

## Zhang Conducts Schubert & Dvořák

### ONE-MINUTE NOTES

#### **Schumann: *Konzertstück* for Four Horns**

A concerto for four horns! Schumann's *Konzertstück* is unique. Fanfares and hunting-style music enliven the outer movements. The central Romanze celebrates the horns' lyricism and warm tone.

#### **Schubert: *Symphony No. 8, "Unfinished"***

Schubert's approach to form is completely original in the Unfinished Symphony. Listen for clarinet and oboe playing the first theme in unison. Mood, atmosphere, and lyricism balance passion and drama. The slow movement shimmers with heavenly calm.

#### **Dvořák: *Cello Concerto***

Dvořák's cello concerto was the culmination of his American visit. The legendary cellist Pablo Casals called it his "Tenth Symphony." The orchestra is a full symphonic partner to the cello. Allusions to the earlier movements recur at the end.

### **SCHUMANN: *Konzertstück* in F Major for Four Horns and Orchestra, Op. 86**

#### **ROBERT SCHUMANN**

**Born:** June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Saxony, Germany

**Died:** July 29, 1856, in Endenich, near Bonn, Germany

**Composed:** 1849

**World Premiere:** February 25, 1850, in Leipzig

**NJSO Premiere:** These are the NJSO-premiere performances.

**Duration:** 19 minutes

Schumann developed a keen interest in wind instruments in the 1840s. His curiosity was well placed. In the middle decades of the 19th century, both brass and woodwind instruments were undergoing significant technical advances that made a big difference in the range of sounds they could produce.

The Schumanns had moved their family from Leipzig to Dresden in 1844. The celebrated Dresden Court Orchestra boasted a gifted principal horn in Joseph-Rudolph Lewy. He was a cutting edge player on the relatively new valve horn. With Lewy in mind, Schumann composed in rapid succession his *Adagio* and *Allegro* for horn and piano, *Hunting Songs* for men's voices and four horns, and the *Konzertstück* for four horns and orchestra. The *Konzertstück* is the finest of those works, and it holds a unique place in the concerted literature.

The movements adhere to the standard fast-slow-fast convention of traditional concertos. After a blazing wake-you-up opening, fanfares dominate the opening movement, with lively interplay between and among the four soloists.

The Romanze features a marvelous passage with first and second horns in canon. Mostly what we notice in this central movement, however, is Schumann's loving attention to the warm, lyrical qualities the horn can produce. Listen and watch for places where two, three or four horns are playing. The variety is remarkable, and Schumann's melodies are inspired.

The finale has a strong hunting character, with a persistent dactylic rhythmic pattern (long-short-short, which some listeners will hear as short-short-long, but you won't miss the recurrence). Schumann's genius keeps us engaged with visual theater, observing four stellar players interacting with each other and with their orchestra. If you listen and watch carefully, you'll discern differences in horn timbres. The variety in individual lines, duets, trios and full chorus of horns is virtuosic composing, as well as playing.

## **WHAT'S A KONZERTSTÜCK?**

*Konzertstück* is a tricky word to translate. It literally means “concert piece,” but the German *Konzert* means both concert and concerto. *Konzertstück* is also a difficult word to pronounce—something like “cone TZAYRT shtook.”

The term has come to be associated with a 19th-century genre in the style of a concerto, but more flexible in form. Most *Konzertstücke* are cast in a single movement. Examples occur in the works of Carl Maria von Weber and Max Bruch. In addition to the work on this program, Schumann also composed a *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra.

His *Konzertstück* for four horns is unusual in that it is a full-fledged concerto cast in three movements, although all three are connected and the second movement Romanze flows directly into the finale (a pattern similar to Schumann’s beloved piano concerto).

## **RENAISSANCE FOR A SUI GENERIS CONCERTO**

In 1979, the Austrian composer and musicologist Hans Gál wrote that Schumann’s *Konzertstück* “had almost disappeared from concert programmes ... performances are rare events.”

That rarity had nothing to do with the quality of the music. Schumann thought highly of this piece, and his contemporaries praised it. The Dresden Court Orchestra played it several times.

Historically, the problem has been assembling a horn section with the depth and virtuosity to present this work. Not only does it require four soloists, but also the orchestral ensemble includes two additional horns. Few orchestras boast those resources.

In a more recent assessment published in 2005, the American scholar R. Larry Todd writes, “For all [the *Konzertstück*’s] bizarre forces, the work stands out amid the music of these years for high spirits and compositional panache.” This weekend’s performances, which are an NJSO premiere, bring us the richness and variety of *two* concertos on one unforgettable program.

*Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, strings and four solo horns.*

## **SCHUBERT: Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759, “Unfinished”**

### **FRANZ PETER SCHUBERT**

**Born:** January 31, 1797, in Liechtenthal, Vienna, Austria

**Died:** November 19, 1828, in Vienna

**Composed:** 1822

**World Premiere:** December 17, 1865, in Vienna

**NJSO Premiere:** 1945–46 season; Frieder Weissman conducted.

**Duration:** 24 minutes

With certain composers’ works, “unfinished” means that the artist died, leaving a masterpiece in an incomplete state. That is not the case with Schubert and his B-minor symphony. It was his major project in 1822, until he abandoned its scherzo to concentrate on the *Wanderer Fantasy* for piano. Only sketches survive for that third movement, but the planned finale remains a mystery.

The “Unfinished” Symphony was apparently intended for the city of Graz. Schubert had been nominated as an honorary member of Graz’s Styrian Music Society. We may never know why the project lay fallow. It remained unperformed for four decades.

Both movements, though large in their dimensions, are lean and economical in their distribution of ideas. Schubert’s wanderings tend to be miraculous harmonic shifts rather than episodes or rhetorical digressions. His lush texture, particularly in the private, shimmering world of the slow movement, contributes to a sense of timelessness that makes one want to listen to this music for an entire evening. Live performance leaves us hungry for the two movements it lacks.

*Instrumentation: woodwinds and trumpets in pairs, three trombones, timpani and strings.*

## **DVOŘÁK: Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in B Minor, Op. 104**

### **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK**

**Born:** September 8, 1841, in Mühhlhausen, Bohemia

**Died:** May 1, 1904, in Prague, Czechoslovakia

**Composed:** November 1894–February 1895

**World Premiere:** March 19, 1896, in London. Leo Stern was the soloist; the composer conducted.

**NJSO Premiere:** 1938–39 season. Maurice Eisenberg was the soloist; Rene Pollain conducted.

**Duration:** 40 minutes

When Johannes Brahms first examined the score to Dvořák's cello concerto, he exclaimed: "Why on earth didn't I know that one could write a violoncello concerto like this? If I had only known, I would have written one long ago!" While it is our loss that Brahms' only concerto with cello was the Double Concerto, it is our gain that Dvořák did not stop exploring the genre with an early, abandoned work in 1865. This B-minor work crowns Dvořák's concerto production and remains one of the cornerstones of the literature. His obvious confidence in solo writing clearly developed with great strides through his earlier piano and violin concertos. The cello concerto is the harvest.

Curiously, Dvořák considered cello to be an inappropriate solo instrument. He perceived its upper register as strained, even nasal, and its lower register gruff. While he favored the cello in orchestral and chamber music, he was reluctant to write a solo work for it. The Czech cellist Hanus Wihan changed his mind.

Much of his composing took place in 1894, during Dvořák's second trip to the United States. The concerto was the only work completed during his final year here and is generally grouped with Dvořák's American works. Historians believe that he may have been influenced by hearing Victor

Herbert's Cello Concerto in New York in April 1894.

The concerto is more closely allied with Dvořák's Bohemian roots. One hears the Czech flavor most clearly in the slow movement. In America, Dvořák had learned that his sister-in-law Josefina Kaunitzova was ill. She had been a youthful love, and he remained fond of her. Knowing her affection for his song "Let me wander alone with my dreams" (Op. 82, No. 1), he incorporated it into the Adagio ma non troppo. This movement is exceptionally rich in melodic material, including a noteworthy duet for oboe and the soloist, plus a lovely flute solo.

Josefina died shortly after Dvořák's return to his homeland in May 1895. He then revised the finale, quoting the song again in the Coda. The cellist Wihan wanted a virtuoso cadenza in the finale, but Dvořák was adamantly opposed to that idea. Instead, the end of his finale has an ineffable quality of repose that is one of the concerto's most distinguishing characteristics. As a consequence, he and Wihan had a tiff, and Leo Stern played the premiere.

Throughout, Dvořák's concerto has a symphonic breadth. The prominent solo role, aggressive and fluid from the start, succeeds in integrating itself quite satisfactorily with the larger orchestral entity.

### **IN THE COMPOSER'S WORDS**

While putting the finishing touches on his new concerto late in 1895, Dvořák was on edge because of disagreements with his intended soloist. Hanuš Wihan (1855–1920) had played in several important German orchestras, including as a soloist with the Munich Court Orchestra. He became friendly with Liszt and was later a member of the Bohemian String Quartet. He developed a big ego and was determined to add his bravura input to the new concerto with two flashy cadenzas.

Equally determined to prevent Wihan from making changes in the first edition, Dvořák wrote to his publisher Fritz Simrock on October 3:

Dear Mr. Simrock:

The copyist is not finished yet, but next week everything will be ready. I have had some differences

of opinion with friend Wihan on account of a number of places. I do not like some of the passages—and I must insist on my work being printed as I have written it. The passages in question can be printed in two versions, an *easier* and *more difficult* version. I shall only give you the work if you promise not to allow *anybody* to make changes—Friend Wihan not excepted—without my *knowledge and consent*—and also not the cadenza that Wihan has added to the last movement. There is no Cadenza in the last movement either in the score or in the piano arrangement. I told Wihan straight away when he showed it me that it was impossible to stick such a bit on. The finale closes gradually *diminuendo*—like a sigh—with reminiscences of the first and second movements—the solo dies down to *pianissimo* (—then swells again—) and the last bars are taken up by the orchestra and the whole concludes in stormy mood.—That was my idea and I cannot depart from it. If then you agree to these conditions, including the printing of the titles also in Czech, I am willing to give you the Concerto and the Te Deum [Op. 103] together for 6000M (six thousand marks).

With kind regards,

Ant. Dvořák

– From O. Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: Letters and Reminiscences* (Prague, 1954), trans. R.L. Samsour

The letter is revealing on several levels. Simrock drove a tough bargain when he first began to publish Dvořák's music in 1877, and the relationship between composer and publisher was often strained. By the mid-1890s, however, the Czech composer wielded considerable influence. His music sold well and was thus a profitable cash cow for Simrock. Dvořák could name his price with assurance, and he could issue instructions knowing that they would be followed.

His insistence on the Czech titles is another manifestation of pride in national heritage. (Early on, Simrock printed all titles in German and listed the composer's first name as Anton.) (Similarly, Dvořák also refused to allow himself to be bullied by a soloist more interested in showing off than maintaining musical integrity. Most interesting is the composer's detailed description of his musical intent in the finale, which outlines its links to the Viennese symphonic tradition.

*Instrumentation: woodwinds in pairs, three horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, strings and solo cello.*