

ORCHESTRAL SPECTACULAR

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2007 – 3:00 PM
FIRST FREE METHODIST CHURCH

ORCHESTRA SEATTLE
George Shangrow, conductor

PROGRAM

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)
Agon (1957)

- I. Pas de quatre; Double Pas de quatre; Triple Pas de quatre*
- II. Prelude; First Pas de trois; Sarabande-Step; Gaillarde; Coda*
- III. Interlude; Second Pas de trois; Bransle Simple; Bransle Gay; Bransle Double*
- IV. Interlude; Pas de deux; Coda; Four Duos; Four Trios*

MURL ALLEN SANDERS (b. 1950)
Accordion Concerto #2

Poco allegro
Andante
Klezmer, let's go!
Murl Allen Sanders, accordion

– Intermission –

ANTONIN DVORAK (1841-1904)
SYMPHONY No. 9, "From the New World", Opus 95

Adagio—Allegro Molto
Largo
Scherzo: Molto Vivace
Allegro con fuoco

Please disconnect signal watches, pagers and cellular telephones. Thank you.
Use of cameras and recording equipment is not permitted in the concert hall.

PROGRAM NOTES

Stravinsky: Agon

Igor Stravinsky invigorated ballet music to such a profound degree that his musical presence still resonates on ballet stages around the world. His first efforts in that genre for orchestra, written between 1909 and 1913 – *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and especially *The Rite of Spring* (see below) – changed the world of dance and music forever. He didn't stop writing music for dance with those ground-breaking works, either. *Rénard*, followed, as did *Les noces*, *Chant du rossignol*, and *Pulcinella*, all within a decade. Even when Stravinsky conceived music for a small, mobile chamber group – his *Histoire du soldat* was originally conceived as a piece to be performed on a portable, flatbed stage – dancing was still on his mind: *Histoire*, scored for only seven instruments and three voices, also included a dancer.

The 1928 score, *Apollo* (*Apollon Musagète*), was a turning point in Stravinsky's continuing collaborations with dancers. At the work's European premiere, the ballet was choreographed by the famed George Balanchine. (Adolph Bolm, a veteran of Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, choreographed and danced *Apollo*'s world premiere at the Library of Congress.) Balanchine and Stravinsky would collaborate again on ballets inspired by two more Greek themes: *Orpheus* (1947) and *Agon* (1953; 1957).

In Greek drama, the *agon* was a moment of deliberation, or a contest, between two characters or competing ideas, sometimes also taking the form of a debate between a single character and the chorus. No literal program or story guided Stravinsky as he wrote the music for *Agon* – he was striving to create that pure, absolute music he so fervently spoke about – but in a clever, idiosyncratic, and totally unique way, it became a dialogue between old and new. Indeed, his musical inspiration came as much from the Baroque French court as from the atonal serial technique and sparse orchestrations of Second Viennese-school composer Anton Webern. It is this juxtaposition of old and new – the obsolete vs. then-cutting-edge technique of 12-tone serialism – which creates a “debate” in the music of *Agon*.

In addition to the tonal vs. atonal opposition, Stravinsky also allows for the orchestration to create a dialogue: his choice of instruments is quirky, reinforcing the contrasts between old and new. Strings and a single mandolin – instruments with Renaissance origins – are set among a more contemporary-sounding ensemble heavy on winds, brass, and percussion.

The ballet itself, choreographed by Balanchine, was considered by many dance critics to be a “high-water mark” in American ballet. The Library of Congress Performing Arts Division website describes the “*Pas de deux*,” a dance originally created for Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell that begins the fourth section of *Agon*, as “one of the defining moments of mid-century ballet.”

In a letter to Stravinsky, dance impresario Lincoln Kirstein, who along with Balanchine commissioned *Agon*, outlined an idea for the scenario: a dance competition “before the gods... as if time called the tune, and the dances which began quite simply in the 16th century took fire in the 20th and exploded.” At a 1996 revival by Houston Ballet, Houston Chronicle critic Ann Holmes described the movement: “eye-popping, with offbeat angularity, unexpected footwork, and bent and twisted bodies, as dancers responded to the [often] dissonant music... If there is a dance in the contemporary armory that could be called ‘cool,’ *Agon* is it. One wants to re-invigorate the word... adapting it to describe the cutting edge, the bravura styling, the sheer shock of strangeness, while still conveying elegance and grace.”

Simple and emotionally detached titles such as “*Pas de quatre*” (dance for four), “*Interlude*,” and “*Four Duos*” designate the musical movements. Directions in the musical score are sparse,

specifying only which dancers, male or female, would appear in each movement, and giving rudimentary theatrical directions. As *Agon* commences, for example, the score indicates “as the curtain rises, four male dancers are aligned across the rear of the stage with their backs to the audience.” The work ends similarly.

The 12-tone serial “row” – an atonal, ordered sequence of notes which Stravinsky used to compose some of the movements – is reflected fascinatingly in the choreography. Balanchine calls for 12 dancers, four men and eight women, who are then divided into various combinations of dancers for the four musical movements, which are further subdivided into three shorter tableaux.

The music travels from a tonal center in the first movement – around the note C – moving into polytonality in other sections, on to atonal and 12-tone material, sometimes combining tonality with atonal serialism, several times reprising the music of the opening dance. Stravinsky concludes the work again with the note C as a tonal anchor. Surely with this mixture of tonal and atonal, the composer has created his own *agon* within the sweep of the music.

Another notable contrast of old and new in *Agon* was Stravinsky's use of counterpoint, an ancient musical art which dictates how individual musical lines interact with one another, in particular, governing how individual notes move from consonance to dissonance to consonance again. He cleverly takes the ancient rules and freshens them up for the 20th century. From the initial overlapping trumpet entrances to the many curious multi-voiced textures he creates throughout, Stravinsky – as much as any composer – demonstrated how counterpoint could still be a valid practice in the 20th century.

The first concert performance of *Agon* took place at the University of California, Los Angeles, June 17, 1957, with Stravinsky's friend and champion Robert Craft conducting the Los Angeles Festival orchestra, as part of film composer Franz Waxman's Los Angeles Music Festival and in commemoration of Stravinsky's 75th birthday. The dance premiere occurred several months later in New York City.

-- *Composer Dave Kopplin, who holds a Ph.D. in composition from UCLA, is the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Publications Coordinator.*

Sanders: Accordion Concerto #2

Accordion Concerto #2 reflects many of my “world music” influences and shows off the accordion and orchestra in a number of different styles and moods while maintaining a distinctly American perspective. I continue my quest to integrate modern American accordion sounds into the symphony orchestra and mainstream American music.

Concerto #2 incorporates drums and percussion in all three movements to help define the styles and propel and inspire the orchestra and soloist. The first movement of Concerto # 2 reflects some of the emotional turmoil present in my life and the world at large while writing it. My choice was an “off balance” tango style, reminiscent of Piazzolla, with changing meters, mood and tempi. The three main themes of this movement represent some frustration, anger and urgency giving way to some bittersweet tenderness and finally reconciliation. The difficulties and suffering endured by so many people in the world today are impossible to ignore and I feel compelled to express what I can about it in the way I know best through music. It is helpful to do this for my own emotional well-being and if it helps others I am grateful.

The second movement opens with a serene chordal section and proceeds to the main melody in song form containing elements of rhythm and blues ballad, bossa nova and jazz. There is a brief dream interlude and then a reprise of the song section with

room for improvisation and interaction between the accordion and the orchestra.

The final movement is a klezmer-inspired scherzo, although with darker emotions and implications. After the rousing 2/4 opening the piece migrates to a 7/8 section reminiscent of the middle east and Indian film music. Following an accordion cadenza, the drums and accordion have an improvised interplay that leads back to the original klezmer theme to the rousing conclusion.

Accordion is a natural choice for a solo instrument with symphony orchestra. Its sound production, the free vibrating metal reed, makes it a hybrid instrument with woodwind and brass characteristics. I particularly love the sound of the accordion and its expressive possibilities through dynamics, articulation and sound color. The blend with violins truly excites me and it works well with all the other instruments of the orchestra. Europeans and Russians have known about this for nearly a hundred years and today the accordion is a recognized classical concert instrument with many virtuoso players. In my travels of late I have been meeting and hearing many of the best players and have been thrilled by their performances.

-notes by the Composer

Dvorak: Symphony No. 9; "From the New World"

In September 1892, Antonin Dvorak arrived in New York to take up the post of Director of the National Conservatory of Music. One of his first jobs was to judge the prizes for a composition competition: the patron of the conservatory had put up over \$4,000 in prize money for six classes of composition. Dvorak found much talent, "mostly in the German school, but here and there another spirit, other thoughts, other coloring - in short, Native American music".

Quite what made him think he was hearing the influence of native Indian music is doubtful. He certainly had very little chance to hear any real Native American or African-American music before he began sketching a new symphony in January 1893. Work on it occupied him for about five months, and he completed the work on 24th May.

The title page is interesting: written in both Czech and English it says "From the New World, Symphony (E minor), No.8, Opus 95". The '8' was later crossed out and '7' substituted, only to be crossed out in turn. Dvorak seems to have been oddly unsure as to how many symphonies he had written! The confusion was made worse when Dvorak's first four symphonies were lost, and for most of the early 20th century the New World Symphony was known as number 5.

The first performance was given at a concert of the New York Philharmonic Society in the Carnegie Hall on 16th December 1893. Dvorak wrote to his publisher "The success was enormous; the newspapers say no composer has ever before had such a triumph. I was in a box; the hall was filled with the best New York public and the people applauded so much that I had to thank them from the box like a king."

Though it has no overt Native American or African-American tunes in it, most of the tunes are clearly influenced by folk music generally, being short, simple and memorable. The exception is the famous tune in the Largo, which is long, but still simple and memorable. Dvorak said that the second and third movements were influenced by Henry Longfellow's epic poem "The Song of Hiawatha". This long and now largely forgotten poem presents a highly romanticised view of native American Indian life, a million miles removed from the brutal reality of their oppression at the time.

After a slow introduction the first movement has three main tunes: the bold opening horn call, the folksy tune heard later

on flutes and clarinets, and a happy melody on the solo flute. The whole opening section is repeated before a development of all three themes in increasing complexity and excitement leads to a reprise of the opening theme and a triumphant coda.

The slow movement, after a solemn procession of chords lowers the key from E to D-flat, introduces the famous tune on cor anglais. (If only Dvorak had received royalties every time this tune has been used in an advertisement ...) A long central section includes references to two of the themes from the first movement, and the movement ends with a peaceful memory of the cor anglais theme and the opening chord sequence.

The scherzo is a vigorous dance, whose tunes sound very Czech (not American) in origin - especially the village wind band sound of the trio section. This movement, too, is haunted by the ghost of the first movement, a reference made explicit in the coda.

The finale sweeps along with great energy, built on the bold theme proclaimed by horns and trombones. A calm second theme on solo clarinet offers contrast, and then Dvorak includes references to several themes from earlier movements as he builds the symphony to its powerful and triumphant conclusion.

-Peter Brien

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ST. MATTHEW PASSION
Good Friday April 6 7:00PM
J.S. Bach: *St Matthew Passion*

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Sunday May 6 3:00PM
J.S. Bach: *Double Violin Concerto*
Music by Schütz and Rosenmüller
Ten New Choral Works for Voice and
Instruments
By Huntley Beyer
OSSCS commission—*world premiere*

Program Change:
MASS IN TIME OF WAR
Sunday June 10 7:00PM
Haydn: *Mass in Time of War*
Tschaikovsky: *Symphony No. 5*
Note: Program subject to change

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Orchestra Seattle 2007

George Shangrow, Music Director and Conductor

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Dean Drescher^
Stacey Dye
Stephanie Endy
Sue Herring
Manchung Ho
Fritz Klein, concertmaster
Mark Lutz
Avron Maletzky
Gregor Nitsche
Susan Ovens
Stephen Provine*
Tyler Reilly^
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*Principal

^Guests of Orchestra Seattle.

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