

Orchestra Seattle and Seattle Chamber Singers

George Shangrow, Music Director

present

Musical Feasts III

String Symphony

-Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

Fuga-Grave-Allegro

Andante

Allegro Molto

Symphony No. 1 in A (World Premiere)

-Carol Sams

Allegro

Adagio

Presto

Adagio-Vivace

Intermission

Mass

-Anton Bruckner

Kyrie

Gloria

Credo

Sanctus

Benedictus

Agnus Dei

Soloists

Carol Sams

Emily Lunde

Stuart Lutzenhiser

Brian Box

Sunday, February 9, 1992 3:00p.m.
Kane Hall, University of Washington

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Western Pianos and Organs

Program Notes

in the morning, and were schooled privately in history, Greek, Latin, natural sciences, philosophy, contemporary literature, drawing, and, oh yes, music. They also had regular instruction in riding, swimming, and dancing.

Not only did the young Mendelssohns have a splendid formal education, but the company their parents kept was no less stimulating. Just before Felix wrote his 12 string symphonies, Goethe spent two weeks at the Mendelssohn's home. Other visitors were the philosopher Friedrich Hegel, the explorer and naturalist von Humboldt, as well as popular artists, theologians, and of course, musicians. Private concerts were given in the Mendelssohn home every Sunday afternoon. Felix and his brother and sisters grew up on a steady diet of Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and the Bach sons. It is nearly certain that Felix Mendelssohn's String Symphonies were first performed at these home concerts. His mother wrote charming letters to the ablest professional musicians of Berlin, offering them lunch if they would come and play with her children!

The twelve string symphonies remained unpublished and virtually unknown until the early 1970's, when they were edited and issued by Helmuth Christian Wolff. Mendelssohn himself is mainly to blame for the neglect of these musical gems. He regarded his early efforts as a part of his musical apprenticeship. In fact, he composed what he called his *Symphony No. 1 in C* in 1824, a year after completing his twelfth string symphony.

These first twelve symphonies were learning exercises for young Mendelssohn. In these works he emulated the craft and styles of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Even so, his own musical stamp shines through. The works anticipate what was to soon follow: the brilliant *Octet for Strings* and *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written at age 16 and 17 respectively, and hint at the later works too—like the moody *Fingal's Cave* and *Scottish Symphony*.

-Kay Benningfield

Symphony No. 1 in A Major

by Carol Sams

I thought it would be fun to see if I could in fact write a symphonic piece with no program or text since most of my writing (in fact, all) over the last twenty years or so has been vocal music. In doing this project, I discovered three things. First and foremost, that the essence of music is not in any sense literal or verbal, that its existence has nothing (!) to do with the external world, only in human thought, which although it relies on references in nature and the physical world, does not depend primarily upon them. So, composition in this way is actually about thought.

The most important difference between composing for the voice and composing for instruments alone is that the voice uses words, and those words take center stage. They draw their emphasis from the music, but they are the impetus for the music. They come first, both in the mind of the composer and for the audience. The music must in some way comment upon the meaning in the words, and add to it. For the composer this usually means getting inside the words first and finding out personally and intimately what they mean.

Of course, there are symphonies that include the human voice and words in one or more movements. But there is an emphasis shift when this occurs that is, to me, disruptive. So even if it had been an easy way out, I didn't choose this option, nor did I choose to illustrate a story line. I wanted to see what would happen if I worked strictly in a musical sense, disregarding any extraneous non-musical input.

After writing most of the first movement, it became obvious to me that there is another element in composing for instruments alone that is not primary with vocal works. In vocal writing, one instrument (the voice) is the focal point and other musical ideas move to support that. In instrumental writing, the situation is considerably more democratic, the musical ideas having the most potential in this situation are incomplete in and of themselves, so that an idea which would work as a song melody

turned out to be less useful in the total scheme than a fragment of the melody, passed boarding-house style around the entire orchestra.

My teacher Darius Milhaud used to say that the ABA form essentially contained everything you really needed to ensure your piece had a beginning, middle and end. In the first movement, I tried to stick to the traditional sonata allegro form. Later, I used more free structures to see what I could find out about that. This was illuminating, since I felt that the freer structures actually worked better for my style.

I am presently writing an opera for Tacoma Opera, and it seems that the main question people ask me about my opera is: "Is it going to be in Italian?" People who knew I was writing a symphony used to ask me if I could hear all the parts. The answer to that is a qualified yes. I can hear most of it in my head, but some of it surprises me. Sometimes the balance is different than I thought. Sometimes the sonorities are darker or lighter. Rhythms seem much more vital played live than in my brain.

Since I am a singer, I decided to write a piece in which melody is prominent. I wanted to write a piece in which the orchestra sings. Balancing this with the democracy requirements proved to be the single hardest job involved, but the freedom from literary and programmatic allusions is heady and delightful.

I decided to follow in the footsteps of mystery writer Sue Grafton (*A is for Alibi*) and write my first symphony in A. The next will be in B flat, the B and so on. I hope you like this first piece, because there will be more!

-Carol Sams