

Program Notes and Bios

Opening Night: A Vienna Soirée

Saturday, September 11, 2010 7:30 pm
Jones Hall

Hans Graf, conductor
***Frank Huang**, violin
Wayne Brooks, viola

J. Strauss Jr.	Overture to Die Fledermaus (The Bat), Opus 362
Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat major for Violin, Viola and Orchestra, K.364 I Allegro maestoso II Andante III Presto
J. Strauss Jr.	Perpetuum Mobile, Opus 257
J. Strauss Jr.	Annen-Polka, Opus 117
J. Strauss Jr.	An der schönen blauen Donau (On the Beautiful Blue Danube), Opus 314

There will be no intermission.

*Houston Symphony debut

OVERTURE TO DIE FLEDERMAUS (THE BAT), OPUS 362

Johann Strauss Jr.

Born: Oct 25, 1825, Vienna, Austria

Died: Jun 3, 1899, Vienna, Austria

Work composed: 1874

Recording: Herbert von Karajan conducting Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Sony DVD)

Instrumentation: pairs of flutes (one doubling piccolo), oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings

Although Johann Strauss Jr. is world-famous for dozens of waltzes, his fame as a composer of stage works rests largely on Die Fledermaus, the only genuine hit among his long string of operettas. The story tells of a masquerading couple who carry on little extra-marital romances behind the backs of their spouses, only to have their amours exposed after a night spent behind bars.

Its plot stems from a mid-19th-century Viennese farce that was adapted for the Parisian stage in 1872. Its string of charming melodies includes several tunes from the third act in which Rosalinda's husband and her lover both wind up in jail, the bubbling second-act waltz, and a mock-mournful oboe melody from the first-act Trio where Gabriel von Eisenstein tells his wife that he has to serve his jail term, without admitting that he is sneaking out to a fancy ball beforehand.

SINFONIA CONCERTANTE IN E-FLAT MAJOR FOR VIOLIN, VIOLA AND ORCHESTRA, K.364

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart

Born: Jan 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria

Died: Dec 5, 1791, Vienna Austria

Work composed: 1779-80

Recording: Arthur Grumiaux, violinist; Arrigo Pelliccia, violist; Sir Colin Davis conducting the London Symphony Orchestra (Philips)

Instrumentation: two oboes, two horns, strings

For all its beauty and elaborate detail, Mozart's Sinfonia concertante is something of a mystery piece in his vast legacy of compositions. The autograph manuscript has been lost and our knowledge of the work is based upon the first printed edition by the Viennese publisher, Anton André, plus a few surviving manuscript sketches.

Scholars generally surmise that it was composed at the end of 1779, immediately following Mozart's trip to Mannheim and Paris, two cities where this genre of a concerto featuring multiple soloists was very popular during the last three decades of the 18th century. Nor does anyone know the violinist and violist for whom Mozart may have composed the piece, since he held a well-known disdain for the performing abilities of musicians in Salzburg following his reluctant return to that provincial city after his heady but unprofitable trip to Mannheim and Paris.

Concertos for more than one soloist were very much on Mozart's mind during the middle and late 1770s. The Concerto for Two Violins and Strings was the first of these, composed in 1774. His concertos for two and three pianos were composed between 1775 and 1779. Several other multiple-soloist works were planned, completed, abandoned or lost during his trip abroad. These include his non-existent, possibly lost, Sinfonia Concertante for Four Winds and Orchestra, the Concerto for Flute, Harp and Orchestra and a Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Viola and Cello, which was left unfinished among Mozart's manuscripts following his death.

In composing this work, Mozart ennobled the sinfonia concertante as a musical form. Among Parisian composers, it had been a superficial type of composition, more concerned with showing off the technical prowess of solo performers than expressing much in the way of artistic values. But Mozart's work is thematically as rich as any of his mature concertos, and its poignant C minor slow movement is one of his most expressive adagios. The orchestral part is full of intricate contrapuntal details and is far more than a bland accompaniment to the two soloists, as is commonly found among Parisian

examples.

The Mozart Sinfonia concertante is also a striking example of the “symphonic concerto” by which he fused the solo/orchestral interplay of the earlier concerto form with the logical exposition/development/restatement plan of symphonic form. Finally, one should note Mozart’s plan in alternating the two solo lines. Where the violinist states the numerous themes, letting the violist respond in the exposition to the first movement, their roles are neatly reversed when the themes again pass in review during the recapitulation.

PERPETUUM MOBILE, OPUS 257

ANNEN-POLKA, OPUS 117

AN DER SHÖNEN BLAUEN DONAU (ON THE BEAUTIFUL BLUE DANUBE), OPUS 314

Johann Strauss Jr.

Recording: Herbert von Karajan conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Sony DVD)

Instrumentation: an average orchestra of piccolo, one or two flutes, two oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings

The polka, with its two-step meter and infectiously happy rhythms, came into popularity during the 1830s in nearby Bohemia, and it became the second most frequent dance form to find its way into the Strauss repertoire. It is structurally simpler than the waltz, resembling the three-part 18th-century minuet with a central trio section separating the opening section and its repetition at the end of the piece.

As the polka’s popularity spread throughout European society, it was subdivided into various types. Strauss’ deftly orchestrated Perpetual Motion is labeled a “polka schnell” or “fast polka,” while the moderately fast Annen-Polka is sometimes classified as a “polka française.” It was composed in 1852 for an annual public celebration in Vienna’s huge municipal park, The Prater, on the feast day of St. Anne.

People familiar with the famous river that passes through Vienna vow that the Danube’s waters are sometimes green, silvery or gray, depending upon whether the river is reflecting sunlight, moonlight or cloudy skies. But its waters are never blue. Nevertheless, the image was good enough to inspire unforgettable melodies from Johann Strauss in his famed Blue Danube Waltz.

Conductor Johann Herbeck, who gained lasting fame for rediscovering the manuscript to Schubert’s “Unfinished” Symphony and giving that work its long-delayed premiere in 1865, added to the luster of his name by commissioning a choral waltz from Strauss two years later. In the 1850s and 1860s, Herbeck directed two choral groups, including the Men’s Choral Society of Vienna. Alas, the quality of available choral music was poor, and he sought to improve it by commissioning Strauss to write a waltz for the chorus to sing during the February carnival season of 1867.

Never at a loss to find a handy title to fit waltzes written for any occasion, Strauss remembered a love poem by Austrian writer Karl Isidor Beck, in which each verse ended

with the line, “By the beautiful blue Danube.” Strauss borrowed the line for his title, but not the full text. Instead, Herbeck assigned a poet in his Men’s Choral Society to write new words to fit the music. The new text by one Josef Weyl exhorted the city to celebrate, even though Austria had just suffered a humiliating loss in a brief conflict with Prussia.

According to biographer Joseph Wechsberg, the Men’s Choral Society gave the premiere of the Strauss/Weyl Blue Danube Waltz, accompanied by the combined café orchestras of the Strauss brothers, Eduard and Josef, on February 13, 1867. It was a flop with the public, and the composer philosophically wrote it off as one of life’s failures, lamenting only that its bittersweet coda deserved better treatment.

But in the summer of that year, Strauss was invited to perform the waltz at an elaborate pavilion maintained by the Austrian government at the Paris World Exhibition. By happenstance, an orchestral version of his Blue Danube Waltz was the surprise hit of the entertainment at a dinner party given for French journalists. Suddenly, the waltz was guaranteed lasting international fame.

Following a pensive introduction, the waltz proceeds through five different sections, each of which calls for extensive repetition. These waltz sections are followed by an elaborate coda, recalling and modifying various tunes heard earlier. The waltz concludes with a sentimental commentary on the first tune.

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Musician Biographies

Hans Graf, conductor

Known for his wide range of repertoire and creative programming, distinguished Austrian conductor Hans Graf – the Houston Symphony’s 15th Music Director – is one of today’s most highly respected musicians. He began his tenure here on Opening Night of the 2001-2002 season.

Prior to his appointment in Houston, he was music director of the Calgary Philharmonic, the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, the Salzburg Mozarteum Orchestra and the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra.

A frequent guest with all of the major North American orchestras, Graf has developed a close relationship with the Boston Symphony and appears regularly with the orchestra during the subscription season and at the Tanglewood Music Festival. He made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Houston Symphony in January 2006 and returned leading the Orchestra of St. Luke’s in March 2007. He and the Houston Symphony were invited to appear at Carnegie Hall in January 2010 to present the New York premiere of *The Planet—An HD Odyssey*.

Internationally, Graf conducts in the foremost concert halls of Europe, Japan and Australia. In October 2010, he leads the Houston Symphony on a tour of the UK to present the international premier of *The Planets—An HD Odyssey*. He has participated in the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Bregenz and Aix en Provence and appeared at the Salzburg

Festival. In summer 2010, he conducted the opening concert of the Aspen Music Festival and returned to Tanglewood and Chicago's Grant Park Festival.

An experienced opera conductor, Graf first conducted the Vienna State Opera in 1981 and has since led productions in the opera houses of Berlin, Munich, Paris and Rome, including several world premieres. Recent engagements include Parsifal at the Zurich Opera and Boris Godunov at the Opera National du Rhin in Strasbourg.

Born in 1949 near Linz, Graf studied violin and piano as a child. He earned diplomas in piano and conducting from the Musikhochschule in Graz and continued his studies with Franco Ferrara, Sergiu Celibidache and Arvid Jansons. His career was launched in 1979 when he was awarded first prize at the Karl Böhm Competition.

His extensive discography includes recordings with the Houston Symphony, available through houstonsymphony.org: works by Bartók and Stravinsky, Zemlinsky's Lyric Symphony, Berg's Three Pieces from the Lyric Suite and a DVD of The Planets—An HD Odyssey.

Graf has been awarded the Chevalier de l'ordre de la Legion d'Honneur by the French government for championing French music around the world and the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria.

Hans and Margarita Graf have homes in Salzburg and Houston. They have one daughter, Anna, who lives in Vienna.

Frank Huang, violin

Frank Huang begins his tenure as concert-master of the Houston Symphony with this concert. First Prize Winner of the 2003 Walter W. Naumburg Foundation's Violin Competition and the 2000 Hannover International Violin Competition, Huang has established a major career as a violin virtuoso.

At age 11, he performed with the Houston Symphony in a nationally broadcast concert and has since performed with orchestras throughout the world. He has performed on NPR's Performance Today, Good Morning America and CNN's American Morning with Paula Zahn. Huang's first commercial recording, comprised of Fantasies by Schubert, Ernst, Schoenberg and Waxman, was released on Naxos in 2003.

Recently, Huang held the position of first violinist of the Grammy® Award-winning Ying quartet and was a faculty member at the Eastman School of Music. He is concertmaster of the Sejong Soloists, a conductor-less chamber orchestra based in New York.

Huang has taken top prizes in the Premio Paganini International Violin Competition, the Indianapolis International Violin Competition, the Kingsville International Competition, the Irving M. Klein International Competition and the D'Angelo International Competition. Recent concerts include debuts in Wigmore Hall (London), Salle Cortot (Paris), Kennedy Center (Washington), Herbst Theatre (San Francisco) and a second recital in Alice Tully Hall (New York), which featured the world premiere of Donald Martino's Sonata for Solo Violin.

His commitment to chamber music, has taken him to the Marlboro Music Festival, Ravinia's Steans Institute, The Seattle Chamber Music Festival and the Caramoor Festival. He frequently participates in Musicians from Marlboro tours. He was selected by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center to be a member of the prestigious Chamber Music II program. Huang is part of a trio with Thomas Kaines and Reiko Uchida.

Huang studied with Robert Mann at The Juilliard School, Donald Weilerstein at the Cleveland Institute of Music and Fredell Lack in Houston.

Wayne Brooks, viola

Wayne Brooks is the principal violist of the Houston Symphony. Born in Los Angeles, Brooks joined the orchestra in 1977 as associate principal violist after graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In 1985, he won the position of principal viola. In February 2007, he commemorated his 30th season with the orchestra by performing the world premiere of *La Llorona: Tone Poem for Viola and Orchestra*, a Houston Symphony commission by composer Gabriela Lena Frank.

He has appeared in chamber music performances with Joseph Silverstein, Lynn Harrell, Yefim Bronfman, Garrick Ohlsson and Christoph Eschenbach. He has participated in chamber music concerts in the Houston Symphony's previous INNOVA series and others with Da Camera of Houston, Greenbriar Consortium and Mukuru "Arts for AIDS" Series.

As violist of the Houston Symphony Chamber Players, he served on the faculty of Japan's Pacific Music Festival and toured Japan (1993-1995) and Europe (1994 and 1997). He also appeared at Chicago's Ravinia Festival in 1996 and 1997 and recorded works of Webern and Berg.

Brooks taught solo and orchestral repertoire classes as associate professor of viola at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music from 1985 to 2001. He currently teaches as an affiliate artist at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music. His former students perform in the New World, Charlotte, Richmond and Detroit Symphonies, as well as the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Chiara Quartet, Arianna Quartet and Borromeo Quartet.

In 1995, Brooks gave the Houston premiere of Alfred Schnittke's *Viola Concerto* with Eschenbach and the Houston Symphony. In 2001, he performed Frank Martin's rarely heard *Ballade for Viola and Orchestra* with Larry Rachleff and the Shepherd School Chamber Orchestra. Most recent solo appearances with the Houston Symphony include Berlioz' *Harold in Italy* under Eschenbach's baton and Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*, K.364 with violinist Eric Halen.