

Program Notes by Michael Keelan (unless otherwise noted)

Anna Clyne - *Within Her Arms* for string orchestra (2009)

Anna Clyne was born in London and is composer-in-residence for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. She previously held similar roles at the Chicago and Baltimore Symphonies, L'Orchestre national d'Île-de-France, and most recently the Berkeley Symphony. Her music is widely performed by major ensembles internationally, and is endorsed by conductors Riccardo Muti, Leonard Slatkin, and Esa-Pekka Salonen. Her double violin concerto, *Prince of Clouds*, was a Grammy nominee for Best Classical Composition in 2015, and 2019 brought a concerto for her own instrument, the cello. She is on the faculty of Mannes/The New School, and a mentor composer for the Orchestra of St. Luke's Inaugural DeGaetano Composer Institute.

Within Her Arms is Clyne's only music for string orchestra, specifically fifteen solo players. It is an elegy for her mother, premièred by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in April 2009. She included a poem of the Buddhist monk and writer Thich Nhat Hanh:

*Earth will keep you tight within her arms dear one—
So that tomorrow you will be transformed into flowers—
This flower smiling quietly in this morning field—
This morning you will weep no more dear one—
For we have gone through too deep a night.
This morning, yes, this morning, I kneel down on the green grass—
And I notice your presence.
Flowers, that speak to me in silence.
The message of love and understanding has indeed come.*

Bruch - Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26 (1865-1867)

There was never a better case for revising your work than Max Bruch's first concerto. His constant dissatisfaction with it led him to refine it further and further, under the counsel of great violinists, until it became an evergreen concert favorite.

Bruch was working at the court of Mannheim in 1864, before Germany was unified as a nation. He was still in his twenties and historically positioned to become a major German composer; Mendelssohn and Schumann had died, and Brahms was just ascending. Bruch was not a violinist, and the instrument is notoriously forbidding for composers not familiar with details of its playing technique. A concerto usually employs the full range of an instrument's capabilities, so Bruch asked the court concertmaster for help. It still took over a year to finish the first version, by which time the composer had moved on to Koblenz on the Rhine. A violin professor played this first version in April of 1866 with Bruch conducting. But that was just the start of the odyssey.

Now Bruch enlisted Joseph Joachim, only seven years older but a well-established virtuoso violinist. Joachim was also a skilled composer and could give advice on structure and form besides the writing for the violin. The two corresponded with details on what changes to make. Although Bruch had no problem acknowledging the advice he was given, he later forbade publication of Joachim's main reply, fearing people would say "he (i.e. Bruch) probably never did anything alone throughout his entire life"(!) At this point, patronizing criticism of the concerto from conductor Hermann Levi only stirred Bruch's doubts ("... I still have the distinct feeling that I am standing on very insecure ground"). Another notable virtuoso, Ferdinand David, weighed in, and the final version was played by Joseph Joachim in 1868, who took it on tour in multiple German cities. Bruch dedicated the score to him "in respect," which was changed in Joachim's handwriting to "friendship."

It might be surprising, for all the advice Bruch received, that the concerto turned out to be the shortest by duration in the Romantic-era repertoire, lasting under 25 minutes. Perhaps cutting out the excess and leaving only the best material was one effect of the revisions. This may also have helped its popularity, combined with undeniable tunefulness, not surprising from a composer who declared that "melody is the soul of music." In a mistake to be repeated by other famous composers, Bruch sold the publication rights for a flat fee, and was thus unable to reap the financial benefits of the music's permanent success. That

was particularly stinging in light of his long life- Bruch lived until 1920- and his repeated attempts to write a comparable “hit” for the violin.

Many of those other violin works are excellent, but none captured the affections of players and listeners quite like this concerto (with the near exception of the *Scottish Fantasy*). As Bruch aged and grew curmudgeonly, he forbade auditioning violinists from playing the first concerto. In one letter, he describes with hapless fury how players in Italy seemed to be waiting on street corners ready to break into the inescapable g minor whenever he appeared. After Germany’s defeat in WWI caused financial ruin, he tried to sell the concerto’s autograph manuscript to raise money. A pair of American musical sisters promised to arrange the sale, but instead held onto the document for decades after Bruch’s death, and he didn’t benefit a *pfennig* (penny). It is now in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Beethoven - Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92 (1811-1812)

If the basis of music is song and dance, Beethoven’s seventh symphony sits firmly in the second category. Much of the symphony is built of relatively simple motives (short groups of notes) combined with harmonic surprises (complementary notes). An architectural analogy might be a limestone or brick building; i.e. simple component motives- providing striking and powerful perspectives based on the angle from which you view it (the harmonic underpinning). And indeed the word “monumental” is sometimes applied to the symphony, describing a quality that an orchestra captures better than perhaps any other medium.

The symphony was first played on a benefit concert for wounded soldiers of the Napoleonic wars, in which Beethoven’s Austria and many other countries were pitted against France. As such, the program included another Beethoven “symphony,” *Wellington’s Victory*, referring to a different British win over Napoleon. While that piece is rarely performed any more, and generally regarded as a noisy potboiler, the seventh symphony rode the coattails of its success. In another English connection, Beethoven was at work on folksong settings of melodies of the British Isles in the early 1810s. One accompanying figure became the main violin motive of the symphony’s finale.

As organized as that sounds, Beethoven’s life was generally in turmoil at this time (1811-13). His hearing had markedly deteriorated, and he tried to break up his brother’s marriage with legal force on ostensibly moral grounds. He even went missing for a few weeks, not a hard thing to manage for an isolated bachelor in that era of slow communications. Back in Vienna by the end of 1811, he had finished the symphony (along with parts of the eighth) by April 1812. Disorder persisted into 1813, a year in which he wrote no major music. Luckily, Johann Maelzel, inventor of the metronome, the famous box that clicks in time to a musician’s practice, proposed both the concert and idea for *Wellington’s Victory*.

The concert was December 8, 1813, and included in the orchestra a number of musical luminaries- Moscheles, the virtuoso pianist; Spohr, one of the most prominent living composers and violinists; Schuppanzigh, leader of the quartet that premièred Beethoven’s string works; and even Hummel, Mozart’s greatest student, and Salieri, the aged rival of Mozart, in the percussion section. Beethoven himself conducted, and a mechanical trumpet invention of Maelzel played interludes. It was a solid triumph, and Beethoven published a carefully worded thank-you letter in the newspaper giving credit to his colleagues for their part in the success. This gesture belies the common notion of Beethoven as a self-centered boor.

In the seventh symphony, the second movement was particularly applauded and encored, maybe partially because its march-like quality resonated with the military theme of the concert. But it’s an austere march, interspersed with more consoling textures. The other three movements, after the initial magisterial introduction, have a nearly relentless propulsion forward. The only exception is the noble “trio” (contrasting section, here repeated) of the scherzo, which makes a point of holding a single note as background.

Beethoven called the symphony one of his best pieces, a verdict with which posterity has agreed. The fact that it came right after a program (story) symphony, the sixth, meant that for a few generations commentators tried to attach a program to the seventh also, coming up with far-fetched ideas. One reading of the whole piece as a revolutionary uprising and subsequent trial of the instigators (surely remembering France) is especially elaborate. Beethoven eventually got annoyed about those attempts. He continued conducting the symphony on other occasions and as late as 1819, by which time his

hearing was too far gone for him to be very effective. The symphony consistently ranks as a favorite among conductors for its listener appeal and rhythmic drive.