

## Program 4

### Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV 1046

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Composed around 1717.

Brandenburg, in Bach's day, was a political and military powerhouse. It had been part of the Holy Roman Empire since the mid-12th century, and its ruler — the *Markgraf*, or *Margrave* — was charged with defending and extending the northern imperial border ("*mark*," or "*marche*" in Old English and Old French), in return for which he was allowed to be an Elector of the Emperor. The house of Hohenzollern acquired the margraviate of Brandenburg in 1415, and the family embraced the Reformation a century later with such authority that they came to be regarded as the leaders of German Protestantism; Potsdam was chosen as the site of the electoral court in the 17th century. Extensive territorial acquisitions under Frederick William, the "Great Elector," before his death in 1688, allowed his son Frederick III to secure the title and the rule of Brandenburg's northern neighbor, Prussia, with its rich (and nearby) capital city of Berlin; he became King Frederick I of Prussia in 1701. Frederick, a cultured man and a generous patron, founded academies of sciences and arts in Berlin, and built the magnificent palace Charlottenburg for his wife, Sophie Charlotte, which became one of the most important musical centers in early-18th-century Germany. When Frederick William I succeeded his father in 1713, however, he turned the court's focus from music to militarism, and dismissed most of the excellent musicians that his father had assembled; several of them found employment at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig, where a young prince was just starting to indulge his taste and talents for music. Frederick William did, however, allow his uncle, Christian Ludwig, younger brother of the late King Frederick and possessor of the now-lesser title of Margrave of Brandenburg, to remain at the palace and retain his own musical establishment.

Johann Sebastian Bach met Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, in 1719, during his tenure as music director at the court of Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, the young prince who had recently signed up some of the musicians fired by Frederick William I. Bach worked at Anhalt-Cöthen from 1717 to 1723, and he and Leopold seem to have gotten along splendidly. The Prince enjoyed travel, fine art and, above all, music, and he respected and encouraged Bach in his work, even occasionally participating in the court concerts as violinist, gambist or harpsichordist. Provided by Leopold with an excellent set of instruments and a group of fine players (and the second-highest salary of any of his court employees), Bach enjoyed a fruitful period at Cöthen — many of his greatest works for keyboard, chamber ensembles and orchestra date from those years.

Early in 1719, Leopold sent Bach to Berlin to finalize arrangements for the purchase of a new harpsichord, a large, two-manual model made by Michael Mietke, instrument-builder to the royal court. While in Berlin, Bach played for Christian Ludwig, who was so taken with his music that he asked him to send some of his compositions for his library. Bach lost an infant son a few months later, however, and in 1720, his wife died and he rejected an offer to become organist at the Jacobkirche in Hamburg, so it was more than two years before he fulfilled Brandenburg's request. By 1721, however, Leopold had become engaged to marry a woman who looked askance at his huge expenditures for musical entertainment. Bach seems to have realized that when she moved in, he would probably be moved out, so he began casting about for a more secure position. He remembered the interest the Margrave Brandenburg had shown in his music, and thought it a good time to approach him again, so he picked six of the finest concertos he had written at Cöthen, copied them out meticulously, had them bound into a sumptuous volume (at no little cost), and sent them to Christian Ludwig in March 1721 with a flowery dedication in French — but to no avail. No job materialized at Brandenburg, and in 1723, Bach moved to Leipzig's Thomaskirche, where he remained for the rest of his life. It is possible that the Margrave never heard any of these magnificent works that immortalized his name, since records indicate that his modest *Kapelle* might not have been able to negotiate their difficulties and instrumental requirements. The Concertos apparently lay untouched in his library until he died thirteen years after Bach had presented them to him, when they were inventoried at a value of four *groschen* each — only a few cents. Fortunately they were preserved by the noted theorist and pedagogue Johann Philipp Kirnberger, a pupil of Bach, and came eventually into the collection of the Royal Library in Berlin. They were brought to light during the 19th-century Bach revival, published in 1850, and have since come to be recognized as the supreme examples of Baroque instrumental music.

The Brandenburg Concertos differ from those of later eras in both instrumental disposition and form. These are *concerti grossi* ("*great concertos*"), works in which a small group of soloists (*concertino*) rather than a single instrument is pitted against the orchestra (*ripieno*). Most of the fast movements of the Brandenburgs use a formal procedure known as "*ritornello*," which is based on the contrast of sonority between *concertino* and *ripieno*. First the orchestra presents a collection of thematic kernels from which much of the movement grows. Then the soloists take over for an episode, sometimes borrowing material from the opening orchestral introduction, sometimes providing something new. The orchestra then returns (*ritornello* is Italian for "*return*"), and is followed by another solo episode, and that by another orchestral *ritornello*, and so forth. The remaining fast movements are based on dance types,

while the slow movements are usually lyrical and through-composed, a sort of elaborate wordless aria.

The Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, whose solo group includes two horns, three oboes and a violin, originated in the three-movement Sinfonia in F major (BWV 1046a) that Bach composed to introduce the "Hunting Cantata" he wrote to celebrate the birthday of Prince Christian of Saxe-Weissenfels in 1713 — *War mir behagt, ist nur die muntre Jagt* ("The Merry Hunt Is My Delight," BWV 208, source of the much-loved pastorale *Sheep May Safely Graze*). To create the First Brandenburg Concerto several years later, Bach thoroughly revised the Sinfonia, adding a violin to the soloists, expanding the finale with an additional *Polacca* episode, and composing anew the third movement. Bach again reworked portions of the Concerto No. 1 for the secular cantata *Vereinigte Zwietracht* ("United Discord," BWV 207), written in 1726 for the installation of Dr. Gottlieb Kortte as Professor of Law at Leipzig University. The opening movement, whose lusty horn-calls recall the Concerto's origin in a work inspired by the hunt, contains a joyous abundance of notes driven by a muscular rhythmic energy. The *Adagio* is a poignant lament largely carried on in dialogue between the first oboe and the solo violin. The third movement, in vigorous 6/8 meter, is bright and virtuosic. The finale is a procession of dances. It begins with a *Menuetto* for the full ensemble that returns, rondo fashion, as the structural support of the movement. Interspersed are a section for two oboes and bassoon, a *Polacca* ("Polonaise") for strings and a rousing trio for horns and three unison oboes.

In his book on *The Bach Family*, the noted scholar Karl Geiringer concluded of the Brandenburg Concertos, "There is an exuberance and optimism in this music that only a genius aware of his newly achieved, full mastery could call forth. Craftsmanship and inspiration, iron logic and zest for experimenting, here counterpoise each other to an extent rarely equaled again even by Bach himself."

### **Symphony No. 92 in G major, "Oxford"**

**Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)**

*Composed in 1788 or 1789.*

"Grand CONCERTS of VOCAL and INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, calculated to raise in the Minds of the Hearers the most pleasing and exalted Sensations that the Powers of Harmony alone are capable of effecting." So announced the local press in Oxford of the musical festivities which surrounded the awarding of an honorary degree to Joseph Haydn in July 1791. Sir Charles Burney, the peripatetic chronicler of 18th-century European musical life, nominated the composer for the honor following the great success of Haydn's London concerts during the previous spring. Three programs devoted largely to the works of Handel and Haydn were planned, and Haydn agreed to oversee a performance of one of his symphonies on each. However, he arrived too late on the day of the first concert (July 6th) to hold a rehearsal for the work he brought with him, so a symphony (which one is not known) familiar to the Oxford players was substituted. A rehearsal did take place for the concert on the next day, and it was on that date that this Symphony — No. 92 in G major — was introduced to the ancient university town and was awarded *its* title: "Oxford."

The history of the "Oxford" Symphony, however, extends back several years and many miles before those august graduation exercises in Wren's magnificent Sheldonian Theatre. Hardly new, the work had been composed, along with the Symphonies Nos. 90 and 91, in 1788 or 1789 for Comte d'Ogny in Paris. D'Ogny had commissioned these works for his "Concerts de la Loge olympique" following the enormous French success of Haydn's "Paris" Symphonies (Nos. 82-87) in 1787. Just as he was undertaking the commission for Paris, Haydn received another order for three symphonies from Krafft-Ernst, Prince of Oettingen-Wallerstein in southern Germany. Being severely pressed for time, Haydn tried a little shady business to satisfy both of his clients. Having sent the full manuscript score off with an appropriate dedication to d'Ogny, he then turned around and shipped a set of parts without score to Krafft-Ernst. In those days, a commission usually carried with it exclusive performance rights for a period of time, and the German Prince was understandably upset when he soon discovered that his Symphony had already been performed to much acclaim several hundred miles away. His agent convinced him that Haydn meant no harm by the incident, and Oettingen-Wallerstein found forgiveness in his heart. When Salomon snared Haydn from Vienna to give the first series of London concerts, the Prince invited the entourage to stop at his castle on the way to England, and reportedly extended every courtesy to the great musician.

Having already landed in France and Germany, the Symphony No. 92 had one more stop to make before it settled in Oxford. According to H.C. Robbins Landon, whose authoritative volumes on Haydn are a major musicological masterwork, this Symphony was on the first Haydn-Salomon concert in London, on March 11, 1791. All of this background made no difference whatsoever to the enthusiastic response the Symphony received when it was repeated in Oxford. The London *Morning Herald* reported of the concert, "The new Overture [i.e., Symphony] of Haydn, prepared for the occasion, and previously rehearsed in the morning, led the second Act [portion of the concert], and a more wonderful composition was never heard. The applause given to Haydn, who conducted this admirable effort of his genius, was enthusiastic; but the merit of the work, in the opinion of the Musicians present, exceeded all praise."

There are many endearing anecdotes about Haydn's stay in Oxford: how he felt both silly and proud walking around town for three days in his gown made of cherry and cream-colored silk ("I only wish my friends in Vienna might have seen me," he fancied); how his friends in the orchestra waved and shouted to him when he received his degree; how he raised his gown with outstretched arms and told the assembled crowd simply, "I thank you," to

which congratulations on his fine command of English echoed through the hall. Despite all the unaccustomed pomp, Haydn seemed genuinely proud of his honorary degree. "I have that doctorate to thank for much," he modestly recorded, "indeed, I may say all my success in England: it brought me the acquaintanceship of the most prominent men and *entr e* into the greatest houses." He signed himself thereafter "Doctor zu Oxford" and his pupil the young Beethoven dedicated his first three published piano sonatas to "Joseph Haydn, Docteur en Musique."

Haydn was, of course, a master of musical form, and the exquisite and inventive structures of this Symphony demonstrate once again his surpassing skill. There are, however, many ways to listen to a piece of music beside laying in wait for second themes, transitions, developments, and such, and Haydn presents the listener with such an opportunity in this work. The philosophy of balance was at the heart of the Classical ethos: four bars of music demand another four for symmetry; aggressive must be weighted against docile; loud against soft; the list goes on. It is a fascinating study to listen to this Symphony with an ear tuned to the balanced elements that Haydn emphasized. After a rather weighty introduction to the first movement, the exposition in quick tempo commences, and it is here that the game begins. Two starkly contrasting phrases are given at the outset — one a shy, hesitant four-measure strain presented tentatively by the strings; the other a vigorous, rhythmic proclamation hurled forth by the full orchestra. These two balancing moods — loud and soft, strong and cautious — control much of the Symphony, and they can be followed easily as they alternate throughout the sonata form of the first movement.

In the second movement, these balancing musical forces are played out on a larger scale. In this three-part form, the outer sections are sweet, graceful, and filled with a very proper *gallanterie*. The central portion of the movement, in contrast, is expressive, romantic, and touched with a kind of emotional pathos not heard in the other sections of the movement. In the following Minuet, contrast again plays an integral part in the music. Loud and soft alternate, and at one point, a large pause appears creating the ultimate antithesis in music: silence and sound. This balancing act — loud and soft, high instruments and low instruments, clear rhythm and obscure rhythm — continues throughout the movement.

The dichotomy carries into the finale. A light, tripping tune is tossed out by the violins to be balanced by a hearty outburst from the full orchestra. As in the Minuet, silence makes a resounding entry at crucial structural points. Other sudden contrasts appear. Some call these quick musical changes humorous, and this aspect is not to be denied, but Haydn in this wonderful Symphony also presented a dynamic conception of music, one that pulses with power and expectancy and urges the listener to anticipate each next moment. This is music that bristles with joy and energy and the love of life.

Robbins Landon wrote of the "Oxford" Symphony, "It seems to sum up, to round off, the enormous number of symphonies Haydn had written up to this point; it is a work written in the high summer of a long and productive life and its infinitely subtle introduction and poetic slow movement show us more of Haydn's true character than do any of the letters of the period. Together with some of the 'Paris' works and No. 88, it is one of the few symphonic works of the time worthy to stand beside the last four symphonies of Mozart."

## **Bassoon Concerto in E minor, R. 484**

**Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)**

Vivaldi's fecundity is amazing. He composed forty operas, two oratorios, two dozen cantatas, 75 sonatas, many miscellaneous instrumental and vocal pieces, and a clutch of music for the Church. Not to deny the considerable beauties of these works, it is, however, for his concertos that he is chiefly remembered. There are close to 500 of these works, almost half being for solo violin, with other large collections for bassoon, cello, oboe, flute, recorder and mandolin. There is a sizable body of compositions for multiple soloists, and some with no featured performers at all, these latter drawing such soloists as are required from the orchestra itself.

Vivaldi was occupied with the composition of concertos for over forty years. He inherited many of the formal and stylistic traits of this music from the large number of Italian composer-violinists who were spurred by the achievements in string instrument making scored by such Cremonese craftsmen as Stradivarius, Guarneri and Amati. Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) laid the foundation for the concerto form late in the 17th century with works that pitted a small band of soloists against the larger body of the orchestra in the *concerto grosso*. His principles of construction were transferred from a group of soloists to a single featured performer by Giuseppe Torelli (1658-1709). It was Vivaldi, however, who gathered together many disparate ideas to create the style of the mature Baroque concerto that was to have such a profound influence on Bach, Handel and even Mozart. (The concerto, it must be remembered, reached its formal perfection at least a half century before the symphony, and is the earliest form of music still part of the regular orchestral repertory.) Vivaldi's contributions to the genre may be summarized as follows: he established the three-movement, fast-slow-fast organization of the concerto that has served almost three centuries of composers; he introduced brilliance and virtuosity into the solo part (he was known in his day as much for his impassioned violin playing as for his compositions); he brought a certain quality of heightened, dramatic expression into instrumental music; he created themes with distinct profiles that were easy to remember; he codified the ritornello form; he injected a quality of almost operatic pathos into many of his slow movements; and he promoted the use of wind instruments.

The form of the Baroque concerto is simple in principle, but capable of seemingly infinite variation, as the diversity of Vivaldi's own works demonstrates. The word "concerto" comes from the Latin *concertare*, which originally meant "to contend, dispute," but in its Italian derivative also took on the sense "to agree, get together." Both implications of the word apply to the musical form. The soloist (or group of soloists) is held in opposition to the larger body of the orchestra (hence, the concert placement of the soloist at the front of the stage), but the two forces have to collaborate in themes, tonalities and rhythm if anything but chaos is to result — cooperation and contention simultaneously. The so-called *ritornello* form of the first and last movements of Vivaldi's concertos exploits these two sounding elements by alternating them. First, the orchestra (called the *tutti* — Italian for "together") introduces a collection of thematic fragments that establishes the key and mood. Then the soloist is trotted out as the orchestra is reduced to an accompanimental role. After the soloist has a turn, the full orchestra again appears with some of the fragments from the opening *tutti*. Further exchanges between soloist and orchestra fill out the movement, the solo portions being comparable to the stained-glass windows in a church wall buttressed by the returning *tuttis*. The form derives its name from the returning nature of these *tutti* sections, *ritornello* meaning simply "return." The form is logical, easy to follow and amenable to an enormous variety of music.

The E minor Bassoon Concerto is one of 36 such works that Vivaldi produced for that instrument, second in number in his output only to those for violin and more than any other composer. The opening orchestral introduction presents the brace of thematic fragments which reappear in the *ritornello* sections. These are interspersed with three sections for the solo bassoon, each utilizing some challenging resource of the technique of the instrument. The solo sections may borrow themes from the orchestra, but more often the soloist is given new figurations which are played only by him. The forms of Vivaldi's slow movements do not show the consistency of the outer movements, but are often akin in spirit to the operatic lament, as is the case here, where the bassoon sings a melody full of touching sentiment that is framed by an orchestral introduction and postlude. The finale, more dance-like than the other movements, is again in *ritornello* form, and, like the first movement, has three solo episodes. The work ends with some flashing technical display, testimony to the excellent abilities of Vivaldi's Venetian musicians, and a brief closing orchestral *tutti*.

### **Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major, K. 453**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

*Composed in 1784.*

*Premiered on June 13, 1784 in Vienna with Barbara Ployer as soloist.*

From the time that Mozart settled in Vienna in 1781, one of his most important means of financial support was giving piano lessons to some of the city's better-heeled residents. Though he charged top price for his services, he seldom had trouble filling his teaching schedule which, during his early years in the capital, occupied most of his weekday mornings. That he was also frantically busy during the palmy days of spring 1784 performing and composing (between February and April he played 22 concerts, and wrote four piano concertos, a violin sonata and a quintet for piano and winds) says much for his popularity and his ambition; it is little wonder that sickness overtook him by the end of the summer. "Have I not enough to do? I do not think I can get rusty at this rate," he wrote in a letter to his father, Leopold, with which he also proudly enclosed a list of his performances.

One of Mozart's favorite and most talented pupils in 1784 was Barbara Ployer, daughter of Gottfried Ignaz von Ployer, the Viennese agent at the Habsburg court (today he would probably be called a lobbyist) for Mozart's old employer and nemesis, the Archbishop Hieronymous Colloredo of Salzburg. Mozart gave Barbara lessons during the winter at the family's town home in the Lugeck, near St. Stephen's Cathedral, and in the summer at their villa in the nearby village of Döbling, north of the city, on the way to Grinzing. On February 9, 1784, he finished for her the Concerto in E-flat major (No. 14, K. 449), which "Fräulein Babette" (as Mozart called her) first played on March 23rd. This handsome piece was so well received in the Ployer household that Mozart created for it a sequel, the G major Concerto (K. 453), and presented it to his student/patron just three weeks later, on April 12th. (During that amazingly fertile spring season, Mozart wrote two more piano concertos, K. 450 and K. 451, between the works for Babette.) A performance was arranged at the Ployer residence in Döbling for June 13th. Mozart took advantage of the occasion to invite the famous composer Giovanni Paisiello, who was passing through Vienna on his way back to Naples after serving as opera composer to the Empress Catherine in St. Petersburg for eight years, to accompany him "in order that he might hear my composition and my pupil." In addition to Babette's rendition of the new work that evening, Mozart joined his student in the Two Piano Concerto (K. 365), and then took part in his recent Quintet for Piano and Winds (K. 452). One wonders if Paisiello's stronger emotion that night was pleasure or envy. At any rate, Mozart thought highly of the new Piano Concerto; it was one of only six such works that he published during his lifetime.

The Piano Concerto No. 17 is, in many ways, Mozart's quintessential example of the genre. It is brimming with excellent melodies, touched by both pathos and wit, masterful of form, brilliant in sonority and always in the most exquisite, refined taste. In his survey of the concerto literature, Abraham Veinus perceptively noted one of the essential qualities of Mozart's genius, a characteristic seen nowhere better than in this Concerto: "He was a blender of moods, a man who worked with the entire gamut of human emotions. Even within a single movement his range is

as extensive as it is subtle. Whatever the main character of the movement, there are always qualifying touches. It is in the continual *chiaroscuro* of lighter and darker emotions that one finds the richest satisfaction.” Alfred Einstein called this Concerto a work of “hidden laughter and hidden sadness.”

The Concerto begins with the best of good cheer. The movement’s main theme is one of those peerless Mozartian mixes of march, song and symphony, bursting with the beautiful melodic kernels that incited his contemporaries to jealousy over his lyrical gifts. The violins present a complementary motive, a close-interval phrase which finds an echo in the soulful theme that opens the *Andante*. After its entry, the piano usurps and elaborates both of these themes, and adds a new one of its own between them in an unaccompanied passage. The soloist pauses while a vigorous *tutti* leads to the stronger sentiments of the development section, largely based on a little arpeggiated motive previously introduced in the orchestral introduction. The recapitulation returns the earlier material, and allows for a solo cadenza, for which Mozart left not one but two notated realizations.

The *Andante* is one of those wondrous, formally unclassifiable slow movements which abound in the piano concertos. It opens with what Tovey called “a solemn, pleading phrase” in the violins and a limpid melody shared among the woodwinds. The piano enters, ponders some of the material already presented, and then undertakes a thoughtful dialogue with the members of the orchestra for the remainder of the movement. Such thorough, symphonic integration of soloist and ensemble was one of Mozart’s greatest contributions to the concerto form.

A bit of Mozartian biography attached to the finale is as charming as the movement’s infectious main theme. On May 27, 1784, Mozart recorded in his account book the expenditure of 34 *kreuzer* for a starling at a Viennese pet shop. The bird, according to the delighted composer’s testimony, was able to whistle all the notes of the first five measures of the finale’s melody except one, which it overshot by about a half-step. “That was beautiful,” Mozart told his diary, and then copied down the starling’s version of the tune, noting the single “mistake.” Mozart grew fond of the bird. He liked its cheerful company, and was amused to show it off to visitors. When it died three years later, he buried it in his backyard with a tiny funeral ceremony and a few lines of elegiac doggerel: “A little fool lies here, Whom I held dear ...” It is a delightful story, of course, though Mozart never explained how the bird came to learn his theme even before it had been played by human musicians — the starling must have been a veritable Jenny Lind among fauna. The avian connection for this music is certainly not inappropriate, however, since it is decidedly in the *opera buffa* idiom from which arose seven years later that most memorable birdman in all of opera, Papageno in *The Magic Flute*. Formally, the finale is a crystalline set of variations which concludes with a dashing coda in quicker tempo, exactly the technique that Mozart used to round off the acts of his operatic masterpieces.

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