PROGRAM NOTES

Polka and Fugue from "Švanda dudák (Schwanda the Bagpiper)" (1927)

Jaromir Weinberger (1896-1967)

Arr. Glenn C. Bainum

Among the most popular works of Jaromir Weinberger (1896-1967) is the polka and fugue from the opera Schwanda the Bagpiper (1927). Weinberger, a Czech composer, studied at the conservatories of Prague and Leipzig before eventually settling in New York. In the fantasy opera Schwanda, the Bagpiper, Schwanda is a country piper, who uses his music to break a spell of gloom cast upon the court of Queen Ice-Heart by a sorcerer. The Queen kisses Schwanda in appreciation, but when Schwanda's wife appears he denies the encounter. "May the devil take me to hell on the spot," Schwanda says, "if the Queen kissed me." He is promptly swallowed up by a gaping hole in the earth, but a friend engages the devil in a card game, wins half of the devil's infernal kingdom, and trades it for Schwanda's release. The "Polka" is the music with which Schwanda breaks the evil spell at court and sets the whole town dancing. The "Fugue" accompanies Schwanda on his triumphant departure from the devil's realm. Arranged for wind band by Glenn C. Bainum in 1934, the work has become a popular and lasting part of repertoire for the concert band setting.

Concerto in Eb for Trumpet (1803)

Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837)

Arr. John Corley

Johann Nepomuk Hummel was born in what is now Bratislava, Slovakia, the son of the director of the Imperial School of Military Music in Vienna. He was a contemporary of Haydn, Mozart (who had given him lessons at the age of 8), and the young Beethoven. His music is reminiscent of all 3 of them, and he had great influence on later composers of the piano, Carl Czerny, Frederick Chopin, and the young Robert Schumann.

While his main compositional output was for piano (he wrote 8 concertos for it!), and although he wrote no symphonies, Hummel produced a large number of works for guitar and mandolin, 22 operas, and some for winds – including a Bassoon Concerto, a quartet for Strings and Clarinet, and arguably his most famous work – the Concerto for Trumpet, written for Viennese trumpet virtuoso Anton Weidinger, of which we will be hearing movements 1 and 3 in tonight's performance. The Concerto was first performed on New Year's Day, 1804 to mark Hummel's assumption of the post of conductor of the court orchestra of Prince Nikolaus II of Esterhazy as successor to Franz Josef Haydn.

Frequently considered to be a companion work to the more famous concerto by Haydn (also written for Weidinger), the Hummel Concerto is more closely aligned with the late classical and even early romantic periods in terms of the inventiveness of its themes and its use of harmony. The first movement is by turns reminiscent of the typical trumpet fanfare alternating with elaborate technical flourishes and romantic themes. The third movement is a virtuoso *tour-de-force* that takes the soloist, the ensemble, and the listener on a wild and breathless ride!

Love Scene from *"La Boheme"* (1895)

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Arr. Merlin Patterson

"*La Boheme*" (The Bohemians) refers not to Czechoslovakia, but to the carefree (but financially challenged) and vagabond lifestyle of those living the life of artists (and aspiring artists) in Paris in the late 19th – early 20th century. The story of the doomed love of Rudolpho and Mimi and their friends became one of Puccini's greatest and most beloved works, and has inspired movie and stage versions of the story as well as the modern hit musical "Rent".

The theme from the opera's Love Scene, first introduced in Act I by the two doomed lovers, is used many times in the course of the opera, and always in association with Mimi. Merlin Patterson has fashioned a tone poem around four of his favorite settings of the theme and closing with the death of Mimi. His setting of this music uses the richness and beauty of Puccini's renderings of the theme as well as the composer's rich harmonies ultimately conveying the power and passion of the love shared by Rudolpho and Mimi.

Dance of the Comedians from *"The Bartered Bride"*

Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884)

Arr. Clark McAlister and Edited by Alfred Reed

At the peak of his career Smetana poured the better part of his energies into eight first-rate operas, which were produced in Prague between 1866 and 1882 and still form an important part of the repertory there. The best known of these today is The Bartered Bride, a work that has become perhaps the most popular of all Czech operas. Its success surprised Smetana, who never expected the light-hearted piece to outstrip his serious works, which he considered far worthier. The comic opera has curious origins. "I composed The Bartered Bride not out of vanity but out of spite," the composer wrote, somewhat ironically, "because after my opera The Brandenburgers in Bohemia I was accused of being a Wagnerian who was incapable of writing anything in a lighter vein."

The opera tells the story of Marenka, an unhappy farmer's daughter whose upcoming marriage to Vašek, a local rich boy, has been arranged by the local marriage-broker, Kecal. But Marenka instead loves Jeník, a poor orphan boy of unknown origins. Vašek is the second son of Mícha Tobias, a well-to-do landowner whose firstborn son had disappeared many years before. Jeník sells off ("barters") his rights to Marenka for 700 florins, agreeing that she should marry "the son of Tobias." After a chaotic tangle of plot-twists it is revealed, of course, that the penniless Jeník is indeed Mícha Tobias's missing firstborn, and has thus positioned himself to be not only the heir to his father's estate but also to be Marenka's groom.

In the opera's last act a circus troupe comes to town—the "Dance of the Comedians," as it is called, is marked by a skocná (jump dance) in 2/4 meter. Three loud chords introduce a perpetual motion tour-de-force (somewhat reminiscent of the opera's Overture) with delightful lyric touches inserted. John Tyrrell, a leading scholar of Czech music, notes that this dance is quintessentially Czech, but that the dance mood extends to many of the pieces within this opera as a whole, forming part of its distinctive character.

Trittico (1963)

Vaclav Nelhybel (1919-1996)

Vaclav Nelhybel represents the most modern compositional style (the 20th Century) on this program. At times his style sounds like Bela Bartok, at others much like Dmitri Shostakovich, but always uniquely his own. Primitive, driving, repeated rhythms, heavy use of brass and percussion, and deceptively simple (deceptive because of the complex of the way they evolve throughout his work) themes are the hallmarks of Nelhybel's style.

Trittico was composed in 1963 for Dr. William Revelli, who gave the first performance of the work in Spring, 1964 (50 years ago!) In Ann Arbor, with the Symphonic Band of the University of Michigan.

The first and third movements (heard tonight) are, in several ways related to one another. Their character is brilliantly forward moving and energetic; the main theme of the first movement reappears in the culmination point of the third movement and the instrumentation of the 2 movements are identical, with each type of instrument being used very similarly. While very dissonant the work is essentially a joyous, raucous ending to the first half of tonight's concert.

Dance Bohemien

Randall D. Standridge

Energy bursts from this exhilarating piece from the first note to the last. The tuneful dance features lively rhythms and dynamic contrasts, and features both the BGSB's xylophonist, Dawn Karis and our Associate Conductor, Allison Rakickas.

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 88 (1889), Movements 1 and 4

Antonin Dvorak (1873-1904)

Arr. Òscar Seneń (Movement 1) and Jos van de Braak (Movement 4)

Movement 1: Allegro con Brio Movement 4: Allegro ma non Troppo

Dvorak's last 3 symphonies (Nos. 7, 8, and 9) are not only Dvorak's greatest works, but some of the greatest examples of symphonic writing of the 19th century. They were originally numbered 3, 4, and 5 because the composer did not regard his earliest symphonies as being worthy of publication. In the 1950's those first 4 symphonies were rediscovered (fortunately he did not have the heart to destroy them and they were rediscovered and the numbering corrected).

Band audiences, and indeed most casual listeners of symphonic music are only familiar with the 9th (known as the New World Symphony). In fact the BGSB has performed the second and fourth movements of that work many times.

The eighth symphony has until recently never been transcribed for winds. The arrangements being played tonight are something of an American premiere as they are only published in Europe and were acquired by the BGSB for its library in 2012. The first movement transcription is unusual also due to the fact that it uses cellos!

Dvořák composed and orchestrated within the two-and-a-half-month period from 26 August to 8 November 1889 at his summer resort in Vysoká u Příbramě, Bohemia. The score was composed on the occasion of his admission to Prague Academy and dedicated "To the Bohemian Academy of Emperor Franz Joseph for the Encouragement of Arts and Literature, in thanks for my election.") Dvořák conducted the premiere in Prague on 2 February 1890.

Dvořák kept the typical format of a symphony in four movements, but structured them in an unusual way. All movements show a remarkable variety of themes, many of them based on Bohemian material. Occasionally the development of the themes seems like improvisation.

The first movement is a powerful and glowing exposition characterized by liberal use of timpani. It opens with a lyrical G minor theme originally in the cellos, horns, clarinets and bassoon with trombones, violas and double basses pizzicato. This gives way to a "bird call" flute melody, reaching the symphony's key G major. The development section works up quite a storm. In the recapitulation, the second main theme is played by the English horn, two octaves lower than in the beginning. The movement ends with a "short but very energetic coda".

The finale, formally a "complex theme-and-variations", is the most turbulent movement. It begins with a fanfare solo trumpet. Conductor Rafael Kubelik said in a rehearsal: "Gentlemen, in Bohemia the trumpets never call to battle – they always call to the dance!" The music progresses to a beautiful melody which is first played by the clarinets and saxophones. The tension is masterfully built and finally released at approximately two minutes into the piece, with a cascade of instruments triumphantly playing the initial theme at a somewhat faster pace offset by the French Horns playing a counter theme utilizing unusual (and thrilling) trills. A central contrasting episode is derived from the main theme. From there the movement compellingly progresses through a tempestuous middle section, modulating from major to minor several times throughout. After a return to the slow, lyrical section marked by one of the literature's most romantic clarinet solos, the piece ends on a chromatic coda, in which brass and timpani are greatly prominent.

Dvorák's handling of form is indebted to Beethoven and Brahms, but he filled out the form with melodies of an unmistakably Czech flavor and joviality few composers at the time possessed. The variations vary widely in character: some are slower and some are faster in tempo, some are soft (such as the virtuosic one for solo flute), and some are noisy; most are in the major mode, though the central one, reminiscent of a village band, is in the minor. The music is always cheerful and optimistic."

~ Compiled and Composed by Howard M. Green