

The logo for Arizona Musicfest features a stylized green cactus on the left, a black swoosh underneath, and an orange sun partially obscured by the swoosh.

Arizona Musicfest

2021 MUSICFEST OUTDOORS SERIES Musicfest Chamber Players Concerts – May 1, 2021

PROGRAM NOTES

Serenade for Strings in E-major, op.22 by Antonin Dvořák

The **Serenade for Strings** by Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904) is a perfect “Welcome Back” to classical music performance at Arizona Musicfest. Why do I feel this? There is no brass fanfare heralding the concert, rather the music is an ingratiating breath of fresh air, just hinting at a salute. It is a genuine serenade, a piece written to honor or welcome someone or something. The someone is **you**, our audience, and music is the honoree. No trumpets, no stirring “hear ye, hear ye”.... just beckoning strings quietly requesting our attention.

By definition, a serenade is a work in several movements, generally performed outdoors, and variously described as light, engaging, and even calm and peaceful. Often dance and march rhythms are prominent and it’s easy to understand why: usually, the musicians would enter the outdoor venue playing an appropriate walking beat.

The word itself comes from the Latin *serenus*, which, in turn, is the root for the Italian *sereno* (peaceful) and *sera* (late or evening). Although Dvořák had already written symphonic works, it was this lovely, smaller-scale piece that was one of his first big successes, bringing him fame and some much-needed financial support.

The Serenade is a five movement work; for this special concert, you will hear three sections. (Do listen to the other two movements: a Chopinesque *Tempo di Valse* and an energetic *Scherzo Vivace*.)

The First Movement (*Moderato*) presents a charming, delicately syncopated theme, then pursues other captivating melodic journeys. The Fourth Movement (*Larghetto*) needs only to be heard: its rich textures speak of romance and “tristesse”....glorious. The Final Movement (*Allegro vivace*) abounds with happy themes: it is joyous and conversational dance music, filled with the harmonies and rhythms of Czech folk music. The lovely *Larghetto* theme is heard again and the melody from the First Movement returns as the work comes to an ebullient close.

To the listener, it seems so simple: some of the movements are in ternary form (ABA), some show harmonic development, some have fugal passages, but all are so accessible. How appropriate that this warm and gracious **Serenade for Strings** was composed in the first two weeks of May in 1875. And how wonderful to hear this enchanting music outdoors this Spring.

Appalachian Spring by Aaron Copland

The ballet *Appalachian Spring* may well be Aaron Copland's quintessential gift to American music. It is surely one of the most popular ballets of the 20th Century, commissioned by the dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham.

Copland (1900-1990) grew up in Brooklyn, the son of a Jewish immigrant family. He studied piano and composition with notable composers and teachers. As George Gershwin and Samuel Barber did before him, Copland went to Paris to work with Nadia Boulanger, the celebrated musical mentor of the 1920s. After returning to the States, Copland spent most summers at Tanglewood, where he taught and composed, and where he befriended the major American composers, among them Leonard Bernstein, Roy Harris, and Virgil Thompson.

Like his contemporaries, Copland sought to find a personal voice in music. The work we hear today contains familiar Copland hallmarks: the use of cowboy and Western idioms, folk music and the well-known Shaker Hymn "Simple Gifts." But what is distinctive and personal to Copland is the open, sometimes surprising harmonic progressions, and the spare orchestration alternating with an often complex, lush sound. We also find this "voice" in his ballets, *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid*, and, incorporating South American and Mexican musical material, in the Clarinet Concerto and *El Salón México*. This skillful combination of sophisticated musical technique with "native" thematic ideas has often been called the "American Sound." The chamber group for *Appalachian Spring* consists of the nine strings, a flute, a clarinet, a bassoon, and a piano.

Written in 1945, *Appalachian Spring* is the story of a young, newly-married couple in southern Pennsylvania in the 19th Century as they take possession of a farmhouse. We hear a sermon, a barn dance, and then a quiet, tender section in which the couple are alone. The music portrays these scenes alternating slow tempos with quick and boisterous dance rhythms.

The sudden shifts of meter and rhythmic accents throughout the piece enhance the sense of motion and activity. "Simple Gifts" is quietly introduced by the various instruments in a fugue-like progression, then the pace picks up with a lively dance passage for the entire chamber group. The regal and chorale-like music that follows leads to the final section of the eight-part suite, in which "the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house."

Piano Concerto No.3 in c-minor, op.37 by Ludwig van Beethoven

The Piano Concerto No. 3 in c-minor by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) shows us the titan *before* his form-shattering Symphonies #3, #5 and #7. It is the Beethoven who, upon hearing Mozart's Piano Concerto #24 in c-minor, marveled, "We shall never be able to do anything like that!" It is the young composer, innovative, yet rooted in the older forms. It is definitely an ebullient Beethoven, yet also often dark and stormy. It is, finally, Beethoven, suffering from depression and finding strength through his music.

The arrangement for chamber orchestra, written in 1881, is by the German court conductor and composer from Mannheim, **Vinzenz Lachner** (1811-1893). Salon concerts were the rage in mid- to late-19th century Europe and the demand was often for important orchestral works. True, it was almost a must for families to have a piano in their homes, but how could even the wealthy fit 45 orchestral musicians in their family home on a Sunday afternoon? Enter the three Lachner brothers, each one a recognized composer and sought-after as a talented arranger. A thriving genre developed and adaptations of concertos abounded. A string orchestra of nine musicians is the group you will hear: the good old "Noah's Ark" grouping, two by two, plus a double bass.

The First Movement's prolonged orchestra introduction shows the work to still be classically Mozartian. Marked *Allegro con brio* (briskly, with spirit), the section is in C minor, a key noted for its power to inspire emotion and tension, and a favorite of the composer (see his Piano Sonata #8, Symphony #5, and the "Funeral March" in his Symphony #3). Strings present a terse first theme that is answered by woodwinds. Next, the orchestra airs a gracious second theme. Finally, Beethoven turns the spotlight on the pianist, who enters with scales in octaves that lead back to the serious first theme, played now only by the pianist. From here on, the soloist dominates the movement. (An interesting side note: during the early 1800s, the piano's range was being expanded from its original five octaves. Beethoven wrote the first-known high G into the musical material heard as the piano enters. Some months later, he added a high C for a pupil who was performing the work.)

Following this expansive double exposition in which both orchestra and piano state the material, the development section is filled with unrest and passages of unsettled emotions. The recapitulation is pretty straightforward, leading to the soloist's cadenza. As was customary, Beethoven premiered the Concerto himself, but, pressed for time, he left many pages of the score either blank or with mere reminders of the soloist's part. (And yes, he dutifully nodded to the page turner when it was time to turn the page, something they laughed about afterwards over dinner!) The piano continues to dominate the orchestral texture in the ending (*coda*), revisiting the octave scales sounded when it first entered.

The Second Movement, in the comforting key of E Major and marked *Largo* (very slow), is lyrical, poetic, and exudes the romantic side of Beethoven's creativity. The pianist begins by offering a poignant theme that is enhanced by its deliberate revelation. The piano sings with sweeping *arpeggios* (open chords), joined by plucked strings to accompany the thematic material. Analysis does little (if anything) to enhance the enjoyment of such musical magic. Revel in the sheer beauty of this section, and listen for a surprise at its conclusion!

The Third Movement is a rondo, whose main theme is repeated, alternating with new melodies (e.g. ABACADA). The soloist opens with an almost gypsy-like flair, playing a somewhat nervous, but happily energetic theme in C minor. As the movement progresses, Beethoven has fun with temporary key changes, but settles back to the home key of C minor. The movement is bright and cheerful; romping melodic motifs and playful passages abound, as always back to the first theme we go. Finally, Beethoven shifts to C Major, known as the purest key, for a happy-go-lucky close to the Concerto.