SYMPHONIC METAMORPHOSIS

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2025 | 3:00 PM

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

Daniel Hege
Music Director & Conductor

Alexi Kenney
Violin

PROGRAM NOTES

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GUISEPPE VERDI

Born October 9 or 10, 1823, in Roncale near Busseto, Italy
Died January 27, 1901, in Milan, Italy

La forza del destino Overture (The Force of Destiny) (8')

The Wichita Symphony has performed Verdi's Overture eight times over the years. The most recent performance took place on April 9 and 10, 2011. Daniel Hege conducted. The WSO performed it for the first time on January 21, 1952, with James Robertson conducting.

In the catalog of Verdi's operas, *La forza del destino,* composed in 1862, comes after *The Masked Ball* and marks the start of a ten-year period during which he composed *Don Carlos* and *Aida.* The motivation behind *La forza* was a lucrative commission from the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Verdi's desire to write a truly "grand" opera. The opera premiered in St. Petersburg on November 10, 1862. Although it was successful, Verdi was unhappy with its dramatic aspects and later revised the work, adding a new ending and other changes for a second premiere at La Scala in Milan on February 27, 1869. For this second version, Verdi replaced a somber prelude with the more elaborate overture heard at this concert.

The story of *La forza* is based on an 1835 play by the Duke of Rivas with some additional material from Schiller thrown in by Verdi and his librettist Francesco Piave. The story, far too complicated to relate here, concerns the predicament of a hero (Don Alvaro) compelled by destiny to commit actions contrary to his noble spirit and the futility of seeking peace in the sanctity of a cloister.

La forza is one of Verdi's most sprawling and complicated operas with some "grand" elements reminiscent of Meyerbeer's operas. Dramatically, much is left to improbable coincidence (destiny) and off-stage events that are difficult to follow. Departing from his previous operatic format that relied on a sequence of arias, duets and other set pieces, Verdi, perhaps under the influence of Wagner, begins to move towards his own "opera of ideas" that addressed a dramatic sequence. Despite weaknesses in the plot, the opera remains one of Verdi's most popular by virtue of its magnificent music. Like his other operas based on Spanish stories (*Il trovatore* and *Don Carlos*), the libretto inspired some of Verdi's most passionate music.

The Overture, one of Verdi's most frequently performed overtures in concert, is a miniature tone poem encapsulating the emotions and turbulence of the opera. Three unison octaves (destiny) in the brass announce the opening of the overture. After their repetition, Verdi launches into his principal subject, an agitated *presto* that seems to reflect both the inner turmoil and the element of revenge that dominates the opera. The music presents several contrasting themes associated with the heroine Leonore, noted for their poignant lyricism and beauty. We also hear music from the conflict between the two male antagonists and their subsequent duel. However, throughout the overture the principal motive has an underlying presence. As the principal motive is developed, Verdi whips up the drama and tension until a grand restatement of two lyrical themes reworked in a full orchestral fortissimo climax. The overture concludes in Verdi's typical potboiler fashion.

Verdi orchestrates the Overture for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, two harps, and strings.

Enjoy this video recording of the performance of the *La forza del destino* Overture by the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Herbert von Karajan.
https://youtu.be/AUuJxE-iWbo?si=IV0WTp1tDYSDrImu

Or try this video by the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milan conducted by Xian Zhang for the 2013 BBC Proms. The lighting of the orchestra is better than the older Karajan recording.
https://youtu.be/CkPOVYg4Bxc?si=y68ORWRZT8zZ2yQN

Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds degrees in piano and music history from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland, College Park, where he coordinated the University's International Music Festivals and Competitions for piano, cello, and voice. In 1988, he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, managing it for twelve years. NOI, as it's fondly known by participants, has helped young musicians prepare for and win professional auditions in orchestras around the world, including the Wichita Symphony. The program continues today under the leadership of internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop and director Richard Scerbo.

ERICH WOLFGANG KORNGOLD

Born May 29, 1897, in Brno, Moravia, Austria-Hungary, now the Czech Republic
Died November 29, 1957, in Los Angeles, California

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35

1. Moderato nobile (9')
2. Romance (8')
3. Allegro assai vivace (7')

The Wichita Symphony has played Korngold's Violin Concerto twice before. Its most recent performance was on February 21 and 22, 2009, featuring violinist Corey Cerovsek and conductor Andrew Sewell. Before that, Gil Shaham performed it on October 14 and 15, 1995, with Zuohuang Chen conducting.

If asked to name a composer who was a famous musical prodigy, most concertgoers would name Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In addition to Mozart, we would include Felix Mendelssohn and Camille Saint-Saëns, the latter exhibiting prodigious talents across multiple musical and academic disciplines. Erich Wolfgang Korngold would be a fourth comparable musical wunderkind to add to the list. Composing as a child, at age 10, he played a cantata on the piano for Gustav Mahler, who then sent Erich to study with Alexander von Zemlinsky, who taught the not-yet-famous composer Arnold Schoenberg. When he was eleven, Korngold composed a ballet, *Der Schneemann (The Snowman),* which became a sensation when it premiered in Vienna in 1910. Within a year, the story synopsis was published in the United States, and various American publications congratulated the young musician with birthday wishes. Pianist Artur Schnabel promoted a piano sonata by the fourteen-year-old Korngold on recital programs. When he was fifteen, Korngold composed a *Sinfonietta* that was anything but a diminutive symphony, as the title suggested. It was forty-three minutes long and scored for a large orchestra. Korngold's command of the orchestra struck "fear and awe" in Richard Strauss.

In 1920, Korngold's first full-length opera, *Der tote Stadt (The Dead City),* premiered in Hamburg and Cologne in December, and a year later, it was performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Opera houses still produce it. Barely into his twenties, Korngold's reputation as a composer and masterful orchestrator was well established. Along with Richard Strauss, Arnold Schoenberg, and Paul Hindemith, Korngold was among the most renowned composers of the Berlin-Weimar-Vienna cultural hubs in the 1920s.

Like many of his peers of Jewish heritage, Korngold was censored by the Nazis in the 1930s, with his music labeled as Entartete (Degenerate) Musik. Fortuitously, Austrian theater director and producer Max Reinhardt offered Korngold an opportunity by inviting him to Hollywood to help with Reinhardt's movie production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Subsequently, Korngold became a conductor and film score composer for Warner Bros. Studios. After the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938, Korngold and his family became permanent US residents and later citizens.

Between 1935 and 1946, Korngold composed music for twenty-one films, earning four Oscar nominations plus a fifth as a write-in, and winning twice for *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). He was especially known for his scores to swashbuckler films like *Robin Hood, Captain Blood* (1935), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), and *The Sea Wolf* (1941), which still occasionally air on Turner Classic Movies.

Hollywood saved Korngold and gave him the means to support his family. Not everyone approved of his switch to writing for films. In the mid-20th century, many musicians and critics looked down on film music. Korngold's

father, Julius (1860–1945), who was once a prominent music critic in Vienna, dismissed film music as second-rate and urged his son to pursue "more serious" outlets for his creativity. Although many composers took the opportunity to earn a living in Hollywood, film music didn't have the prominence in concert halls that it enjoys today.

Korngold made little distinction between music for film and the concert hall. He found scoring films just like composing an opera, only without the singing. His romantic melodies, lush harmonies, and vibrant orchestrations, which he applied to his operas and concert music, fit Hollywood directors' preferences perfectly. The Wagnerian technique of leitmotif helped tell and deepen a film's story. Along with colleagues Max Steiner and Franz Waxman, fellow émigrés from Central Europe, and others, Korngold helped create what we now call the "Hollywood Sound." Composers such as John Williams, James Horner, and Hans Zimmer are their direct musical descendants.

With studio deadlines pressing, Korngold's concert music lay fallow. His wife indicated he vowed to stop writing concert music while Hitler was in power. After World War II, Korngold went back to composing music for concert halls.

Over the years, violinist Bronislaw Huberman (1882–1947) repeatedly asked Korngold for a violin concerto whenever they met. With the defeat of Germany, Korngold's first project for the concert hall was the Violin Concerto. He composed the concerto during the summer of 1945 and orchestrated it that fall. Acknowledging his Viennese roots, Korngold dedicated the concerto to Gustav Mahler's widow, Alma Mahler-Werfel. Since Huberman's health was declining and prevented him from performing, Korngold turned to Jascha Heifetz, who offered advice on making the solo violin part more challenging. The work premiered with the St. Louis Symphony on February 15, 1947, with Heifetz as the soloist and Vladimir Golschmann conducting. The premiere was a success, and Korngold said the reception was "just as in my best times in Vienna." A St. Louis music critic proclaimed that the concerto would "enjoy a lifespan like that of the Mendelssohn Concerto."

A subsequent performance in New York City was less well received, with *The New York Times* music critic Olin Downes panning it as a "Hollywood Concerto." Irving Kolodin quipped that the concerto was "more corn than gold." Claudia Cassidy, writing for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* after the concerto's Chicago premiere, was more sympathetic. She colorfully commented on the work's ability "to wrap the audience in a luxurious cocoon of voluptuous tone, drenched in the hues and textures of night." She stated that regardless of how one viewed the composer's music, the concerto could "hold an audience enthralled." *The Christian Science Monitor* hailed the concerto's orchestration to be "the work of a master."

Influential critics, music historians, and many composers entrenched in academia continued to look down on film composers. The romantic style of 19th-century music kept alive by Hollywood and concert composers like Rachmaninoff and Howard Hanson lost favor (but not among audiences) during the post-war years. By the 1950s, Korngold's music was dismissed as derivative and outdated. Despite this, Heifetz continued to promote and perform the concerto. Over time, and after Korngold's death, the piece gained popularity, and today, it is part of the repertoire of nearly every concert violinist. Alongside Samuel Barber's equally romantic violin concerto, Korngold's remains one of the most popular 20th-century violin concertos.

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35
continued

The Concerto and Its Hollywood Connection
Many listeners, especially fans of mid-century movies, will recognize the sound of a Hollywood film score in Korngold's Violin Concerto. The connection is more accurate than many realize. Korngold often reuses musical themes from his movie scores, adapting and expanding them within the new context of his concert music. This does not mean the concerto is about films or attempts to reminisce about their stories. You don't need to know anything about the film sources to enjoy the concerto.

Interestingly, every concert work Korngold composed after WWII features musical themes borrowed from his film scores. He was not alone in this practice. Bernard Herrmann, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and others also used music originally created for films for concert works. Sometimes the connections between film and concert music are intentional, like Copland's *Red Pony Suite;* other times, the link is coincidental, as it is with Korngold's music. Korngold's main goal in composing was to "uplift [his listeners] into the purer realm of phantasy." To that extent, why waste a lush and romantic piece of music, even if it did originate in the movies!

The Music
There is no orchestral introduction to the **first movement.** Against quiet harmonies in the orchestra, the solo violin begins with two climbing arpeggios, each one reaching for a resolution at the top, creating a sense of yearning. These intervals will form structural elements that underpin much of the movement. As Korngold develops this idea with swirling chromaticism, the violin rises to a higher range, leading to the orchestra's statement of the first theme. Korngold originally wrote this theme for the 1937 movie *Another Dawn,* starring Errol Flynn and Kay Francis. To no fault of Korngold, the movie received poor reviews.

After some detailed development and expansion of the first theme, Korngold introduces the second theme, a somewhat slower *cantabile* melody, which he borrowed from his score of the 1939 film *Juarez* starring Bette Davis and Paul Muni. The brief development section features a cadenza for the soloist, leading into the recapitulation performed by the full orchestra. The recapitulation condenses material with intricate writing for the soloist and splashes of orchestral color, speeding up to a brilliant conclusion.

The **second movement** is a beautiful wordless song, where the solo violin floats above tranquil, rich orchestral harmonies. The theme comes from the score for *Anthony Adverse* (1936), starring Olivia de Havilland and Fredric March. Korngold's score earned him his first Academy Award. In the context of the concerto, the music brings out a nostalgic feeling. A short contrasting theme, newly composed for the concerto, adds lovely color with the harp and celeste. Delicate orchestral writing for the winds and strings contributes a magical color to the music.

Korngold starts his **third movement** with a lively jig. This dance, popular in 16th-century Britain, is full of fun and rhythmic energy. It flows into the second theme, a warm and lyrical melody from the 1937 film *The Prince and the Pauper,* another Errol Flynn movie, also starring twin brothers Bobby and Billy Mauch. The music features energetic interaction between the themes, the soloist, and the orchestra. The movement peaks with a bold, full orchestration of the second theme, anticipating many later Hollywood film scores. Then, the music softens to a pause on a delicate triple pianissimo chord shaded by a vibraphone. After this brief moment, the music bursts into a lively *allegro* that rushes toward the concerto's conclusion.

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35
continued

The orchestration for Korngold's Violin Concerto includes a solo violin, two flutes with the second doubling on piccolo, two oboes with the second doubling on English horn, two clarinets, a bass clarinet, and two bassoons with the second doubling on contra. The brass section is somewhat lightly scored, featuring four horns, two trumpets, and a single trombone. The percussion section comprises timpani, bass drum, cymbals, gong, tubular bells, glockenspiel, vibraphone, and a xylophone. The orchestra also includes a celesta, a harp, and strings.

For more information about Korngold, visit the website of the Korngold Society at https://korngold-society.org/site/.

Information about Korngold's reuse of his film music and references to the critical reviews of the Concerto come from Ben Winters' *Korngold in America: Music, Myth, and Hollywood,* published by Oxford University Press, 2025.

Before attending the Wichita Symphony's concert, enjoy this live concert performance by violinist Hilary Hahn with conductor Kent Nagano and the Deutsche Sinfonie Orchester.
https://youtu.be/lcGEGl5bdbk?si=3RRDM12HwAHeNA1c

Or this classic 1953 recording by violinist Jascha Heifetz and the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Alfred Wallenstein.
https://youtu.be/QCbAsGQwz40?si=WtMajjRuN-T0O-ZZ

If you are interested, YouTube has a collection of movie trailers. In this one for *Another Dawn* (1937), you can hear the origin of the opening theme for Korngold's Violin Concerto.
https://youtu.be/RinKHrN-1NQ?si=q4p711AFxsAjMaHp

In another, you'll hear the theme from *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937) (entering at 17 seconds) that Korngold later used in the Concerto's third movement.
https://youtu.be/VYSkvRfqyw4?si=Kn6PaoducQB21i3E

If this is your first time listening to Korngold's music, don't miss the change to hear his aria, *Marietta's Lied*, from the 1920 opera *Der Tote Stadt (The Dead City)*. This beautiful aria, composed by the young composer, measure up to anything by Richard Strauss and is a prime example of the late-romantic style that persisted into the 20th century and helped shape the Hollywood Sound for movies. In this recording, the aria is performed by Renée Fleming.
https://youtu.be/ErdxbjzOFp4?si=LGFT_5wDYrT3Xw1U

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS

Born December 18, 1967, in Dallas, Texas

Rainbow Body (13')

This is the second time the Wichita Symphony has performed Rainbow Body. The first was on March 10 and 11, also conducted by Daniel Hege.

The website for Christopher Theofanidis states that "his music has been performed by many of the world's leading performing arts organizations, from the London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, and New York Philharmonic to the San Francisco Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and the American Ballet Theatre. He is a two-time Grammy nominee for best composition, and his Viola Concerto, recorded with David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony with Richard O'Neill as soloist, won the 2021 Grammy for Best Instrumental Solo. Mr. Theofanidis's work, Rainbow Body, is one of the most performed works in recent decades, having been performed by over 200 orchestras worldwide. Mr. Theofanidis is currently coordinator of the composition programs at Yale University and the Aspen Music Festival and has taught at the Juilliard School and the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University."

Theofanidis provides the following background on *Rainbow Body*.

> *Rainbow Body was the coming together of two ideas- one, my fascination with Hildegard of Bingen's music (the principal melody of Rainbow Body is loosely based on one of her chants, "Ave Maria, O Auctix Vite"), and two, the Tibetan Buddhist idea of "Rainbow Body," which is that when an enlightened being dies physically, his or her body is absorbed directly back into the universe as energy, as light. This seemed to me to be the metaphor for Hildegard's music as much as anything.*

Who was Hildegard of Bingen? She was a Benedictine abbess and polymath born around 1098, active in what is now southwest Germany. As the leader of an abbey, her death was recorded on September 17, 1179. She was beautified by Pope John XXII in 1326. Pope Benedict XVI later canonized her and declared her a Doctor of the Church in 2012. Hildegard was one of the earliest known composers of sacred monophony (Gregorian chant). Her interests and work also spanned philosophy, mysticism, and medicine. She composed about seventy pieces of music, including texts. Scholars consider her Ordo Virtutum (Play of Virtues) the earliest known musical drama not tied to a liturgical service. The responsory Ave Maria, O Auctix Vite (Hail Mary, source of life), chosen by Theofanidis, was probably composed during the 1150s. Interest in Hildegard's music increased during the late 20th century, and since 1979, a wide range of recordings interpreting her music has been available. Her music is noted for its particularly mellifluous style, often covering a wider range of the voice than what many of her peers typically used. Her collection of poetry from the 1150s was titled "a symphony (symphonia) of the harmony of heavenly revelations." Symphonia back then would mean "an agreement or concord of sound," according to Wikipedia.

Writing further about the piece, Theofanidis writes:

> *Rainbow Body begins in an understated, mysterious manner, calling attention to some of the key intervals and motives of the piece. When the primary melody enters for the first time*

about a minute into the work, I present it very directly in the strings without accompaniment. In the orchestration, I try to capture a halo around this melody, creating a wet acoustic by emphasizing the lingering reverberations one might hear in an old cathedral.

Although the piece is built essentially around fragments of the melody, I also return to the tune in its entirety several times throughout the work, as a kind of plateau of stability and peace within an otherwise turbulent environment. Rainbow Body has a very different sensibility from the Hildegard chant, with a structure that is dramatic and developmental, but I hope that it conveys at least a little of my love for the beauty and grace of her work.

After an introduction with fragmented splashes of color in the bass clarinet, cello, and upper winds, the Hildegard theme enters with unison strings. The warm, serene melody, played with the rhythmic flexibility of a chant, gradually builds to a forte marked by a cymbal crash, then repeats with added woodwinds. Listen for the sustained tone in the brass, low winds, and double basses that create an ambient medieval atmosphere. Above this drone-like accompaniment, which is prevalent throughout the piece, the melodic chant seems to hover in time.

As Theofanidis develops his material, he introduces a descending five-note scale from Hildegard's chant. The tempo speeds up, and we hear a short passage for bass and pounding percussion, followed by a section with swirling woodwinds. An ominous low brass passage follows, accompanied by conga drums.

The tempo broadens, and the music returns to the mood of the opening with the chant. As the pace speeds up, a march-like rhythm emerges in the bass drum and other low-pitched instruments. The descending five-note scale is played and begins to transform into an ascending scale, leading to the climactic moment when the full orchestra performs the chant in fortissimo unison.

Rainbow Body's orchestration is vibrant and colorful, resembling a rainbow itself. The woodwinds include three flutes, with the third doubling on piccolo; three oboes; three B-flat clarinets, with the second doubling on E-flat clarinet and the third on bass clarinet; and three bassoons, with the third doubling on contrabassoon. The brass section features four horns, three trumpets, two tenor trombones, a bass trombone, and a tuba. The percussion section has a timpanist and three players using various instruments, including suspended cymbals, a Chinese cymbal, a crash cymbal, chimes, a large gong, claves, a triangle, congas, a bass drum, bells, and a vibraphone. Theofanidis also employs a harp, a piano, and the string section, consisting of first and second violins, violas, cellos, and double basses.

The Houston Symphony, under the baton of Robert Spano, premiered *Rainbow Body* in April 2000. Spano subsequently recorded the piece with the Atlanta Symphony.

Before attending the concert, you might want to familiarize yourself with this beautiful music. Start by listening to a performance of Hildegard von Bingen's *Ave Maria, O auctrix vite,* which serves as the foundation for Theofanidis's piece. He only uses a brief excerpt, not the entire composition. In a performance by Sequentia, a vocal and instrumental group specializing in medieval music, you'll notice a reedy instrumental sound supporting the melismatic vocal line that weaves and soars. This drone is an early example of polyphonic music called organum. Theofanidis incorporates this technique in *Rainbow Body.*

https://youtu.be/3F56pe_-0Uc?si=2BS_N5owZLWpRvfs

Then, listen to this excellent recording of *Rainbow Body* by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra conducted by Robert Spano.

https://youtu.be/LqtA8BzTqTw?si=0i1RN32K5stmGKL2

Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds degrees in piano and music history from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland, College Park, where he coordinated the University's International Music Festivals and Competitions for piano, cello, and voice. In 1988, he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, managing it for twelve years. NOI, as it's fondly known by participants, has helped young musicians prepare for and win professional auditions in orchestras around the world, including the Wichita Symphony. The program continues today under the leadership of internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop and director Richard Scerbo.

PAUL HINDEMITH

Born November 16, 1895 in Hanau, Germany (near Frankfurt)
Died December 29, 1963, in Frankfurt, West Germany

Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber (21')

1. Allegro (4')
2. Scherzo (Turandot): Moderato - Lively (8')
3. Andantino (4')
4. March (5')

The most recent Wichita Symphony performance of Symphonic Metamorphosis *took place on March 22 and 23, 1997, with Zuohuang Chen conducting. The WSO has performed the work five times in its history.*

Like Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Paul Hindemith was one of the most famous composers in Europe a century ago. Unlike Arnold Schoenberg and his followers, Alban Berg and Anton Webern, who expanded on German Expressionism and turned it into their signature 12-tone style, Hindemith mixed German traditions, especially Baroque influences, with the Expressionist style of the early 20th century to create his own musical language. Expressionism in music, often said to start with Schoenberg's 1912 *Pierrot Lunaire,* but also seen in Strauss's operas *Salome* and *Elektra,* as well as some late works by Mahler, aimed to express the composer's personal and deepest feelings, often through distortion or exaggeration of melodic lines and harmonic dissonances, including atonality.

During the Roaring 20s, composers often tried to outdo one another to become the next big *enfant terrible.* In 1920, Hindemith introduced a fire siren in *Kammermusik #1* (Chamber Music #1). In his 1928 opera, News of the Day, Hindemith outdid many by featuring a "nude" soprano immersed in a bubble bath while warbling about the joys of warm, running water.

With the Nazis coming to power in 1933, Hindemith quickly ran into trouble with the new regime. Joseph Goebbels publicly condemned Hindemith in 1934, and by 1936, the government banned his music. In 1938, Hindemith's music was included as examples in the infamous Entartete Musik (Degenerate Music) exhibit in Düsseldorf. Knowing that his wife's Jewish ancestry put him at risk, Hindemith decided to take his family to Switzerland. They eventually made their way to America, where he accepted a teaching position at Yale University during the war and became an American citizen in 1946.

Hindemith was a prolific composer whose music isn't performed as often today. Wichita audiences enjoyed his *Mathis der Maler,* which we heard two seasons ago. That piece and the *Symphonic Metamorphosis* are the two Hindemith orchestral works most frequently performed. He composed a large body of works for various instruments he called Gebrauchsmusik, meaning music for use or useful music. Often written with amateurs in mind, Gebrauchsmusik frequently served educational, social, or even political purposes. Much of it is rarely performed today, leading one wag to call it "a body of useless useful music." Besides being an influential composer, conductor, and teacher, Hindemith was an outstanding violist who composed many works for that instrument. He was also an excellent clarinetist and a decent pianist. He wrote an important book on music theory and the craft of musicianship.

In 1938, Hindemith collaborated with Léonide Massine to create a fifty-minute ballet called *Nobilissima Visione* (Noble Visions). Massine (1896–1979), born Leonid Myasin, was a distinguished Russian ballet dancer and

choreographer who gained fame as a member of Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* after World War I. He choreographed many ballets, including Satie's *Parade* (1917), de Falla's *Three-Cornered Hat* (1919), and *Gaîté Parisienne* (1938), which was set to music by Jacques Offenbach.

For a second collaboration with Hindemith, Massine proposed a ballet based on Carl Maria von Weber's music. However, Massine and Hindemith did not see eye to eye on the Weber project. Massine preferred orchestrated arrangements of Weber's music, while Hindemith, who was unhappy with Massine's earlier work, believed there was more creative potential. Eventually, the partnership ended, and Hindemith pursued his own artistic vision, resulting in the *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber.* The music was composed in 1943, and the piece was completed on August 29 of that year.

Many modern audience members might not recognize the name Carl Maria von Weber, who lived from 1786 to 1826 and died before turning forty due to tuberculosis. As a younger contemporary of Beethoven, whom he visited in 1823, Weber is credited with helping to shape the Romantic style of 19th-century music. He is mainly remembered for founding German Romantic opera with works like *Der Freischütz* (The Sharpshooter), *Oberon,* and *Euryanthe*—operas that influenced Richard Wagner. Weber's piano and concert music, including two clarinet concertos, a bassoon concerto, and a *Konzertstück* (Concert Piece) for Piano and Orchestra, was admired by Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Schumann.

Weber's concert music, especially the three overtures to his most famous operas, was more often featured on symphony programs during the 19th and 20th centuries but has become less prominent in the current century. When it is heard at all, it is more likely on classical music radio stations. At the Wichita Symphony, each of the three notable overtures was performed more than six times between 1945 and 2000, but only once since then.

For his Weber source material, Hindemith chose piano four-hand pieces, which he often played with his wife, and an overture from incidental music Weber wrote for a production of *Turandot,* a 1762 stage play by Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806). Incidental music is written for theatrical productions and helps fill the time during scene changes.

When calling his work "Metamorphosis," Hindemith is essentially using a more refined term for "Symphonic Variations," although at least one German edition called it "Variations." However, choosing the word "Metamorphosis" suggests a transformation of musical material, not in the usual way we think of a piece with sequential variations. Comparing the process to the transformation of a butterfly, Hindemith uses relatively common material by Weber and subjects it to his compositional process, resulting in a much grander outcome than the original material.

The **first movement** starts with an energetic and robust tune. Hindemith's fondness for brass instruments is evident. The orchestral textures in the first section are relatively thick and are accompanied by swirling woodwinds. A quieter middle section provides contrast to the opening. Pizzicato strings support the solo woodwinds. A section for violas – Hindemith's favorite instrument – signals the return of the opening material.

The **second movement** is a perfect example of humor and pure, unfiltered fun. It features Weber's overture from his incidental music for Turandot. It begins quietly with a solo flute introducing the theme against a soft sustained

chord in the strings. The clarinet and piccolo respond with a contrasting phrase. The melody has an exotic quality that hints at the non-European setting of the original story. Interestingly, the melody circles back on itself. The opening four-bar phrase repeats, followed by a contrasting four bars, which also repeat, leading back to the first phrase. This sequence repeats endlessly in a catchy, earworm-like way. When the brass instruments take their turn with the theme, the woodwinds accompany with chords that shimmer with trills. This seemingly simple structure showcases Hindemith's skill as an orchestrator, using a full range of orchestral colors that build to a striking climax, much like a "raspberry" to stop the repetitive earworm. A middle section introduces a jazzy variation of the theme, highlighting the brass. The strings drop out, and the sound shifts to that of a symphonic wind ensemble. Another passage emphasizes the solo timpani and other percussion instruments in a style reminiscent of a janissary band. The opening section returns with our familiar tune played by the cellos and basses, who begin a fugal treatment of the theme. A rising melody in the woodwinds adds complexity to the texture. The timpani and percussion have the final say as the music gradually fades, ending with a softly sustained chord in the orchestra.

After the energy of the first two movements, we need to catch our breath. Hindemith begins the **third movement** with a quiet, somewhat mournful melody introduced by a series of solo woodwinds. The cellos introduce the second theme, which is then taken up by the violins and oboes in turn. When the first theme returns in the horns and winds, a solo flute enters with a florid descant passage heard above the main theme. This extended solo, an essential orchestral audition piece for flutists, lasts over a minute until the movement's end.

The **fourth movement** is a lively, brisk march characterized by a dotted rhythm. The oboe and English horn introduce the first theme, which is then echoed by other instruments. Hindemith introduces a new playful theme played memorably by the horns against a backdrop of woodwind chatter. When the opening theme returns, it is in an augmented rhythm. The music quickly shifts back to the march theme, building to a brilliant climax in the brass. No wonder brass players enjoy the opportunity to perform Hindemith!

The New York Philharmonic, conducted by Artur Rodzinski, premiered *Symphonic Metamorphosis* on January 20, 1944. Writing his review for *The New York Times,* critic Olin Downes described the piece as "a novelty… [which] was one of the most entertaining scores that [Hindemith] has thus far given us, a real *jeu d'esprit* by a great master of his medium in a singularly happy mood."

Ultimately, Hindemith's music was performed as a ballet. George Balanchine choreographed *Symphonic Metamorphosis* for the New York City Ballet, debuting it on November 25, 1952.

The music is orchestrated for an orchestra consisting of two flutes and a piccolo, two oboes and an English horn, two clarinets and a bass clarinet, two bassoons and a contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, a tuba, and strings. A large percussion section typically requires five musicians to play the following instruments: timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, Chinese tom-tom, two wood blocks, tambourine, two triangles, glockenspiel, large and small cymbals, three suspended cymbals, four tubular bells, and large and small tam-tams (gongs).

Before attending the Wichita Symphony performance, familiarize yourself with Hindemith's fantastic take on music by Weber with these options.

Want to follow along with the score? Listen to this lively YouTube performance by the San Francisco Symphony with Herbert Blomstedt conducting.
https://youtu.be/RthuLePDo3A?si=etipnVf4FU16NZoV

For a live concert featuring soloing orchestral instruments and sections, watch this video by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, conducted by Alain Altinoglu.
https://youtu.be/vrJBzUsI7Iw?si=qnWb2SMyP3uDX4Lp

Don is the retired CEO (2012 - 2024) of the Wichita Symphony. He holds degrees in piano and music history from Bucknell University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also studied piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the University of Maryland, College Park, where he coordinated the University's International Music Festivals and Competitions for piano, cello, and voice. In 1988, he founded the National Orchestral Institute, an advanced training program for aspiring orchestral musicians, managing it for twelve years. NOI, as it's fondly known by participants, has helped young musicians prepare for and win professional auditions in orchestras around the world, including the Wichita Symphony. The program continues today under the leadership of internationally renowned conductor Marin Alsop and director Richard Scerbo.