

SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ELGAR & MOZART | OCT 2, 3 & 4, 2021

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

LIBBY LARSEN

Deep Summer Music



COMPOSER: born December 24, 1950, Wilmington, DE

WORK COMPOSED: 1982; commissioned by the Terrace Mill Foundation for the Minnesota Orchestra

WORLD PREMIERE: Joseph Giunta led the Minnesota Orchestra on July 2, 1982, in an outdoor concert in Terrace, MN

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, trumpet, 3 trombones, timpani, marimba, orchestra bells, triangle and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 8 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Over the course of her prolific career, Libby Larsen has helped shape the sound of contemporary American music. Larsen's catalogue of over 500 works includes music for virtually every genre, and her music has been commissioned by major artists and ensembles around the world.

In 1983, Larsen was appointed Composer-in-Residence with the Minnesota Orchestra, making Larsen the first woman composer to hold this position with a major American orchestra. "Panorama and horizon are part of the natural culture of the plains states," Larsen observes in her notes for *Deep Summer Music*. "On the plains, one cannot help but be affected by the sweep of the horizon and the depth of color as the eye adjusts from the nearest to the farthest view. The glory of this phenomenon is particularly evident at harvest time, in deep summer, when acres of ripened wheat, sunflowers, corn, rye and oats blaze with color. In the deep summer, winds create wave after wave of harvest ripeness which, when beheld by the human eye, engender a kind of emotional peace and awe: a feeling of abundance combined with the knowledge that this abundance is only as bountiful as nature will allow . . . Built into the score are modulating percussion and string patterns over which soar a broad string melody. A solo trumpet recalls the presence of the individual amidst the vastness of the landscape."

Deep Summer Music premiered at an outdoor concert by the Minnesota Orchestra in the tiny rural community of Terrace, population approximately 200. The concert drew an audience of more than 8,000 people from both Minnesota and neighboring South Dakota. "There was the most beautiful blanket of quiet," Larsen recalled "... and as one trumpet solo happened, a 'V' formation of geese flew over and honked, seeming to echo the music. It was a lovely and peaceful experience – and you couldn't have cued the geese any better!"

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Violin Concerto No. 5, Turkish



COMPOSER: born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria; died December 5, 1791, Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: Mozart wrote all five of his violin concertos between April and December 1775, probably for violinist Antonio Brunetti, who took over as concertmaster for the Archbishop of Salzburg's court orchestra after Mozart resigned his post there in 1776.

WORLD PREMIERE: December 1775 in Salzburg

INSTRUMENTATION: solo violin, 2 oboes, 2 horns, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 31 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Today, we think of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as a composer and virtuoso pianist, but he was also a prodigally skilled violinist. When Mozart was a boy, he traveled throughout Europe displaying his virtuosity on both violin and keyboard, but he also absorbed the musical styles of Italy, with its emphasis on lyricism and bravura technique. Both qualities infuse Mozart's music for violin, particularly his five violin concertos, most of which he wrote over a few months in 1775.

The A Major Violin Concerto is the most mature of the five; the overall mood, even in the Adagio, is one of optimism and joyous expression. In the first movement, the soloist explores the violin's highest notes in graceful arabesques. In the tender, intimate E major Adagio, both orchestra and soloist play passages of exquisite transparency. The closing Rondeau combines Mozart's deceptively simple melodies with adventures in minor keys and folk music flourishes; these account for its "Turkish" nickname (in Mozart's time, any vaguely Eastern-sounding music was referred to as Turkish, although in the case of this concerto, Mozart's inspiration was actually Hungarian folk music).

GABRIELLA SMITH

Rust



COMPOSER: born December 26, 1991, Berkeley, CA

WORK COMPOSED: 2016 as a commission from the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, which premiered it in March 2017

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, piano and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 8 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Composer/environmentalist Gabriella Smith has made an international name for herself with music hailed by the Philadelphia Inquirer as "high-voltage and wildly imaginative." Clive Paget, writing for Musical America, declares Smith possesses "the coolest, most exciting, most inventive new voice I've heard in ages."

Smith grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area playing and writing music, hiking, backpacking and volunteering on a songbird research project. Her music grows out of a love of play, exploring new sounds on instruments and connecting listeners with the natural world. Recent highlights include the LA Philharmonic's performances of

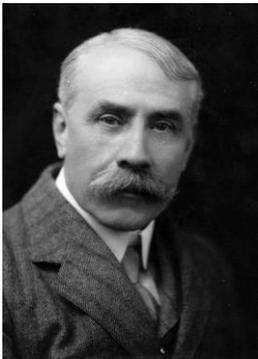
Tumblebird Contrails, conducted by John Adams, and the Aizuri Quartet's recording of Carrot Revolution on their Grammy-nominated debut album Blueprinting. In June of this year, Smith released her first full-length album, Lost Coast, with cellist Gabriel Cabezas.

"In the summer of 2016, I spent three weeks at a music festival in the mountains of New Mexico, climbing peaks in the morning and attending concerts at night," Smith writes. "*Rust* weaves those two experiences together. One of the final performances of the festival was Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins in B minor. For weeks afterwards, the final bars looped in my head, repeating over and over, mingling with the mountains until they became a minimalist metamorphosis of Vivaldi rusting away into the landscape."

Smith's specific soundscape incorporates minimalism (music restricted to a limited palette of timbres, tonalities or rhythms) and aleatoric qualities (some aspect of the music occurs by chance; e.g., performers may choose how many times to repeat a given phrase). In the opening of *Rust*, we hear the closing phrases from the Vivaldi concerto rising by quartertones in a slow, inexorable progression, much as rust slowly consumes its original metal.

EDWARD ELGAR

Enigma Variations



COMPOSER: born June 2, 1857, Broadheath, near Worcester, England; died February 23, 1934, Worcester

WORK COMPOSED: October 21, 1898 through the spring of 1899; dedicated "to my friends pictured within."

WORLD PREMIERE: Hans Richter conducted the first performance on June 19, 1899, at St. James' Hall in London.

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, triangle, organ, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 31 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Elgar's *Variations on an Original Theme* for Orchestra, Op. 36, better known as the *Enigma Variations*, poses an intriguing mystery, which to this day has never been solved. There are two enigmas in the Variations: one opens the piece; the other is silent but present throughout. Much has been written about the Variations, including lengthy discussions of their actual title. Elgar called them simply *Variations for Orchestra on an Original Theme*, and later added the word "Enigma" in the manuscript.

The Variations marked a new phase in Elgar's career. His previous works, primarily for chorus and orchestra, had brought him fame within England, but he remained largely unknown elsewhere. When renowned conductor Hans Richter agreed to premiere the Variations, he also became their champion, introducing them to audiences throughout England and Europe.

With the success of the Variations, English music itself, which had languished in relative obscurity since the death of Henry Purcell some 300 years earlier, also received a much-needed boost. The work immediately intrigued audiences with its thirteen portraits of Elgar's friends and family, and his own self-portrait finale. However, Elgar intended this loving tribute to his circle of friends to be enjoyed as pure music. He wrote, "There is nothing to be gained in an artistic or musical sense by solving the enigma of any of the personalities; the listener should hear

the music as music, and not trouble himself with any intricacies of 'programme.' To me, the various personalities have been a source of inspiration, their idealisations a pleasure – and one that is intensified as the years go by."

"The enigma I will not explain – its 'dark saying' must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the Variations and the Theme is often of the slightest texture; further, through and over the whole set another and larger theme 'goes' but is not played," Elgar wrote in the notes for the first performance. This silent second enigma sparked much speculation, from "Rule Britannia" and "God Save the King" to "Auld Lang Syne" or even "Ta Ra Ra Boom Dee Ay." Some scholars suggest the second enigma is not musical at all but an abstract concept, such as friendship or love.

The audible enigma theme is Elgar himself (he felt it embodied the loneliness of the creative artist). It came to him one evening in October of 1898 while he was improvising at the piano. In a letter to his friend and publisher August Johann Jaeger, Elgar wrote, "I have sketched a set of Variations (orchestra) on an original theme: the Variations have amused me because I've labeled 'em with the nicknames of my particular friends – you are Nimrod. That is to say I've written the variations each one to represent the mood of the 'party' – I've liked to imagine the 'party' writing the var: him (or her) self and have written what I think they wd. have written – if they were asses enough to compose – it's a quaint idee & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won't affect the hearer who 'nose nuffin.' What think you?"

Elgar indicated with initials and a few names each character pictured in his music:

C.A.E. Caroline Alice Elgar, Elgar's wife.

H.D.S-P. Hew David Steuart-Powell, an amateur pianist with whom Elgar played in chamber ensembles.

R.B.T. Richard Baxter Townshend, an eccentric scholar/author whose caricature of an old man is the subject of the variation.

W.M.B. William Meath Baker, the squire of Hasfield Court, whose habit of slamming doors upon exiting rooms is heard in this variation.

R.P.A. Richard Penrose Arnold, son of poet Matthew Arnold, known as a daydreamer.

Ysobel Isabel Fitton, an amateur violist.

Troyte Arthur Troyte Griffith, an artist and architect and a pianist of limited skill, hence the bombastic quality of his variation.

W.N. Winifred Norbury, secretary of the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society (this variation is actually a portrait of her stately house, the scene of numerous musical gatherings; it also captures her ready laugh).

Nimrod August Johannes Jaeger, a good friend and one of Elgar's publishers at Novello (Nimrod is the biblical "mighty hunter," a pun on "Jaeger," German for "hunter.")

Dorabella Dora Penney (later the wife of Richard Powell) nicknamed "Dorabella" by Elgar, who borrowed the name from Mozart's opera, *Così fan tutte*. She was a close friend of the Elgars' and often sat at the piano turning pages for Elgar during performances.

G.R.S. George Robertson Sinclair, organist of Hereford and owner of a bulldog named Dan. The variation actually portrays Dan fetching and retrieving sticks from the Wye River.

B.G.N. Basil Nevinson, an amateur cellist who played with Elgar and Steuart-Powell.

13. *** Possibly Lady Mary Lygon, who traveled to Australia around the time Elgar composed her variation. In it he quotes from Mendelssohn's *Calm Seas and Prosperous Voyage*. This variation may also refer to Elgar's former fiancée, Helen Jessie Weaver, who, by all accounts, broke his heart when she ended their engagement and emigrated to New Zealand.

E.D.U. Elgar. "Edoo" was Alice's pet name for her husband, a variation of the French "Edouard." His variation quotes from hers and from Jaeger's, the two people who believed in his artistic promise and always supported him.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Ms. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today" (now heard on American Public Media).

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