

Program Notes

The *Fanfare für die Wiener Philharmoniker* by Richard Strauss was written in 1924 for the organization's first benefit ball, which raised money for the musician's pension fund. The piece was played while honored guests arrived at the event. The work has been played every year since at the Philharmonic's annual balls. This performance features the Nova Vista Brass and Timpani Ensemble.

Antonio Vivaldi, the “Red Priest” of Venice, was a prominent and prolific Italian composer of the late Baroque; over 500 concerti are attributed to him. At the age of 25 he became the music teacher at an all-girls orphanage school, the Ospedale della Pieta. It was his job to teach students to play music, as well as to write concerti to showcase their talents. The two concerti on this program each feature two soloists: one concerto written for two violins, and the other for two trumpets. Tonight’s performance features members of the Nova Vista Symphony as soloists for both works: Concertmaster Anthony Crawford and his son Miles playing violin, and Larry Blake and Michael Abouav performing on trumpet.

2018 commemorates the 125th anniversary of the death of Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky. The ballet *Swan Lake* was initially considered a failure at its premiere in 1877 – it was “too noisy, too Wagnerian, too symphonic - altogether unmemorable”, according to the critics of the day. Despite its initial failure, the story of Odette, a princess turned into a swan by an evil sorcerer's curse, is now one of the most popular of all ballets. This piece is one of the Nova Vista Symphony’s most requested orchestral works. In this program you will hear three excerpts: the famous Waltz, the Hungarian dance, and the grand Finale from the Ballet.

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) is justly celebrated as one of the greatest opera composers, renowned particularly for *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. He was the last of a family that had for two centuries provided musical directors for the cathedral in Lucca, in northern Italy; from the time of his great-great grandfather, the heads of the family held the position of town organist and maestro di capella (choir master) at the Cathedral of San Paolino. Puccini was still a small child when his father died, but the position was held for him, and he was expected to continue the family tradition upon completion of his musical studies at the nearby Institute Musicale.

While still only eighteen, during the spring of 1876, he walked the twenty miles from Lucca to Pisa and back for a performance of Verdi's *Aida*, and it is this experience which seems to have decided him on becoming a composer of musical theatre. He said later in life of this experience that he "felt that a musical window had opened for me".

After that glimpse through the window into the future, Puccini composed as his graduation exercise the mass you are hearing tonight; he entitled it simply *Messa a quattro voci* (*Mass for 4 voices*). The first performance in 1880 was a great success, praised by critics and public alike, but Puccini filed it away and it was not heard again in his lifetime.

In 1951 Father Dante del Fiorentino, an émigré Italian priest living in New York who had known Puccini when he was a young curate, visited Lucca to collect material for a biography of the composer. He came upon a copy of the mass and on his return home organized the first American performance of it in Chicago in 1952, seventy-two years after its premiere in Lucca. Although the notes in the preface of the published score indicated that Father Dante had 'rediscovered' the 'lost' manuscript, this was not an accurate portrayal. In fact, although the work was never performed after its premiere, it was not lost; Puccini scholars had always known of its existence, and Father Dante was by no means the first to have seen the manuscript. The real reason why it was not performed after its premiere was because Puccini quite clearly intended it to be a farewell to his association with sacred music. But was it a farewell, or was it merely a bridge constructed between opera and sacred drama, waiting to be crossed?

Since its publication in 1951 this Mass has been universally known as the *Messa di Gloria* due to the prominence of the Gloria section, though it is a "missa tota" (complete mass) comprised of the usual mass sections: Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus and Benedictus, and Agnus Dei. Puccini uses a standard classical orchestra, with tenor, baritone, and bass soloists. The style is direct and is clearly influenced by Puccini's hero, Verdi.

As a liturgical work written in an overtly operatic style its most obvious antecedents are Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle* (1863) and Verdi's *Requiem* (1874). It is a remarkably assured work for an eighteen-year-old, full of color, vitality, and musical surprises such as the many sudden key changes. But the work's operatic credentials are not immediately revealed.

The Kyrie begins with a luminous string introduction leading to a lyrical 'Kyrie eleison'. The music becomes more forceful halfway through the 'Christe eleison' before returning to the peaceful opening mood.

The Gloria, a real *tour de force*, takes up nearly half the entire mass, and abounds in rhythmic energy, soaring melodies and arresting dramatic gestures. Here Puccini's operatic instincts are fully expressed. There are several sections, starting with a joyous opening theme that defines the movement. A dramatic tenor solo at 'Gratias agimus' is followed by a reprise of the 'Gloria in excelsis' theme, and then for 'Qui tollis' a truly Verdian melody is introduced by the choral basses. 'Cum sancto spiritu', as custom decreed, is set to an exuberant fugue, the final section of which combines the fugue subject with the opening 'Gloria' theme, building to a compelling climax.

Like the Gloria, the Credo is divided into several sections. It begins with strong, unison choral phrases answered by rising orchestral interpolations. A beautiful section for tenor solo and unaccompanied chorus ensues at 'et incarnatus est'. After an extended bass solo for 'Crucifixus' the music explodes into life for the energetic 'et resurrexit'. The solemn tones of 'et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum' usher in the concluding section of the Credo - a surprisingly light and dance-like 'et vitam venturi' ("and the life of the world to come").

The Sanctus is short and simple. The stately opening is followed by a brisk 'Pleni sunt coeli' and 'Hosanna'. The Benedictus is given over to the baritone soloist, the chorus then returning with a brief 'Hosanna'.

The Agnus Dei is also straightforward. A lilting melody for the tenor soloist is answered by the chorus with 'miserere nobis'. This pattern is repeated with the baritone soloist and finally with both soloists, until the Mass comes to an untroubled close with an innocent triplet phrase.

The over-all impression upon first hearing the *Messe di Gloria* is that it is an opera set to the Mass Ordinary. But is this inappropriate or unusual? Harkening to an earlier period in music, one only need reference a work like Bach's "*Passion according to Saint Matthew*" to realize that sacred drama is not new at all. Bach's "*Passion*" has often been regarded as "Bach's greatest opera." In fact, it has even been staged as such, not only in church but in the opera house. Like Bach, Puccini set every word of the text with careful attention to the meaning conveyed. He was well acquainted with liturgical practices and the true meaning of the mass texts were known to him intimately. As a man of faith, he did not overstep the boundaries of appropriateness, unless one has an issue with drama in worship.

Therefore, let the debate begin...again.

Strauss, Vivaldi, and Tchaikovsky notes by Anthony Quartuccio, Nova Vista Symphony. Puccini notes ©John Bawden MMus, University of Surrey, UK, and Leroy Kromm, San Jose Symphonic Choir.