

Program Notes for Ravel's Bolero

Feb. 26-28

The Sorcerer's Apprentice **PAUL DUKAS (1865-1935)**

Composed in 1897.

Premiered on May 18, 1897 in Paris.

Paul Dukas spent his entire life in Paris as a greatly respected teacher and composer. He showed his musical aptitude early, teaching himself to play piano, and entered the Conservatoire in 1882, where he proved to be an excellent student, winning the second *Prix de Rome* in 1888. Though he had to abandon his formal training for a time to serve in the army, he turned that period to good use by studying many of the classical works of music, the basis upon which he later built his own compositions. (He later edited several volumes of works by Rameau, Beethoven, Couperin and Scarlatti.) After his stint in the military, he completed the overture *Polyeucte*, his first work to be performed publicly. The Symphony in C major followed in 1896, and he gained international recognition a year later with *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Dukas held important positions throughout his life as an instructor at the Conservatoire and as a critic, and was awarded the *Legion of Honor* in 1906. Stern self-criticism of his compositions led him to destroy all his unpublished manuscripts before his death, so that his small musical legacy comprises only three overtures, a symphony, an opera (*Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*), a ballet (*La Péri*), three piano works, a short *Villanelle* for horn and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice is based on Goethe's 1796 ballad *Der Zauberlehrling*, which in turn was derived from the dialogues of the second-century Greek satirist Lucian. The tale tells of a naive apprentice to a wizard who overhears the magic incantation used by his master to animate the household broom into a water-carrier. In the sorcerer's absence, the neophyte tries the spell on the broom, and — to his delight — it works. The broom marches smartly between well and water basin until the latter is full, then overflowing, then flooding — the apprentice never bothered to learn the magic words to *stop* his wooden servant! Not knowing what to do, he axes the broom in half, only making matters worse — now there are two water-carriers instead of one. More chopping produces more brooms. Just before the novice drowns in his own mischief, the sorcerer returns and, with a sweep of his hand and a spoken word, quiets the tumult.

Dukas captured perfectly the fantastic spirit of this poem in his colorful music. The quiet, mysterious strains of the beginning depict the wizard and his incantations, while the apprentice scurries about to lively phrases in the woodwinds. When the door slams behind the departing sorcerer (a loud whack on the timpani), the tyro is left in silence. A rumble in the low instruments signals the first stirring of the enchanted broom. The rumble becomes a galumphing accompaniment, over which the bassoons give out the main theme of the work. This melody, combined with a quicker version of the incantation theme and brass fanfares, is used to suggest the aquatic havoc being wrought in the wizard's absence. At the height of the confusion, the magician bursts through the door (the mysterious music of the opening returns to indicate his presence), and he orders the flood to subside. When peace has been restored, the apprentice receives a swift boxing of the ears to end this jovial musical tale.

Symphony No. 38 in D major, K. 504, "Prague" **WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)**

Composed in 1786.

Premiered on January 19, 1787 in Prague.

"No work has ever created such a sensation as the Italian opera *The Marriage of Figaro*," reported the Prague *Oberpostamtszeitung* on December 12, 1786. "Connoisseurs who have also seen this opera in Vienna

assert that it has been done much better here. Word of this triumph must have reached the ears of Mozart himself, for rumor has it that he will come here in person to see the performance." The rumor proved to be correct — Mozart and his wife, Constanze, left Vienna on January 8, 1787, and arrived in the Bohemian capital three days later. Within hours of his arrival, Mozart was whisked to a soirée that confirmed the glowing reports of the success of his music in Prague. "At six o'clock," he wrote to Gottfried von Jacquin, "I drove with Count Canal to the so-called Bretfeld Ball, where the cream of Prague's beauties gather. I did not dance and did not flirt. The former because I was too tired, the latter because I am a natural idiot. But I looked on with great pleasure while all these people skipped about, quite enraptured, to the music of my *Figaro* arranged as contradances and waltzes. For people here talk about nothing but *Figaro*; they play nothing, sing nothing, whistle nothing but *Figaro*; they go to no opera but *Figaro* and forever *Figaro*. This is truly a great honor for me." On January 17th, after a week of having been entertained, feted and lionized by the city's nobility, Mozart put in a public appearance at the Prague Opera House for the performance of *Figaro*. "Word of his presence spread through the theater at once," reported the local press, "and as soon as the overture was finished, the whole audience broke into applause, honoring and welcoming him." The response five days later, when he conducted his own opera from the cembalo, was tumultuous. It is not surprising that he told a friend, "Prague is indeed a very beautiful and agreeable place."

As well as simply being a witness to the performances of *Figaro* in Prague, Mozart also hoped to present a concert of his instrumental music during his stay, so he brought along, among other items, a grand, new symphony that he had completed on December 6, 1786. With the help of his host in Prague, Count Johann Josef Thun (for whom he had written the "Linz" Symphony four years before), and the composer Franz Dussek, an acquaintance from his Salzburg days, Mozart was able to organize a program for his own benefit on January 19th at the Opera House. Mozart introduced the new symphony he had brought with him from Vienna, played some concerted works and offered a half hour of improvisation at the keyboard, but the audience demanded more, so he extemporized a dozen brilliant variations on "*Non piu andrai*" from *Figaro*. "Never before had there been such overwhelming and unanimous ecstasy as his divine playing aroused. We truly did not know which we ought to admire more, the extraordinary compositions or the extraordinary playing. Both together produced a total effect upon our souls which resembled a sweet enchantment," recorded Franz Niemetschek in his 1798 biography of the composer. "The great artist perfectly fulfilled all that had been expected of him," summarized one reviewer. Mozart stayed in Prague until mid February, thoroughly enjoying what was one of the happiest times of his life. When he left, he took away not only the unstinting praises of the city and a substantial cache of earnings but also a contract from Pasquale Bondini, impresario of the Prague Opera, to write a new stage work for the fall season — *Don Giovanni*.

The Symphony (No. 38, D major, K. 504) that Mozart premiered at his Prague concert, and which has always borne the name of that city as its sobriquet, is one of the supreme orchestral masterworks of the 18th century. Mozart had not produced a work in the genre for over three years, and this remarkable score bears the impress of the maturity gained from his experience of life and music in the intervening time. In a specifically technical sense, the "Prague" Symphony shows the influence of the elaborate counterpoint of Johann Sebastian Bach, whose works Mozart was arranging and performing for the concerts of "ancient music" sponsored in Vienna at that time by Baron von Swieten, and the structural integration and thematic development of the symphonic sonata forms of his friend Joseph Haydn. So rich is this Symphony's texture that Mozart, who usually completed an entire composition in his head before subjecting himself to the drudgery of writing it down on paper, had to work out its counterpoint on several pages of sketches.

This work has no minuet movement, and is sometimes known as the "Symphony without Minuet" (a silly designation — twenty of Mozart's sixty-odd symphonies have only three movements). Among the theories that have been advanced to explain the Symphony's three-movement form is that Prague may have been one of those conservative places that thought the slight minuet inappropriate for inclusion in the grand symphonic form. Prague, though, willingly accepted the innovations of *Figaro*, one of the most forward-looking pieces of its time. Another argument — that Mozart simply ran out of time to write a minuet for the Symphony — falls on the grounds that he had fully six weeks to compose such a piece after completing the other three movements, more than enough time for a composer who was to turn out the Overture to *Don*

Giovanni in a single night several months later. The reason that the "Prague" Symphony has no minuet lies, not surprisingly for this most formally crystalline of all composers, in the music itself. Even with just three movements, the Symphony is longer than any other that he ever wrote except for the "Jupiter." A minuet could well have pushed the piece beyond what Mozart always considered the touchstone of his art — good taste. In addition, a light-weight minuet may have been lost among the large surrounding movements, which contain the longest symphonic introduction before Beethoven, three extensive and rigorous sonata-allegro essays and, according to Alfred Einstein, "the most serious and most aggressive" thematic working-out in any of Mozart's works. The "Prague" Symphony marks not just an important step in Mozart's personal artistic maturity but also an advance in the sophistication of the symphonic form — after this work, the symphony came to be thought of not as simply a collection of several independent musical essays linked only by key and style but as a single, grand span of music in which the individual movements are carefully weighted and balanced against each other to produce an overall integrity. It is on this basis that Einstein is justified in citing the "Prague" and Mozart's last three symphonies as "the greatest historical and spiritual stimulus to Beethoven's conception of the monumental symphony."

The Symphony No. 38 opens with an extended introduction whose turbulent moods presage the darker pages of *Don Giovanni*. Mozart, one of music's most fecund melodists, is positively profligate with themes in the *Allegro* that comprises the main body of the movement. Einstein counts "almost a dozen" motives that are welded into an expansive sonata-allegro form enriched by some of Mozart's most masterful contrapuntal writing. The long-limbed and lyrical *Andante*, another fully developed sonata form, is one of those pieces of Mozart's maturity that exquisitely balance an ineffable serenity with a whole world of pathos and poignant emotions. The quicksilver finale, the third of the Symphony's sonata forms, was a particular delight at its premiere to *Figaro*-mad Prague, since Mozart borrowed the theme for the movement from the opera's Act II duet of Susanna and Cherubino, "*Aprite presto*."

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in C major, H. VIIb:1 JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

Composed during the early 1760s.

Haydn was among the most industrious composers in the history of music. He summarized his philosophy of no-nonsense professionalism when he wrote, "I know that God has bestowed a talent upon me, and I thank Him for it. I think I have done my duty and been of use in my generation by my works. Let others do the same." His talent for simple hard work and seemingly boundless fecundity was apparent as soon as he joined the musical staff of the Esterházy family in 1761, his employer for the next half century. Not only did he compose, but he was also general administrator of the music establishment, chief keyboard player for chamber and orchestral concerts and conductor of the orchestra. Regarding the press of his duties, the noted scholar H.C. Robbins Landon related an amusing anecdote about Haydn during those years: "He was extremely busy at this time, and when he wrote out the score of the First Horn Concerto he mixed up the staves of the oboe and the first violin and wrote on the score, 'Written while asleep.'"

Haydn was never so rushed, however, that he lost concern for the musicians in his charge. He composed concertos for a number of them so they could show their skills in the best light to their employer. He lived in the same so-called "music building" with them, and became their close friend and trusted advisor. He was a witness at many of their weddings, and he even stood as godfather to a number of their children. One who extended to him this last honor was the cellist Joseph Franz Weigl, a close friend for many years. It was for Weigl that Haydn wrote this lovely C major Cello Concerto as one of the products of those fertile early years with the Esterházy's. The Concerto was certainly played at one of the palace concerts, after which Haydn entered its opening measures into a catalog of his compositions that he compiled in 1765. The piece then disappeared for 200 years.

Though Haydn may have written as many as a half dozen concertos for cello, it was long thought that only

one had survived — that in D major. Some works once attributed to him proved to be spurious; others were lost. It was this latter fate that had apparently befallen the C major Concerto, whose only trace seemed to be the listing in Haydn's 1765 catalog and another entry by his assistant, Joseph Elssler, in an 1805 index. Ironically, it was the upheaval of the Second World War that rescued the work from obscurity. After the War, the Czech National Library's confiscation of all the great private collections in the country resulted in a mountain of manuscripts that took scholars years to catalog. Near the bottom of the pile, in the former holdings of the Counts of Kolovrat-Krakovsky, Oldrich Pulkert and Robbins Landon discovered a complete set of parts for the C major Concerto in 1961. "Here," wrote Landon, "is the major discovery of our age, and surely one of the finest works of the period." The Concerto has come round full circle, from one of Haydn's most important early works, to total obscurity, to an established place in today's concert repertory for the cello. A similar happy circle pertained to the composer's relationship with the Weigl family. The child to whom Haydn was godfather was, like his father, named Joseph, and the son became one of the most popular and successful composers of comic opera in Vienna. He never forgot Haydn. When Haydn's health had broken and he was living his last days in a comfortable Vienna apartment, one of his most frequent visitors was the younger Weigl. He came to share with the older composer the respect and love that had maintained the family friendship for fifty years, a friendship whose beginning was marked by this Concerto.

The C major Cello Concerto was written during the years of transition from the Baroque to the Classical era, and shows traits of both the old and new styles. Its harmonic and melodic components are largely of the modern type, while certain formal characteristics and modes of expression look back to the models of preceding generations. The first movement gives the impression of an old-fashioned stately procession, much in the grand style of Handel's orchestral works. Also backward-looking is the movement's abundance of thematic material. At least six melodic ideas are presented by the orchestra in the first twenty measures alone, far more than the one or two upon which most of Haydn's later movements are founded. This technique is closer to that of the opening orchestral section of the Baroque concerto, with its little treasury of motivic material that is mined throughout the movement, than to the two or so contrasting themes found in the typical exposition of the Classical concerto form.

This Concerto is one of the very few works in which all of the three movements are in the same form, as though Haydn were experimenting to discover what sort of musical material best fit into this particular construction. Each movement comprises alternations between the orchestra and the soloist, the basic formal principle of the Baroque concerto. There are four orchestral sections interspersed with three for the cellist. Unlike the Baroque model, however, the three cello sections take on the properties of exposition, development and recapitulation with the intervening orchestral episodes serving as introduction, interludes and coda. The soloist is provided with an opportunity for a cadenza in the closing orchestral coda. There are only two exceptions to this pattern in the Concerto: the second movement has no orchestral interlude before the soloist's recapitulation, and there is no cadenza in the last movement.

Much of the charm of this Concerto lies in the manner in which the vigorous young composer poured the new wine of sentiment and melody into the old bottles of form and nobility of spirit. It is of such music, and of the man who wrote it, that Mozart said, "He alone has the secret of making me smile and touching me to the bottom of my soul."

Boléro **MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)**

Composed in 1928.

Premiered on November 20, 1928 in Paris, conducted by Walter Straram.

"Ravel's *Boléro* I submit as the most insolent monstrosity ever perpetrated in the history of music," fumed the critic Edward Robinson in 1932. He was hardly the only music lover disparaging the piece when it was new — the composer himself informed his colleague Arthur Honegger, "I have written only one masterpiece. That is the *Boléro*. Unfortunately, it contains no music." When told that a woman at the Paris premiere had

pointed in his direction and cried out, "He is mad," Ravel smiled, and said that she truly understood the work.

Despite critical misgivings, however, the public, always the ultimate arbiter, made *Boléro* one of the most popular pieces of concert music written in this century. Within weeks of its American premiere, it carried Ravel's name and music to more ears than had any of his other works of the preceding four decades: virtually every major American orchestra scheduled *Boléro* for immediate performance; six recordings appeared simultaneously; the melody was arranged for jazz bands and just about every conceivable instrument and ensemble, including solo harmonica; it appeared in a Broadway revue and a cabaret; it served as background music for the 1934 film of the same name starring Carole Lombard and George Raft, as well as another Hollywood effort of more recent vintage in which Dudley Moore pursued a beautiful fantasy on a beach in Mexico. Even the city fathers of Ravel's home town were moved to name the street on which he was born in his honor. Soon after the Paris orchestral premiere in 1930, Ravel was in Monte Carlo with the conductor Paul Paray. When they walked past the Casino, Paray suggested, "Let's go in and play." Ravel replied, "No. I have played, and I don't play any more. I have won." Indeed he had.

Ravel originated what he once called his "*danse lascive*" at the suggestion of Ida Rubinstein, the famed ballerina who also inspired works from Debussy, Honegger and Stravinsky. Rubinstein's balletic interpretation of *Boléro*, set in a rustic Spanish tavern, portrayed a voluptuous dancer whose stomps and whirls atop a table incite the men in the bar to mounting fervor. With growing intensity, they join in her dance until, in a brilliant *coup de théâtre*, knives are drawn and violence flares on stage at the moment near the end where the music modulates, breathtakingly, from the key of C to the key of E. So viscerally stirring was the combination of the powerful music and the ballerina's suggestive dancing at the premiere that a near-riot ensued between audience and performers, and Miss Rubinstein narrowly escaped injury. The usually reserved Pitts Sanborn reported that the American premiere, conducted by Arturo Toscanini at Carnegie Hall on November 14, 1929, had a similar effect on its hearers: "If it had been the custom to repeat a number at a symphonic concert, *Boléro* would surely have been encored, even at the risk of mass wreckage of the nerves."

Of the musical nature of this magnificent study in hypnotic rhythm and orchestral sonority, Ravel wrote in 1931 to the critic M.D. Calvocoressi, "I am particularly desirous that there should be no misunderstanding about this work. It constitutes an experiment in a very special and limited direction, and should not be suspected of aiming at achieving anything different from or anything more than it actually does achieve. Before its first performance, I issued a warning to the effect that what I had written was a piece lasting about seventeen minutes and consisting wholly of 'orchestral tissue without music' — of one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of execution. The themes are altogether impersonal ... folk tunes of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind, and (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity.... I have carried out exactly what I intended, and it is for listeners to take it or leave it."