

Classics 4: Timeless Treasures Program Notes



Lyric for Strings

George Walker

Born in Washington, D.C., June 27, 1922; died in Montclair, New Jersey, August 23, 2018

George Walker's long life consisted of a string of outstanding achievements. After graduating from Oberlin College as a piano and organ student, he studied at the Curtis Institute of Music—composition with Rose Scalero, teacher of Samuel Barber, and piano with Rudolf Serkin—and became the school's first African-American graduate. He was also the first black instrumentalist to give a recital—his debut—at New York's Town Hall and to appear as a soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He toured Europe under the auspices of National Concert Artists—their first African-American instrumentalist—then began teaching before beginning his doctoral studies at

Eastman. Awarded Fulbright and John Hay Whitney fellowships (the Whitney's first composer recipient), Walker studied in Paris with the renowned Nadia Boulanger.

Walker taught at the Dalcroze School of Music, the New School for Social Research, Smith College (first black tenure recipient), University of Colorado, Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University, and University of Delaware. His longest professorship, however, was at Rutgers University (1969–92), where he chaired the music department.

Composing remained an equally important facet of Walker's career, evidenced by over ninety published works to his credit, ranging from orchestral pieces and chamber music to choral works, songs, and piano pieces. Highlighting Walker's remarkable list of awards and honors is the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in Music—he was the first African-American composer so honored—for his *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Walker also received commissions from myriad other organizations, such as the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Kennedy Center.

As recently as 2013 Walker was still having works premiered: his *Movements for Cello and Orchestra* that November with the Sinfonia da Camera led by Ian Hobson at the University of Illinois and his *Bleu for Violin Unaccompanied* at the Library of Congress the previous April. In 2012 the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra premiered his Sinfonia No. 4, "Strands," a joint commission with the Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and National symphonies. That May he gave the commencement address at the Eastman School of Music, also receiving an honorary doctoral

degree where he had already earned a doctorate as a student over half a century earlier. Later that month he received the prestigious Aaron Copland Award from ASCAP.

Lyric for Strings originated as the second movement of Walker's String Quartet No. 1, written in 1946 after he graduated from Curtis and dedicated to his grandmother, who had recently died. Under the title *Lament*, the piece received its premiere that year on a radio concert of Curtis's student orchestra conducted by Seymour Lipkin. The official premiere took place the following year at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., by the National Gallery Orchestra conducted by Richard Bales. Retitled at the request of the publisher, *Lyric for Strings* became one of the most frequently performed pieces by a living American composer.

The piece's origin as a slow movement in a string quartet and its poignant strains tinged with Romanticism bring to mind Barber's famous *Adagio for Strings* and the Curtis connection of both composers. Walker's *Lyric for Strings*, however, stands beautifully on its own. Falling motives and sustained tones set a mournful mood at the outset. The motion increases with contrapuntal lines weaving their way over a sustained pedal tone until gentle chordal iterations briefly arrest the flow. The resumption of the entwined lyrical lines eventually comes to an impassioned peak, now with low, jabbing chordal interjections of utter anguish. As the passage ebbs and quiet chords sound again, the gentle earlier flow resumes. The piece concludes somberly yet with a sense of peace.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for strings



Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major, op. 11

Richard Strauss

Born in Munich, June 11, 1864; died in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, September 8, 1949

Franz Strauss, leading horn player of the Munich Court Orchestra, was known as one of the finest horn players in Europe. It was natural that the young Richard Strauss would show an affinity for his father's instrument. As a youth of fourteen Richard dedicated two pieces to his father: the song "Ein Alpenhorn hör' ich schallen" (I hear an Alphon resounding), for soprano and piano with a fiendishly difficult obbligato horn part; and *Introduction, Theme, and Variations* for horn and piano. A concerto for the instrument seemed a foregone conclusion, but when

Strauss completed his First Horn Concerto in 1883, he dedicated it to Oscar Franz, Dresden horn virtuoso and author of a famous method book.

Though proud of his son's achievement, Richard's father never played the Concerto in public, considering the recurring high notes too risky. He frequently played it in family circles, however,

and even coached a student to play the Concerto in public in Munich in 1883. The first public performance with orchestra was given neither by Franz Strauss nor Oscar Franz, but by Gustav Leinhos and the Meiningen Orchestra conducted by Hans von Bülow on March 4, 1885. Strauss liked Leinhos's tone quality, which was much like his father's own, and he wrote to his father that Leinhos possessed what he considered a rare quality in horn players—"colossal sureness."

Although Strauss was only nineteen when the Concerto was completed, the work shows great originality. In three short and continuous movements, the work abandons traditional sonata form, and its themes migrate from one movement to the next in a fashion developed and exploited by Liszt and others. The opening flourish of the solo horn becomes transformed into the main theme of the rondo finale, the lyrical theme from the first movement appears in the middle of the slow movement, and the opening of the slow movement is briefly alluded to near the end of the last movement. Further, the brief rising "hunting-horn" figure introduced in the orchestra's first section reappears throughout, most saliently in the passage that joins the slow movement and the finale. With its appealing, memorable themes and concise writing the First Concerto fully warrants its popularity and it continues to challenge the best of present-day horn virtuosos.

—@Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Symphony No. 7 in A major, op. 92

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, December 16? (baptized December 17), 1770; died in Vienna, March 26, 1827

Beethoven began composing his celebrated A major Symphony in 1811, completing it in May of the following year. He conducted the premiere in Vienna on December 8, 1813, at a crowd-pleasing concert that also featured his *Wellington's Victory* and two marches played by an automatic trumpeter and panharmonicon (a colossal mechanical instrument that imitated orchestral sounds). These machines had been invented by Johann Mälzel, famous for his refinement and patenting of the metronome. Though the concert was a success both musically and financially, the Seventh Symphony could hardly compete with the program's more spectacular companion pieces. Nevertheless, the Symphony was well received, and the Allegretto had to be encoored on the spot—such repetition of individual movements even before the performance of the work was completed was a common practice in the days before recordings. The entire performance was repeated on December 12, much to Beethoven's pleasure.



Portrait by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1820

Composer and violinist Louis Spohr was present and later wrote of “Beethoven’s uncertain and sometimes ludicrous conducting.” The composer would crouch well beneath the music stand in soft passages and leap into the air for loud ones. Because of Beethoven’s advanced state of deafness these moves were occasionally ill-timed, demonstrating again that the tempos he heard in his head were hard to realize. His metronome markings have caused great debate in this regard.

The Symphony’s outward simplicity and *joie de vivre* mask a wealth of details that proclaim Beethoven’s sophisticated and ingenious art of construction. At the time of composition, the slow introduction was one of the longest in the repertoire. It serves to present the harmonic vocabulary for the entire Symphony—Beethoven takes third-related excursions to keys outside the home key’s normal sphere of influence. The ensuing Vivace also contains brief passages in keys quite removed from the main tonality. Another unusual feature is the Symphony’s forgoing of a real slow movement, presenting instead an Allegretto for the second movement. Beethoven outdid himself in the third movement, Presto, which is an elaboration of the scherzo-trio idea, containing not one but two “middle” sections, in the form A-B-A-B-A-coda. His brief coda alludes to the B section yet a *third* time as if to say jokingly, “Here we go again,” but then the movement is suddenly over.

But perhaps the most salient elements of the Seventh Symphony are rhythmic, leading Wagner to describe the work as the “Apotheosis of the Dance.” Beethoven was fascinated with rhythmic devices, sometimes to the exclusion of all other factors, including melody. A prime example occurs in the first movement in the bridge between the introduction and the Vivace, where for nine full bars the only note sounded is a reiterated E, echoed by winds and strings in prolonged suspense. The Vivace itself contains several themes, almost all permeated by the contagious germinal dotted rhythm.

The second movement, Allegretto, opens with a passage also predominantly rhythmic. The subsequent countermelodies and contrasting sections render the movement beautiful, yet the incessant rhythmic “cell” of the opening is almost always present side by side with the lyric subjects. The rhythmic momentum accumulated in the Presto and Allegro con brio is no less masterful for being self-evident. Again Wagner’s reference to the dance comes to mind. The Symphony, in fact, has been choreographed on several occasions—by Massine, Isadora Duncan, and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo.

To each his or her own, however: the composer Vincent d’Indy heard and imagined the Seventh Symphony as “nothing else than a pastoral symphony. The rhythm of the piece has nothing of the dance about it; it would seem, rather, to come from the song of a bird.”

With all the superlatives that are now heaped upon the Seventh Symphony, it is incredible—and smile provoking—to look back on a time when it was not so universally admired. The following appeared in the London *Harmonicon* in 1825 (quoted in Slonimsky’s *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, 1953):

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony . . . is a composition in which the author has indulged in a great deal of disagreeable eccentricity. Often as we now have heard it performed, we cannot yet discover any design in it, neither can we trace any connection in its parts. Altogether, it seems to have been intended as some kind of enigma—we had almost said a hoax.

—©Jane Vial Jaffe

Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Find composition details, parts / movement information and albums that contain performances of Horn Concerto No. 1 in E flat on AllMusic. Strauss was only 18 and had yet to develop his own distinctive style when he completed his first horn concerto in 1883. He wrote it for his father, a professional horn player, but the elder Strauss found the work too difficult. Today's soloists, ironically, find it much easier than the horn concerto Strauss wrote at the opposite end of his life. Schumann is the dominant influence here; it's hard not to detect a bit of the earlier composer's *Konzertstück* for four horns, and other works, in some of Strauss' more declamatory passages, especially the beginning. Concerto for Horn No. 1, in E-Flat Major, Op. 11 Concert band [Score] Ludwig Music Publishing. By Richard Strauss, Philip Farkas, John Boyd. For Horn Solo with Band Accompaniment. Concert Band. Level: 5. Score. Published by Ludwig Music Publishing. 11 French Horn and Piano IMC (International Music Co.) By Richard Strauss. Horn and piano: (Horn in F unless otherwise specified). Published by International Music Co. \$12.50 - See more - Buy online Pre-shipment lead time: 1 to 2 weeks. Similar items. Details. Details. Concerto for Horn No. 1 in E-flat, Op. As this work was first published before 1924 or failed to meet notice or renewal requirements to secure statutory copyright with no "restoration" under the GATT amendments, it is very likely to be public domain in the USA as well. Please obey the copyright laws of your country. IMSLP does not assume any sort of legal responsibility or liability for the consequences of downloading files that are not in the public domain in your country. Movements/Sections/Mov'ts/Sec's. 3 movements. I-Catalogue Number/Cat. No. IRS 39. Key. E-flat major. Movements/Sections/Mov'ts/Sec's. 3 movements