

Lyricism and Timeless Beauty
November 19 & 20, 2011

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872 – 1958)

Five Variants of “Dives and Lazarus”

Richard Strauss
(1864 – 1949)

Horn Concerto No. 2 in E-Flat Major

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Rondo. Allegro molto

Movements played without pause.

Michael Yopp, horn

INTERMISSION

Vincenzo Bellini
(1801 – 1835)

Oboe Concerto in E-Flat Major

- I. Maestoso e deciso
- II. Larghetto cantabile
- III. Allegro polonaise

Movements played without pause.

Guy Dutra-Silviera, oboe

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756 – 1791)

Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550

- I. Molto allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Menuetto: Allegretto
- IV. Allegro assai

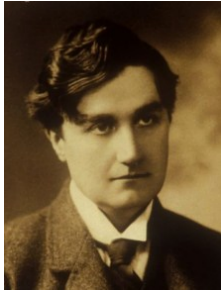
Overview: Ralph Vaughan Williams

Born: October 12, 1872, in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, England

Died: August 26, 1958, in London, England

Work Composed: 1939

Why It Matters: *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* is an overlooked piece in the exceptional output of an overlooked composer. Vaughan Williams tends to be identified with his *Fantasia on Greensleeves* and *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, to the extent of overlooking the best symphonic cycle from England and other excellent pieces.



But in the next world I shan't be doing music, with all the striving and disappointments. I shall be being it.—Ralph Vaughan Williams

In 1939, Ralph Vaughan Williams received a commission from the World's Fair in New York City to compose one of several new works to celebrate the event. He set to work right away, choosing the haunting folk tune “Dives and Lazarus” for a series of five variations. The tune is actually known by at least six different names in different regions of England, Scotland and Ireland. Setting the theme in B Minor with excursions into modal harmonies, Vaughan Williams tended to stay in the home key but generated continued interest by highly diverse and often stunningly beautiful variations. The first performance of *Five Variants of Dives and Lazarus* took place in Carnegie Hall in June, 1939, with Sir Adrian Boult conducting. Boult was a leading champion of Vaughan Williams’ music, and also conducted the first performance in the United Kingdom in November of 1939.

About Ralph Vaughan Williams: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) displayed promise as a young composer but his talents developed rather late. Born in Gloucestershire on October 12, 1872, to the family of a vicar, Vaughan Williams’ early life was sadly impacted by his father’s death in 1875. His mother, great-granddaughter of renowned potter Josiah Wedgwood, took him to live at a Wedgwood family home in the North Downs. (He also had a rather famous great-uncle, scientist Charles Darwin.) Despite his privileged upbringing, Vaughan Williams never exploited his privilege and advocated all his life for democratic and egalitarian ideals.

His early music studies were a flop, as he tried and failed to learn the piano, “which I could never play, and the violin, which was my musical salvation.” He began his formal music studies at the Royal College of music, studying closely with Parry and Stanford, but left to study history and receive a Bachelor of Music degree at Cambridge. He returned to the Royal College to strike up a close friendship with composer Gustav Holst. The two of them would later lead England’s effort to preserve its folk music through recording, notation, and, like Bartok and Kodaly, incorporation into major concert hall works. After his second try at the Royal College, he left for Germany to study with Max Bruch, and then for France to study orchestration with Maurice Ravel, who was three years younger than Vaughan Williams but was producing the most exquisite new sounds from modern orchestras. Upon returning to England, he wrote *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, which placed him firmly in the center of England’s musical culture, but his early career would be interrupted by service in artillery and medical corps during World War I. Upon his return, he threw himself into music, conducting the Handel Society and the Bach Choir and teaching at the Royal College.

In the 1920s, Vaughan Williams’ music won audiences in Europe and the United States, and by the 1930s, he was regarded around the world as the dean of English composition. Still, Vaughan Williams was humble about his craft and troubled by his inability to write a successful opera. This is especially ironic, considering that his symphonic cycle of nine symphonies is the finest symphony cycle ever to emerge from England. Vaughan Williams never allowed his success to separate him

from the people of England whom he loved dearly, believing that “the composer must not shut himself up and think of art; he must live with his fellows and make his art an expression of the whole life of the community.”

Overview: Richard Strauss

Born: June 11, 1864, in Munich

Died: September 8, 1949, in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany

Work Composed: 1941 – 1943

Why It Matters: Strauss’ later works are a refreshing break from his monumental tone poems, with a neo-Classical lightness many would not associate with him. He wrote all of his horn works for his father, who was principal horn of the Royal Bavarian Court Orchestra in Munich, so this is very personal music.



Thirty years ago I was regarded as a rebel. I have lived long enough to find myself a classic.—
Richard Strauss

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was the first major composer after Mozart to bring the horn out from the shadows and promote it to a central musical figure. With a sensitivity to instrumental innovations, Wagner magnificently exploited the technical possibilities of the valved horn, which had been developed around 1820. From Wagner, the 19-year-old Richard Strauss found a model in 1883 for his *Horn Concerto No. 1 in E-Flat Major*, op. 11. Also a powerful influence was Strauss’ father, Franz, who was the first horn player of the Bavarian Court Opera. Franz initiated his son into the horn’s wealth of expression and color, immense tonal range, and technical tricks, saying, “Richard’s talent for composition comes from Almighty God, but his love, feeling, and sympathy for the horn come from me.”

Between 1883 and 1941, Strauss’ only composition featuring the horn was an *Andante* for horn and piano, the middle movement of an unfinished sonata, though his horn parts for the tone poems that defined his career were uniformly virtuosic. In his later career, he returned to Classical forms and to some of the musical ideals that were most important to him in his early life, so another horn concerto was a natural step. He completed the **Horn Concerto No. 2 in E-Flat Major** at the age of 78, immediately after completing his successful opera *Capriccio*. Strauss’ second horn concerto differs greatly from his first, however. Gone are the distinct roles of soloist and accompaniment, with the solo horn line and orchestral textures interwoven like a large-scale piece of chamber music. The concerto was premiered in August of 1943 by Gottfried von Freiberg, principal horn of the Vienna Philharmonic, with Karl Böhm conducting the Vienna Philharmonic.

About Richard Strauss: Born in Munich, Richard Strauss (1864 – 1949) was the only son of Bavarian Court Opera principal hornist Franz Strauss, who was also a composer. Teaching his son the fundamentals of music, Franz taught Richard to revere Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, but also shared his dislike for Wagner. Richard started studying piano at four years old, started composing two years later, and never received a formal musical education. In 1885, he succeeded Hans von Bülow, one of Strauss’ ardent champions, as principal conductor at Meiningen. He left a year later for Italy, which inspired him to write his first tone poem, *Aus Italien*. He returned to conduct the Munich Opera until his first major triumph as composer, *Don Juan* (1888). He would continue with great success, writing large-scale symphonic tone poems and operas and building on the traditions left by Mahler and Wagner. Despite his concerns and often outright opposition to the Nazis, he was appointed President of the Reichsmusikkammer in 1933, effectively making him the face of German music under the Nazis. Strauss held the post for two years, believing that he could

serve German music without serving the Reich itself. Deeply concerned for the Jewish members of his extended family, Strauss finally brought his uneasy relationship with the Nazis to a boil when he refused to condemn Stefan Zweig, a writer with whom he was working. Strauss was removed from his post and became something of an outcast until after the war. World War II left Strauss jaded and cynical. The sweeping and uniquely German style of his early works was no longer in him, so he turned to Classical forms and smaller-scale works in his later years. He would eventually outlast the shadow of the Nazis, be regarded as the greatest living German composer and the culmination of the Romantic Era, and would live out his last days composing in his quiet villa in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, just south of Munich—a region he loved and captured brilliantly in his *Alpine Symphony*.

Overview: Vincenzo Bellini

Born: November 3, 1801, in Catania, Sicily

Died: September 23, 1835, in Puteaux, France

Work Composed: 1823 approximately, while Bellini was still a student at the Naples Conservatory

Why It Matters: Bellini is primarily remembered as an opera composer, but he also composed delightful (yet overlooked) chamber music and solo pieces, of which the Oboe Concerto is the most characteristic of Bellini's future operatic style.



Two lines only, o my dear friend, to give you word about my health, which is at the breaking point from the great fatigue that I am experiencing because of having to compose the opera in a short time, and whose fault is that? That of my usual and original poet, the God of Sloth!—Vincenzo Bellini

In their student years, both Bellini and Donizetti would write wonderful instrumental music foreshadowing their mature operatic styles. The wildly popular operas of both of these composers would overshadow their instrumental compositions. For Italian composers in the eighteenth century, opera was everything.

Bellini's **Oboe Concerto in E-flat Major** was composed while he was still a student at the Naples Conservatory. Rather than the traditional three separate movements, Bellini opted for a short introduction, a Larghetto cantabile that sounds very much like one of his slower opera arias, and an Allegro polonaise that sounds very much like a virtuosic coda for one of his opera arias. Also in operatic style, the melody is almost always with the solo oboe. Bellini's writing for the oboe clearly demonstrates how knowledgeable the young composer was of the instrument's range of expression and technical capabilities. The concerto is, therefore, one of the most demanding yet enjoyable concerti for oboe.

About Vincenzo Bellini: Vincenzo Bellini (1801 – 1835) was born to a highly musical family in Sicily, and legend has it that he could sing an aria by Valentino Fioravanti at only eighteen months old. He left Sicily in 1819 to study at the Naples Conservatory and distinguished himself there. The Conservatory had a tradition of choosing one student each year to present a dramatic work to the public; they chose Bellini. After some initial successes that firmly established his reputation, he moved to Milan in 1827, where he started pushing the limits of Italian opera. For modern audiences, it may be a challenge to see what was so special about Bellini, with his often pedantic accompaniments, grandiloquent choruses and seemingly endless arias chock full of solo histrionics, but Bellini actually changed the course of opera. Italian opera composers of Bellini's day concerned themselves with writing great melodies and showcasing the circus of *prima donnas* that

were the celebrities of their day. Bellini retained all that was admirable in Italian melody but wrote more serious operas and tied the music more closely to the emotions of his characters, paving the way for Donizetti, Wagner, and Verdi to raise opera to a true dramatic art. Even Wagner, who could be virulently critical of Italian opera composers, described Bellini as “all heart.” Bellini would give the world only ten complete operas. His sudden death at only 34 from intestinal inflammation cut short an outpouring of innovation and creativity that defined Italian bel canto opera.

Overview: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

Work Composed: Summer, 1788

Why It Matters: Mozart’s final four symphonies are the pinnacle of his instrumental compositions, with a level of complexity and invention that would change the course of symphonic writing forever. The G Minor Symphony also contains a phrase that some scholars believe foreshadows the atonal harmonic language of Schoenberg.



I declare to you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by name. –Joseph Haydn, to Leopold Mozart.

Mozart’s **last three symphonies** appeared in quick succession during the summer of 1788. Mozart was in dire financial straits at the time. Four years previously he had still been a fashionable celebrity, both as a composer and a pianist, but in the meantime Viennese society had “dropped” him completely. The last three symphonies may perhaps have been Mozart’s last vain attempt to gain another foothold in the cultural life of Vienna.

Robert Schumann admired Mozart’s **Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K.550**, for its air of “Grecian ethereal grace.” Having no trumpets or timpani and only a single flute (instead of the customary two), the work nevertheless has a peculiarly dark tonal quality. Unlike the monumental C Major Symphony that would follow it, the G Minor is remarkably refined and subtle. There are no serious breaks from form, leaving the distinctiveness of this symphony to the remarkably charming themes and the refined chromaticism that Mozart used in his later compositions. There is, however, a most surprising phrase at the beginning of the development in the last movement, where Mozart uses every note of the chromatic scale (except G—the key of the piece!) without repeating any notes. Mozart must have been aware of this, and Beethoven adopted a similar idea in his Ninth Symphony. Many believe that this was a foreshadowing, if not the seed, of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone style that would emerge more than one hundred years later.

About Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) showed such a prodigious talent for music in his early childhood that his father, also a composer, dropped all other ambitions and devoted himself to educating the boy and exhibiting his accomplishments. Between ages six and fifteen, Mozart was on tour over half the time. By 1762, he was a virtuoso on the clavichord—an early keyboard instrument and predecessor of the piano—and soon became a good organist and violinist as well. He produced his first minuets at the age of six, and his first symphony just before his ninth birthday, his first oratorio at eleven, and his first opera at twelve. His final output would total more than 600 compositions. Much has already been said and studied in the popular media about Mozart’s roguish lifestyle and apprehension of conformity. It was this aspect of his personality that never won him the support of royalty or the church, which, at that time, was critical to any composer’s survival. As such, Mozart died young, ill, poor, and relatively unappreciated ... only to become the mostly widely acknowledged orchestral composer in history.