

PROGRAM NOTES

MARCH 11/12, 2017

Rounds

David Diamond

Born in Rochester, New York on July 9, 1915

Died June 13, 2005 in Rochester

First performances by the Wichita Symphony

David Diamond was educated at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Eastman School of Music, the New Music School (New York City) and in Paris by Nadia Boulanger. In the 1940's, unable to secure a teaching position, Diamond continued composing with the aid of several grants and occasional income from playing the violin. Following a year as a Fulbright professor in Rome in 1951–52, he remained based in Italy for 15 years, partly to escape the repression of the McCarthy era.

In 1966 a New York Philharmonic concert featuring Diamond's Piano Concerto and Fifth Symphony led to residence in the U.S. and a string of teaching positions and lectureships—at the Manhattan School of Music, Harvard University, the University of Colorado (Boulder), the American Academy in Rome and The Juilliard School. In addition to the Guggenheim fellowships, Rome and Paderewski prizes, and National Institute of Arts and Letters grant that helped his early career, he received many other accolades during his long, productive life, including the William Schuman Lifetime Achievement Award, the gold medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and President Bill Clinton's National Medal of Arts. Major memorial concerts have been taking place to honor this illustrious composer, who died in June 2005.

Diamond's compositions are known for their meticulous craftsmanship, masterful orchestration, romantically tinged harmonies and forms based in tradition. His large body of instrumental works includes 11 symphonies, several concertos, 10 string quartets, and many other chamber pieces, but he was just as prolific writing for the voice—both songs and choral works.

In 1944 conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos, depressed about the “melancholy” of all the twelve-tone music he had been performing lately, asked Diamond to write him “a happy work.” Composed mostly in June and July, the resulting *Rounds* for string orchestra was premiered by Mitropoulos conducting the Minneapolis Symphony on November 24, 1944. Taking its title from the age-old form of a *round* (each voice entering with the same music after a time delay), the piece employs many kinds of imitation in a joyful, unpedantic display. Of the three-movement work, played without pause, the composer wrote:

The different string choirs enter in strict canonic fashion as an introduction to the main subject, which is played by the violas and soon restated by the cellos and basses. The Adagio is an expressive lyric movement, acting as a resting point between the two fast movements. The last movement again makes use of characteristic canonic devices, though it may be more specifically analyzed as a kind of fugal countersubject for the principal thematic ideas, so helping to “round” out the entire work and unify the entire formal structure.

The catchy syncopated themes and exuberant gestures energize the first and third movements, but also bind the piece together with a nice symmetry. *Rounds* won the New York Music Critics Circles Award in 1946 and went on to become Diamond's most popular work.

Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16

Edvard Grieg

Born in Bergen, Norway on June 15, 1843

Died September 4, 1907 in Bergen

Last performed December 6/7, 1997

In June 1868 Edvard Grieg traveled with his wife Nina and baby daughter to Denmark to undertake his largest-scale work to date, a work for piano and orchestra. Notorious for his inability to work with the slightest outside disturbances, Grieg settled down in the picturesque town of Sölleröd while Nina and the baby went to Nina's parents in Copenhagen. Two of Grieg's friends were with him in Sölleröd—publisher/composer Emil Horneman and virtuoso pianist Edmund Neupert, who consulted with the composer as the work took shape. It was only natural that Neupert should receive the dedication and play the first performance, which was scheduled for shortly after Christmas.

Though the Concerto was completed in rough form at Sölleröd, the orchestration had to be fit around Grieg's many other duties that fall and winter in Oslo. This proved so difficult that the premiere had to be postponed until April 3, 1869, when Neupert indeed played the solo part with the Royal Theater Orchestra in Copenhagen, conducted by Holger Simon Paulli. It was a major event: Queen Louise was in attendance, as were the leading musical personalities, including Johann Peter Emilius Hartmann, Niels Gade and world-famous Russian virtuoso pianist Anton Rubinstein, who had lent his own grand piano for the occasion. On April 6 Neupert wrote to Grieg who had been unable to attend:

On Saturday your divine Concerto resounded through the Casino's large auditorium. The triumph I received was really tremendous. Already at the conclusion of the cadenza in the first part the audience broke out in a true storm [of applause]. The three dangerous critics—Gade, Rubinstein, and Hartmann—sat up in the loge and applauded with all their might.

I am supposed to greet you from Rubinstein and tell you that he is really surprised to have heard such a brilliant composition; he looks forward to making your acquaintance.

The Concerto soon won international fame and has achieved the same kind of ultra-popularity as Tchaikovsky's B-flat Minor Piano Concerto. At a now-famous meeting between Grieg and Liszt in Rome in 1870, Liszt fulfilled Grieg's expectations by reading Grieg's Concerto at sight. "He played the cadenza, the most difficult part, best of all," wrote Grieg. "Not content with playing, he, at the same time, converses and makes comments, addressing a bright remark now to one, now to another of the assembled guests, nodding significantly to the right or left, particularly when something pleases him." Liszt was delighted with Grieg's Concerto and Grieg incorporated some of his suggestions when it was published in 1872.

Grieg greatly admired Schumann's Piano Concerto in the same key and claimed that he studied it in depth before writing his own. He followed Schumann's model in regard to an opening fanfare for the pianist, and in certain formal respects, but he created a completely independent work—one that contains specifically Norwegian elements. One of these occurs between the main theme and second theme, a transitional passage containing rhythms of the *halling*, a lively Norwegian folk dance in duple meter. Grieg's reputation as a melodist is reaffirmed by the lyrical second theme, which since an 1882 edition has been played by the cellos, as opposed to the trumpet in the manuscript and early editions. Grieg continued to tinker with the Concerto throughout his life, making final revisions as late as 1906–1907.

The tender, nocturnal slow movement follows a simple A-B-A pattern, leading without pause into the finale through a magical dialogue between the piano and solo horn. The nationalistic character of the last movement is evinced through the main theme in the piano, again reminiscent of the *halling*. Grieg scholar Schjelderup-Ebbe also likens the use of pedal point, open fifths, and sharp dissonances to the sounds of the Hardanger fiddle. The *halling* refrain near the end is transformed into another folk-dance rhythm, that of the *springar* in 3/4 meter. It was the concluding climax of the movement with its sudden use of the flattened leading tone that so excited Liszt in 1870. Grieg reported:

Toward the end of the finale the second theme is, as you may remember, repeated in a mighty fortissimo. In the very last measures, when in the first triplets the first tone is changed in the orchestra from G-sharp to G, while the piano part, in a mighty scale passage, rushes wildly through the whole reach of the keyboard, he [Liszt] suddenly stopped, rose up to his full height, left the piano, and with big, theatric strides and arms uplifted walked across the large cloister hall, at the same time literally roaring the theme. When he got to the G in question he stretched out his arms imperiously and exclaimed "G, G, not G-sharp! Magnificent! That's the real Swedish article!" . . . He went back to the piano, repeated the whole strophe, and finished. In conclusion he handed me the manuscript, and said in a peculiarly cordial tone: "Keep steadily on: I tell you, you have the capability, and—do not let them intimidate you!"

Symphony No. 8 in G Major, Op. 88

Antonín Dvořák

Born in Nelahozeves, near Kralupy on September 8, 1841

Died May 1, 1904 in Prague

Last performed January 12/13, 2008

Dvořák wrote most of the G Major Symphony in his favorite spot—his country retreat at Vysoká. After sketching the first motives on August 26, 1889, he worked on the four-movement continuous draft between September 6 and September 23, completing the score on November 8, 1889, in Prague. He conducted the first performance with the Prague National Symphony on February 2, 1890, but publication was delayed because of broken-down negotiations with Simrock, who had been Dvořák's main publisher up to that time. Simrock refused to pay a reasonable amount for the work saying that large orchestral works did not sell, and asking if

Dvořák would please write songs or small pieces for piano. They also quarreled over Simrock's persistent use of the German "Anton" for his first name when the composer wanted the Czech "Antonín." The rupture in their relations led Dvořák to offer the Symphony to Novello in London, who published it in 1892. Though it is Dvořák's eighth symphony in order of composition, it was the fourth to appear in print.

The G Major Symphony presents a fascinating mix of Czech and German elements and of conventional and experimental formal procedures. The composer said he hoped "to write something different from his other symphonies and shape the musical content of his ideas in a new manner," and, whereas the work follows the typical four-movement plan, the first and fourth movements in particular show an unorthodox approach to form.

The first movement begins with a solemn-hued G minor introduction, which, though played in the main allegro tempo, serves to highlight the brightness of the parallel major key when the main part of the movement begins. This greatly contrasting main theme, played by the flute, shows Dvořák's pastoral side. The solemn introduction returns before the development, making us wonder whether Dvořák is repeating his exposition, but subtle, delicious new touches let us know that the development is underway. The introduction reappears climactically to bring on the recapitulation, thus each recurrence outlines the major sections of the sonata-form framework.

The Czech-sounding slow movement begins meditatively, with a touch of melancholy even in the patterned "bird calls" and in an ensuing choralelike passage, both of which are based on the opening motive. Soon, however, Dvořák introduces a luminous C major section in which gentle descending scales in the violins underlie a long lyrical melody in the flute and oboe. Dvořák's imaginative scoring extends to an expressive violin solo, with delicately textured tremolo and pizzicato accompaniment while the winds provide the descending scales. The contrasting moods that unfold here in episodic fashion—so characteristic of Czech music—include a dramatic development signaled by the horns and a coda that becomes positively regal as the "bird calls" take on the character of fanfares.

For his third movement Dvořák wrote a lilting waltz rather than a scherzo. The G minor outer sections of the symmetrical three-part form engage the ear with their irregular phrase lengths. The lovely G major trio (contrasting central section) is based on a theme from the composer's comic opera of 1874, *The Stubborn Lovers*. The movement is rounded off by a lively coda derived from this music but in duple meter instead of the prevailing waltz time.

In the finale Dvořák again becomes formally innovative. Following a trumpet fanfare, the movement unfolds as a theme and variations, with the theme derived from the main (flute) subject of the first movement. The variations are interrupted in the middle, however, by an episode beginning in C minor, which sounds developmental, and which near the end refers to the trumpet fanfare. The variations then resume quietly, saving up for the brilliant full orchestra close.

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