

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Quartet for Flute, Violin, Viola and Cello in D major, K. 285 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

*Composed in 1778.*

During his stay in Mannheim early in 1778, Mozart met “a gentleman of means and a lover of all the sciences,” one Willem Britten de Jong who numbered among his accomplishments a certain ability on the flute. De Jong had heard of the 21-year-old musician’s extraordinary talent for composition from a mutual friend, Johann Baptist Wendling, the flutist with the Mannheim orchestra, and he commissioned Mozart to write three concertos and at least three quartets with strings for his instrument. Since he was, as always, short of money, Mozart accepted the proposal to help finance the swing he was then making through Germany and France in search of a permanent position. The next leg of the journey was to lead from Mannheim to Paris, and these flute pieces would help to pay the bills.

Though Mozart professed a distaste of writing for solo flute, he managed to finish three of the quartets (K. 285, 285a and 285b) and two of the concertos (the second one is actually just a transposition of the Oboe Concerto from the preceding year) by the time he left Mannheim. He settled with De Jong for just less than half of the original fee, and let it go at that. Despite his disparagement of the instrument, Mozart’s compositions for flute occupy one of the most delightful niches of his incomparable musical legacy — Rudolf Gerber characterized them as combining “the perfect image of the spirit and feeling of the rococo age with German sentiment.”

The D major Quartet (K. 285) opens with a crystalline sonata-form movement which the flute initiates with the presentation of the dashing principal melody. By the time the music has arrived at the second theme, a rising scalar configuration in triplet rhythms, it is clear that Mozart has endowed the flute with concerto-like prominence in this movement — only in the central development section does it relinquish its leadership in favor of some more democratic motivic discussion with its companions. The *Adagio*, in the expressive key of B minor, is a nocturnal *cantilena* for the flute couched upon a delicate cushion of plucked string sonorities. In his biography of the composer, Alfred Einstein wrote that this movement, suffused with “the sweetest melancholy, [is] perhaps the most beautiful accompanied flute solo that has even been written.” This irresistible Quartet closes with a buoyant rondo enlivened by frequent dialogues of the flute and the first violin.

### **Sonata for Piano James Lee III (born in 1975)**

*Composed in 2002.*

*Premiered on November 24, 2003 in Ann Arbor, Michigan by the composer.*

The composer wrote, “The Sonata for Piano was conceived during the summer of 2002, when I was a composition fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center in Lenox, Massachusetts. The Sonata is in three movements. The first movement is loosely structured in sonata-allegro form. The work begins with a hint of D as a tonal center. The following measures present the first theme, which is full of relentless energy. In these passages there is a slight homage to the persistent rhythms of [Argentinean composer] Alberto Ginastera. This is especially heard in the lower registers of the piano. Once the sound-world of incessant rhythms has calmed down, theme two arrives as a tranquil contrast with sweet dissonances. As one might expect, the development appears with passages exploring both themes. As the climax of the development is reached, there is an abbreviated recapitulation which ends on a musical ‘question mark.’ The second movement is a musical ‘repose’ for both the performer and the listener. A delicate melody is heard in a thin-textured movement temporarily clothed in a B-flat minor tonal center. A low bell tolls near the final passages, which quietly modulate up a step to C. The finale begins with the last notes of movement two. This movement is a loosely structured rondo form. It is here that the pianism and technique of the pianist

are really tested. Repeated notes, octaves, Bachian ‘two-part-invention-like’ counterpoint, and incessant, forward-moving rhythms recall various motives and ideas from movement one. As this continues, practically the whole range of the piano keyboard is explored until the Sonata’s closing measures.”

***Assobio a Játo* (“*The Jet Whistle*”) for Flute and Cello  
Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)**

*Composed in 1950.*

Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil’s greatest composer, had little formal training. He learned the cello from his father and earned a living as a young man playing with popular bands, from which he derived much of his musical background. From his earliest years, Villa-Lobos was enthralled with the indigenous songs and dances of his native land, and he made several trips into the Brazilian interior to study the native music and ceremonies. Beginning with his earliest works, around 1910, his music shows the influence of the melodies, rhythms and sonorities that he discovered. He began to compose prolifically, and, though often ridiculed for his daring new style by other Brazilian musicians, he attracted the attention of the pianist Artur Schnabel, who helped him receive a Brazilian government grant in 1923 that enabled him to spend several years in Paris, where his international reputation was established. Upon his permanent return to Rio de Janeiro in 1930, Villa-Lobos became an important figure in public musical education, urging the cultivation of Brazilian songs and dances in the schools. He made his first visit to the United States in 1944, and spent the remaining years of his life traveling in America and Europe to conduct and promote his own works and those of other Brazilian composers.

*Assobio a Játo* (“*The Jet Whistle*”) for Flute and Cello, composed in New York in 1950, was one of a number of chamber and solo works from his later years in which Villa-Lobos explored the areas of virtuosity and extended techniques for traditional instruments. The piece is in a Classical three-movement form (fast–slow–fast), and exhibits the tuneful influence of Brazilian popular and folk music that was the inspirational and stylistic engine which drove all of Villa-Lobos’ output. *Assobio a Játo* takes its curious title from the effect at the very end in which the flutist blows air directly into the instrument to produce a rushing, whistling sound reminiscent of a jet engine. During the 1950s, when Villa-Lobos was annually making trips to France and the United States but before commercial jet travel was available, perhaps this piece was a musical sign of his eager longing for a quicker, more modern way of air transportation.

**Quartet No. 2 for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello  
in E-flat major, Op. 87  
Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**

*Composed in 1889.*

*Premiered on November 23, 1890 in Prague by Hanus Trneczek (piano), Ferdinand Lachner (violin), Petr Mares (viola) and Hanus Wihan (cello).*

By the time that Dvořák undertook his Piano Quartet No. 2 in E-flat major in 1889, when he was nearing the age of fifty, he had risen from his humble and nearly impoverished beginnings to become one of the most respected musicians in his native Bohemia and throughout Europe and America. He was invited to become Professor of Composition at the Prague Conservatory at the beginning of the year, but refused the offer after much careful thought in order to continue devoting himself to creative work and touring as a conductor of his music. In February, his opera *The Jacobin* enjoyed a great success at its premiere in Prague, and the following month his orchestral concert in Dresden received splendid acclaim. In May, Emperor Franz Josef awarded him the distinguished Austrian Iron Cross, and a few months later he received an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Dvořák composed his Second Piano Quartet at his country home in Vysoká during the summer of 1889, the time between receiving these last two honors, in response to repeated requests from his publisher in Berlin, Fritz Simrock, who had been badgering him for at least four years to provide a successor to the Piano Quartet, Op. 23 of 1875. The new

composition was begun on July 10th, and completed quickly within five weeks, evidence of the composer's testimony to his friend Alois Göbl that his head was so full of ideas during that time that he regretted he could not write them down fast enough; he completed his boundlessly lyrical Symphony No. 8 just two months later.

The Quartet's first movement follows a freely conceived sonata form. To launch the work, the unison strings present the bold main theme, which immediately elicits a capricious response from the piano. Following a grand restatement of the opening theme and a transition based on a jaunty rhythmic motive, the viola introduces the arching subsidiary subject. The development is announced by a recall of the theme that began the movement. A varied recapitulation of the earlier materials rounds out the movement. The *Lento* is unusual in its structure, consisting of a large musical chapter comprising five distinct thematic entities played twice. The cello presents the first melody, a lyrical phrase that Sourek believed was "an expression of deep, undisturbed peace." The delicate second motive, given in a leisurely, unruffled manner by the violin, is even more beatific in mood. A sense of agitation is injected into the music by the animated third theme, entrusted to the piano, and rises to a peak of intensity with the stormy fourth strain, which is argued by the entire ensemble. Calm is restored by the piano's closing melody. This thematic succession is repeated with only minor changes before the movement is brought to a quiet and touching end. The third movement, the Quartet's scherzo, contrasts waltz-like outer sections with a central trio reminiscent of a fiery Middle Eastern dance. The finale, like the opening *Allegro*, follows a fully realized sonata form in which an energetic main theme (which stubbornly maintains its unsettled minor tonality for much of the movement) is contrasted with a lyrically inspired second subject, first allotted to the cello. A rousing coda of almost symphonic breadth closes this handsome work of Dvořák's maturity.

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