevertheless, Dvorak, who was enjoying great success in Russia and London as well as in his native Czechoslovakia, was determined to create a new symphony. The resulting 8th is intensely tuneful, and has the character of a symphonic poem or rhapsody. The ambience created is pastoral, replete with suggestions of rural sights and sounds – particularly birdcalls.

The first movement begins in a melancholy way on lower register instruments, followed by a "chirping" theme heard first on the flute, and which later comes to dominate the movement more forcefully. There are similar contrasts in the *adagio* between a solemn triplet motif in the strings, light birdcalls in the flutes and oboes, and a ponderous clarinet duet which recalls the opening of the first movement. All this gives way to a scene of rustic merrymaking, suggested first by the strings.

The *allegretto* has the form of a scherzo and trio in a slow waltz tempo, with alternation of the melodic and accompanying instruments part way through. There is also a coda in double time. The final *allegro* is, unusually for Dvorak, mainly a series of variations on two distinct themes in turn. With its folk tune character, this last movement perhaps represents a passing concession by Dvorak to his publishers' request for more Slavonic Dances. The movement is announced unconventionally by a trumpet fanfare, which recurs even more dramatically later on. There is again an exuberant coda to bring the entire work to a close.

by Stephen Walter ©