

**Orpheus Chamber Orchestra**  
**January 9, 2019**

**Still Life**

James Matheson (b. 1970)

Commissioned by the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, *Still Life* celebrates its premier throughout the month of January, including tonight's performance and Saturday's concert at Carnegie Hall, Stern Auditorium. New York-based composer James Matheson describes the composition for us in his own words.

"Like a painting that might bear the same title, *Still Life* is essentially an arrangement of musical ideas or 'objects'. These objects are then positioned in such a way as to make for a dramatic and compelling work of music. Each of these objects is crafted to be vivid and full of intensity and energy. Most of these objects are designed to move from a state of tension to one of stability and beauty, giving a sense of forward momentum."

"Some of the objects are understated, others quite wrought. While I was working on *Still Life*, I had the thought of designing the most radiantly beautiful sound I could imagine coming from an orchestra of this size. This 'object' turns out simply to be a simple C major triad that ends the work with a radiant, glowing energy. "

"There's a double meaning to *Still Life*; both in its reference to a style of visual art that focused on the complexity of arrangement within a seemingly simple form, as well the fact that the surface simplicity of a still life also has a shimmering activity in the details of the work; a productive tension between the surface detail and the simple form that holds it together. The second meaning here is simply acknowledging that, despite the division into polarized groups that define the political and social system today, it's still life as it has always been."

**Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat Major, K. 595**

**W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)**

**I. Allegro**

**II. Larghetto**

**III. Allegro**

The legends that surround Mozart may contain a kernel of truth, however most are embellished by 19th century wishful thinking. In reality, Mozart was keenly aware of his capabilities and his relationship to the world around him. Mozart's own letters debunk the myth of the madcap composer. His compositional efforts were focused on promoting his brand. Mozart's break with the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1781 was carefully considered as a step towards his independence as a musical artist. The piano concertos are a clear example of this for nearly all were composed for his personal use, to publicize Mozart the composer through Mozart the virtuoso and to make a living as a free artist.

Mozart's concertos were at their height between 1784-1786, a period during which he wrote at least twelve. By the time Concerto No. 27 was composed, Mozart's popularity in Vienna had waned. The work entered the catalog on January 5, 1791, three weeks before his 35th birthday, a mere 11 months before the composer's death. The premier on March 4 may be the last public performance by Mozart. Unlike earlier performances produced by Mozart, this concert was a private benefit organized by clarinetist Joseph Bähr with Mozart performing third on the program.

Concerto No. 27 is Mozart's most mature and heartfelt piano concerto. The subdued, intimate character, is noticed immediately in the scoring for flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, solo piano, and strings, Note the absence of trumpets and timpani. It stands in contrast to the powerful Coronation Concerto written three years earlier. The first movement opens with a graceful murmuring introduction in the lower strings layered with the wordless conversation between the first violins and winds. The soloist enters *sotto voce* with a slightly ornamented expression of the opening orchestral material. The development begins with the theme now stated in the unrelated key of B minor beginning a journey through approximately 20 daring modulations and diversions before arriving at the recapitulation. The tonal exploration of Mozart's writing is a harbinger of musical ideas that transition into the Romantic period.

The *Larghetto*, marked *alle breve*, demonstrates profound clarity while removing any virtuosity. The result enraps the listener in melodic restraint and contemplative serenity. Do not be deceived, for in great simplicity lies incredible detail revealed by the nuances of perfected line.

The *Allegro*, set as a rondo, shares a melodic theme with his "Sehnsucht nach dem Frühling" (Yearning for Spring). A collection of three children songs, the K. 596 melody appears with "Komm, lieber Mai, und mache", by Christian Adolf Overbeck:

Come, sweet May, and turn  
The trees green again,  
And make the little violets  
Bloom for me by the brook!

The opening may hint at a hunting rondo popular at the time, but the songlike character unfolds a joyous theme. Variations deliver intrigue and imagination as childish innocence influenced by the poem. The movement features two cadenzas, both written by Mozart, as is the cadenza in the first movement. Here the soloist is given virtuosic freedom controlled in classical style, which is the undeniable brilliance of Mozart.

**Bagatelles, Op. 47**  
**Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)**  
**arr. Dennis Russell Davies**

**I. Allegretto scherzando**  
**II. Tempo di minuetto. Grazioso**  
**III. Allegretto scherzando**  
**IV. Canon. Andante con moto**  
**V. Poco allegro**

A "bagatelle" is a short instrumental composition, usually of a light or unpretentious nature. Solo piano tends to be the instrument of choice, however the form is used for various instruments and configurations. Familiar bagatelles are those of Beethoven, including the ever popular *Für Elise*. Other composers include this brief, happy form among their works with the earliest known use by François Couperin in his *Dixième Ordre des pièces de clavecin* (1717), where a rondeau is titled *Les bagatelles*.

Dvořák was working on his first series of Slavonic Dances when he was asked to compose a work for a group of musician friends. Cellist Josef Srb-Debrnov organized small chamber concerts in his home.

Dvořák occasionally joined as violist or played Srb-Debrnov's harmonium, a small reed organ not commonly heard today. The new composition thus bore the unusual instrumentation for two violins, cello, and harmonium. Dvořák took twelve days in May 1878 to write the quartet, originally titled *Malickosti*. The later printed version is titled *Bagatelles*.

The *Bagatelles* were first performed in Prague in February of 1879. The concert was organized by the Umělecká beseda artists' association, with Dvořák at the harmonium. The set was published later that year arranged for four-hand piano, and again the following year in its original version.

Arranger Dennis Russell Davies decided to orchestrate Dvořák's *Bagatelles* when he was conductor of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in Minnesota because he felt that there was not enough romantic music for a small orchestra. It is his version we hear tonight.

Bagatelles are usually heard in sets. Dvořák designed his group as a set of five. Each miniature is composed around a single theme. These simple outlines reveal Dvořák's proficiency at weaving voice and tone color into formal excellence. The *Allegretto scherzando* incorporates the Czech folk tune *Hrály dudy* (The Pipes are Playing). The main theme, with its humorous character, reappears in the third and fifth movements, bringing a sense of cohesion to the entire cycle. The harmonium is responsible for the bass line, while the cello functions as the pizzicato middle voice. Violins cover the melody, navigating between minor and major, and are occasionally mirrored in the cello.

The *Tempo di minuetto* and *Canon* movements introduce contrast into the cycle. Both lyrical movements are slower and flowing. The second movement is less dance-like than the *Allegretto scherzando*. The texture and harmonic structure lacks the delicacy typical in a minuet. The lush richness is unexpected.

The third movement shares the same tempo indication and thematic material as the first, *Allegretto scherzando*. However, Dvořák chooses a more dramatic interpretation of the material. The lively rhythm and darkened tones offer a stormy contrast to the first movement.

The pastoral *Canon* passes the melody between instruments, with the second voice following one measure behind the first. The uncomplicated melody expands into an emotional peak then returns to tranquility. The *Andante con moto* tempo and compositional style harkens to many similar Dvořák andante melodies, notably his Symphony No. 9, *From the New World* and the *American Quartet*.

The final movement, *Poco allegro*, is set with a playful lightheartedness. A new contrasting section expands this movement into twice the length of the others. Quick changing moods create forward momentum. It is not until the end that the harmonium is given a brief solo. The return to the opening thematic material closes the set with a sense of completeness.

## **Symphony No. 33, K. 319**

**W. A. Mozart (1756-1791)**

**I. Allegro assai**

**II. Andante moderato**

**III. Menuetto**

**IV. Finale: Allegro assai**

Mozart dates the completion of Symphony No. 33 on July 9, 1779, shortly after his return to Salzburg in January following a disheartening 16-month tour of Europe. He was unsuccessful in locating a more lucrative position and continued to grieve the loss of his mother, who died during his time away. Upon returning home, Mozart's position as court organist to the Archbishop of Salzburg, a job he referred to as slavery, required him to serve the Court and Church with new compositions by his hand.

Mozart composed three symphonies during this final Salzburg period, K. 318, K. 319, and K. 338 (nos. 32-34). Symphony 31 was crafted for Parisian audiences. Symphony 32 experimented with the Italian style. Symphony 33 returns to the Austro-German style. It seems unimaginable that the warmth and sparkle of Symphony No. 33 was composed during these bitter final years in his hometown. Most likely the symphony was composed for an occasion, but we know not when it premiered. Scored for 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, and strings featuring a divided viola part, K. 319 is the smallest of his late symphonies with chamber music elements. Light-hearted and witty, the work is intimate and rarely strays into melancholy. Mozart resigned his position in Salzburg the spring of 1781 and staked his independence in Vienna. The K. 319 is one of a few of his symphonies published during his lifetime.

The first movement, *Allegro assai*, opens in the Italian symphonic tradition with its brilliant forte followed by whispering strings, a taste Mozart heard in Paris. The cheerful albeit unusual triple meter, gives a musical nod to the Austrian Ländler, the predominant folk dance of the region. Keeping with Paris custom, Mozart omits the expected repeat of the exposition and immediately moves into the development section. This altered sonata form introduces new thematic material rather than elaborate upon previously introduced melodies. Mozart fans will recognize the 4-note figure that later becomes the principal motif of the finale in his Jupiter Symphony, K. 551 (1788). Mozart furthers the development with the introduction of two counter-themes woven into an exciting triplet idiom for the entire violin section. The restatement of opening material does not follow typical recapitulation formulae, but is expanded by excursions into foreign harmonic territory and a coda.

The *Andante moderato* takes an expected slower pace. Set in E-flat major, the strings bring a songful richness with winds appearing in a brief canonic episode. Two themes alternate in this Mannheim version of Sonata-Allegro form, with the return of the themes in reverse order, a mirror image recapitulation concluding with the opening material. The delayed return of the primary theme gives a rounded character familiar to earlier binary movements and sounding similar to a coda.

Returning to B-flat major, the *Minuetto* was added in the mid-1780s to the original three movements for Mozart's new Viennese audiences. The four movement symphony was favored in Vienna and a welcomed expansion of the Italian symphonic form for Mozart. Delightful energy is filled with instrumental play, such as the conversation between the oboes and French horns. The middle section (trio) employs a lyrical phrase derived from this conversation.

The work concludes with the brisk *Finale: Allegro assai*. Filled with fresh ideas, it remains thematically connected to the first movement. The use of the triplet figure, reserved for the climax of the first movement, now functions as the principal theme. This material bears a striking resemblance to the *Finale* theme of Beethoven's Symphony No. 8 and may have served as an impetus to that composition, as Beethoven admired Mozart and probably heard Symphony No. 33 in Vienna. Mozart's *Finale* continues with a graceful, albeit brief development section with

contrasting themes chasing one another. A swift and brilliant conclusion closes the movement.