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Concert: Ithaca College Chamber Orchestra

Ithaca College Chamber Orchestra

Jeffery Meyer

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PROGRAM

Overture to *Le Nozze di Figaro* Wolfgang
Amadeus Mozart
from "The Marriage of Figaro" (1756-1791)

ITHACA COLLEGE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Jeffery Meyer, conductor

Malcolm Bilson, fortepiano

Piano Concerto no. 17, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
K. 453 in G major

I. Allegro
II. Andante
III. Allegretto - Finale: Presto

Malcom Bilson, fortepiano

Ford Hall
Friday, April 30, 2010
8:15 p.m.

INTERMISSION

Symphony no. 4 in B-flat major Ludwig van
Beethoven (1770-1827)

I. Adagio-Allegro Vivace
II. Adagio
III. Allegro vivace
IV. Allegro ma non troppo

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Program Notes

Overture to *Le Nozze di Figaro*

Le Nozze di Figaro by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is based on a play by French playwright Pierre Beaumarchais, the second of the trilogy, *Le Barbier de Séville* being the first and *La Mère coupable* the third. Its full title, *La Folle Journée, ou Le Mariage de Figaro* ("The Mad Day, or the Marriage of Figaro) summarizes well the soap-opera-like drama that pervades the opera. The plot centers around two couples: Count Almaviva and his wife, and their two servants, Figaro and his bride-to-be Susanna. In short, the Count takes a particular interest in Susanna and is determined to seduce her. This does not go unnoticed by the Countess who schemes together with Susanna to try and trap her unfaithful husband. In the end, the Count is exposed but is reconciled with his wife. Although the opera is not devoid of substance, it is generally light-hearted, comical, and playful.

In the opening bars of the overture, Mozart perfectly encapsulates this playful spirit. This soft, scurrying motive is bubbling in anticipation of the humorous drama to follow. After a few measures, the orchestra bursts with an eruption of energy only to return quickly to the opening motive. Although no motives from the opera appear in the overture, which is somewhat atypical for opera overtures, the sprightly, lighthearted, and even flirtatious musical gestures sum up the good-humored spirit of the opera.

Piano Concerto no. 17, K. 453 in G Major

"Concertos," Mozart once wrote to his father, "are a happy medium between what is too hard and what is too easy. They are very brilliant, pleasing to the ear, and natural, without turning vapid. Here and there are passages that only connoisseurs can appreciate, yet they are so written that others cannot fail to enjoy them, though without knowing why." Mozart's piano concerto no. 17 in G major is

certainly no exception to this maxim as it balances ease of listening with sophistication. It was written in 1784, a particularly fruitful year for that genre being the fourth of six piano concertos written that year. His talented pupil, for whom the concerto was written, Barbara von Ployer, gave the premier on June 13th of 1784 at her father's summer home outside of Vienna.

The opening movement *Allegro* is in a characteristic sonata form with a double exposition, the first of which is only orchestral and the second shared by the soloist. The music occasionally dips into melancholic harmonies but one the whole is full of grace and charm. As Mozart himself mentioned in the letter to his father, the first movement very elegantly traverses the line between cleverness and simplicity. The second movement *Andante*, although still charming at times, is full of soul and depth. This quality is created mainly by daring and unpredictable harmonies. The music changes between major and minor modes constantly and explores sometimes jarring chromaticism and melodic suspensions. As the story goes, the opening theme to last movement *Allegretto* came to Mozart from a surprising source: his pet bird starling. Biographers say he allegedly heard the bird whistling a theme which he transcribed for the last movement of this concerto. However, since his expense journal indicates that he bought the bird on May 21st and the concerto was already cataloged on April 12th, it is more likely that he taught the theme to the bird after-the-fact. In any case, the movement is in a theme and variations form with five variations and a lengthy coda. Like the first movement, it is joyful, lively, and energetic.

Symphony no. 4 in Bb Major

Since Symphony no. 4 is overshadowed by Beethoven's two adjacent symphonies, the mighty "Eroica" (no. 3) and the notorious C minor symphony (no. 5), no. 4 is unfortunately the most overlooked of the nine. Although it does not compare in terms of the epic quality of its neighbors, it is nonetheless difficult to listen to this symphony without being captivated

by its beauty and depth. Berlioz remarked that Symphony no. 4 is, "generally lively, nimble, joyous, and of a heavenly sweetness." Sir George Grove wrote: "The movements fit in their places like the limbs and features of a lovely statue; full of fire and invention as they are, all is subordinated to conciseness, grace and beauty."

Beethoven was a very clever businessman when it came to getting the most money for his pieces and this often involved selling the same pieces to multiple publishers or patrons without their knowledge. The fourth and fifth symphonies, which he wrote concurrently, are a perfect example of such scheming. The fourth symphony was written in the summer of 1806 when Beethoven met Count Franz von Oppersdorf, a wealthy nobleman who was also a music lover. The Count commissioned Beethoven to write two symphonies, initially thought to be the fourth and the fifth, until the Oppersdorf received the following letter from Beethoven in 1808:

Esteemed Count!
You will view me in a false light, but necessity compelled me to sell the symphony [the Fifth] which was written for you, and also another one [the Sixth], to someone else...but I assure you that I shall soon send you the one intended for you. I hope that you have been well, and also your gracious wife, to whom I ask you to give my best wishes. ---Beethoven.

When all was said and done, Count Oppersdorf only received the fourth symphony which had already been premiered at a private concert in the Lobkowitz Palace in Vienna, in March 1807. Since Beethoven had already promised the publishing rights to Breitkopf and Härtel rather than giving Oppersdorf the exclusive performance rights for six months as was customary, all the Count actually received was a dedication to the symphony. Beethoven never returned the money for the fifth symphony and made off with a considerable sum he acquired at the premier of the fourth. Needless to say, the relationship between

Beethoven and Oppersdorf did not end on a friendly note.

It is striking that one of Beethoven's most light-hearted symphonies should begin with one of the most mysterious and profound slow introductions. However, its cautious and hesitant mood is eventually broken by eight thundering chords that hurry the listener into a boisterous *Allegro Vivace*. There are few equals to the singing, sonorous quality of the second movement *Allegretto*. Berlioz remarked, in his typically poetic fashion: "Its form is so pure and the expression of melody so angelic and of such irresistible tenderness that the prodigious art by which this perfection is attained disappears completely." A raucous and energetic *Minuetto* follows which, after only a few bars, is interrupted by diminished arpeggios in the woodwinds echoed by the strings. The movement is full of such jarring musical elements both harmonically and rhythmically. The finale is bursting with spirit and good-humor harkening back to Haydn. The non-stop, perpetually motion *Allegro* is comically halted at the end where Beethoven stretches the main theme first in the first violins, then in the bassoon, and finally in the violas and seconds making it hardly recognizable. Then, an eruption of sixteenth notes in the lower strings brings the movement to an abrupt end.

Performer's Biographies

Malcolm Bilson began his pioneering activity in the early 1970s as a performer of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert on late 18th- and early 19th-century pianos. Since then he has proven to be a key contributor to the restoration of the fortepiano to the concert stage and to fresh recordings of the "mainstream" repertory.

Bilson has recorded the three most important complete cycles of works for piano by Mozart: the piano concertos with John Eliot Gardiner and the English Baroque Soloists for Deutsche Grammophon Archiv, the

piano-violin Sonatas with Sergiu Luca for Nonesuch records, and the solo piano sonatas for Hungaroton. His traversal on period pianos of the Schubert piano sonatas (including the so-called incomplete sonatas), likewise on Hungaroton, was completed in 2003. In 2005 a single CD of Haydn sonatas appeared on the Claves label, and in 2008 his first recording on an English piano was released on Bridge Records with works of Dussek, Cramer and Haydn.

Bilson, a member of the Cornell Music Faculty since 1968, is also Adjunct Professor at the Eastman School of Music and more recently on the Early Music Faculty of the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, in charge of Keyboard Studies. He gives annual summer fortepiano workshops at various locations in the United States and Europe, as well as master classes and lectures around the world. In the fall of 1994 Bilson and six of his former artist-pupils from Cornell's D.M.A. program in Historical Performance Practice presented the 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven in New York City, the first time ever that these works had been given as a cycle on period instruments. The *New York Times* said that "what emerged in these performances was an unusually clear sense of how revolutionary these works must have sounded in their time." The recording of this series for Claves Records garnered over fifty very positive reviews and has recently been reissued.

An educational video entitled "Knowing the Score" was released in 2005, in which Bilson discusses the question: Do we really know how to read the notation of the so-called 'classical' masters? (www.knowingthescore.com). A second video is currently in production, the tentative title of which is "Performing the Score."

Malcolm Bilson is a member of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences, has an honoray doctorate from Bard College and is the recipient of the 2006 James Smithson Bicentennial Medal. 2008

Born in Chicago, **Jeffery Meyer** (DMA, MM, SUNY Stony Brook; BM, Lawrence Conservatory) began his musical

studies as a pianist, and shortly thereafter continued on to study composition and conducting. He is the Director of Orchestras at the Ithaca College School of Music, as well as the founder and Artistic Director of the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic in St. Petersburg, Russia and the Artistic Director of the Water City Chamber Orchestra in Wisconsin.

Called "one of the most interesting and creatively productive conductors working in St. Petersburg" by Sergei Slonimsky, in recent concert seasons, he has been seen conducting, performing as piano soloist and chamber musician, as well as conducting from the keyboard in the United States, Canada, Russia, and throughout Europe and Asia. He has appeared with ensembles such as the Milwaukee Symphony, Syracuse Symphony, Philippine Philharmonic, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra and the Orchestra Sinfonico "Haydn" di Bolzano e Trento. As a pianist, he performs frequently as part of the piano-percussion duo /Strike/. He has been broadcast on CBC Newfoundland, has recorded and performed with the Philadelphia Virtuosi (Naxos), and has been heard as a soloist at the Aspen Festival. During the 2001-2002 academic year he lived and studied in Berlin and Leipzig as the recipient of a DAAD grant in music. He has been distinguished in several international competitions (2008 Cadaqués Conducting Competition, 2003 Vakhtang Jordania International Conducting Competition, 2003 Beethoven Sonata International Piano Competition) and was a prizewinner in the 2008 Tenth International "Antonio Pedrotti" Conducting Competition.

ITHACA COLLEGE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Jesse Livingston, conductor

Jeffery Meyer, director

Violin I

Natalie Brandt,
concertmaster
Kristin Bakkegard
Charles Palys
Sadie Kenny
Bryn Digney
Samantha Hecht
Isaac Shiman

Violin II

Alyssa Jutting*
Gabriella Colkett
Robin Alfieri
Emily Frederick
Sarah Weber
Kevin Harper
Kate Goldstein

Viola

Michael Capone*
Jennifer Meckler
Rosie Newton
Max Aleman
Stephen Gorgone

Cello

TJ Borden*
Erin Snedecor
Lin Georgis
Kristin Mills
Chelsea Crawford

Bass

Kevin Gobetz*
Jarrett Bastow
Corey Stevens

Flute

Lisa Meyerhofer*
Emily Wespiser

Oboe

Jamie Davis*
Alana Rosen

Clarinet

Brianne Remaley*
Erik Johnson

Bassoon

Josh Malison*
Noah Wolfinger

Horn

Dana Barrett*
Maureen Preston

Trumpet

Ethan Urtz*
Cyril Bodner

Timpani

Meagan Magnoni*

* principal