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Sixty-First Annual
Choral Union Concert Series

THE PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY SOCIETY
OF NEW YORK

1842-1878. Consolidated in 1928. Concert No. 3556

JOHN BARBIROLI, *Conductor*

MONDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 27, 1939, AT 8:30
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PROGRAM

Overture, "The Roman Carnival" BERLIOZ

Introduction and Allegro for Strings (Quartet and Orchestra), Op. 47 . ELGAR

M. PIASTRO, *First Violin* Z. KURTHY, *Viola*
S. BAROZZI, *Second Violin* J. SCHUSTER, *Cello*

Variations and Fugue, "Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree" . WEINBERGER
(First performance in Ann Arbor)

INTERMISSION

Symphony in E minor, No. 4, Op. 98 BRAHMS

Allegro ma non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

NOTE.—The New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Josef Stransky, Conductor, appeared in the Choral Union Series March 17, 1916. The New York Symphony Orchestra, Walter Damrosch, Conductor, has appeared as follows: January 16, 1918; October 15, 1925; and February 1, 1928.

THE PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

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and the University Musical Society*

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ARS LONGA VITA BREVIS

PROGRAM NOTES

by PITTS SANBORN

Overture, "The Roman Carnival," Op. 9 HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born at La Côte-Saint André, December 11, 1803; died in Paris, March 8, 1869.

As early as 1834 Berlioz was inspired with the idea of composing an opera having as hero the great Italian sculptor and goldsmith, Benvenuto Cellini. The adventurous artist of the Renaissance appealed strongly to the imagination of the fiery French romantic. He devoted himself enthusiastically to writing this work, and it was produced at the Paris Opéra on September 10, 1838. As an opera "Benvenuto Cellini" failed, although the score itself found favor with influential reviewers. But in one respect the première was a triumph. The overture, as Berlioz himself records, did not share in the general catastrophe. It "received exaggerated applause," whereas the opera itself "was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity."

In spite of the initial setback, the undaunted Berlioz, in January, 1844, composed a second overture for "Benvenuto Cellini," not to be substituted, however, for the overture already existing, but to serve as a prelude to the second of the two acts. This "Roman Carnival" overture, as it was called, was performed first at a concert given by Berlioz of his own works at the Salle Herz, Paris, on February 3, 1844, the composer conducting. The audience liked the new work so well that it had to be repeated then and there, and success has attended it down to our own day.

The overture is based on two main themes, presented singly and in combination. One is the theme of the Saltarello danced at the Carnival in Act II of the opera. The other is the melody of a love song, "O Teresa, vous que j'aime," allotted in Act I to the tenor hero and in the overture to the English horn.

Introduction and Allegro, Op. 47 EDWARD ELGAR

Born at Broadheath, near Worcester, England, June 2, 1857; died at Worcester, February 23, 1934.

One of the instruments that Elgar played well was the violin. Early in life he was even violinist in an orchestra, and he enjoyed especially taking part in performances of chamber music. It is worth remembering that one variation in the "Enigma" set is dedicated to the cellist Basil G. Nevinson, who joined with Elgar and another in playing trios. Consequently, it is altogether natural that he should write an elaborate composition for a combination of solo string quartet and string orchestra.

That work, the "Introduction and Allegro," was completed on February 13, 1905, and received its first performance the next month at a Queen's Hall concert in London. Also on the program was Elgar's new "Pomp and Circumstance" march No. 3. As an example of writing for strings, the "Introduction and Allegro" is remarkable for a technical mastery that makes possible an astonishing variety of effects. But the composition is also distinguished by the worth of its themes. After the proclamative opening the solo quartet introduces a lyric theme whose peculiar quality is doubtless best indicated by the composer's own note on the original manuscript, "Smiling with a sigh."

The next subject is the best known in the work. On account of its character it has been termed the "Welsh theme." It is first given out by the viola. This haunting melody, it seems, was inspired by the distant singing of a group of Welsh folk heard by Elgar when he was out on the Malvern Hills one day. Though he was unable to catch the tune, the interval of a descending minor third came clearly to him on the breeze. This repeated fragment so affected him that he took out his notebook and invented the so-called "Welsh theme" of his own. Later on, we are told, a song heard in the valley of Wye reinforced the Welsh impressions and led to the completion of the whole work.

The Allegro section brings new thematic material, but the composer is never forgetful of the "Welsh theme." A fugato takes the place of the traditional working-out. This part Elgar characterized in a letter to his friend Jaeger as "a devil of a fugue," warning Jaeger at the same time that it would take him a good while to become accustomed to it. As the "devil of a fugue" vanishes a solo cello takes up the thread, and in the end the first subject of the Allegro dominates.

Almost six hundred years before Elgar another English artist, working in words instead of tones, had been inspired on Malvern Hills. It was there that the tall, gaunt, rough-clad William Langland, tending his sheep, was lulled to sleep one day by the drowsy murmurings of a brook, beheld in a vision the hills thronged with humanity, and on awakening began writing what mediaevalists call the greatest satire in English "The Vision of Piers the Plowman":

"Ac on a May mornynge on Malverne hilles
Me byfel a ferly of fairy me thoughte . . ."
(On a morning in May on Malverne Hills
A fairy wonder befell me, I thought).

FIFTH VARIATION: "*Pastorale*." It has never been my good fortune to see the English landscape. An old classic painting in the British Exhibition in the Louvre in Paris provided the imagination for this variation.

SIXTH VARIATION: "*Mr. Weller, Senior, discusses widows with his son, Samuel Weller, Esq.*" The twenty-third chapter of Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* establishes the classical example for a stubborn generalization. In this variation the solo bassoon answers to everything in the same stubborn manner as his pattern, the coachman Weller in his imperturbable opinion of widows.

SEVENTH VARIATION: "*Sarabande for Princess Elizabeth, Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia*"—Elizabeth Stuart (1596-1662), daughter of James I, was a lady of unusual beauty and education. She was the unhappy winter queen of my unhappy native country. This Variation is written in the doric mode on C sharp.

Symphony No. 4, in E minor, Op. 98 JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born in Hamburg, May 7, 1833;
died in Vienna, April 3, 1897.

Much was made at first of the fact that the key of this symphony is E minor. When it was brought out at Meiningen, under the direction of Hans von Bülow, on October 25, 1885, there was a great deal of discussion about the choice of key and even some dismay. E minor was looked at askance as the key for a symphony, even though Haydn and Raff had both used it. The suggestion has been offered that Brahms picked out E minor because of its "pale, wan character, to express the deepest melancholy." This key has been described also as "dull in color, shadowy, suggestive of solitude and desolation." Haydn perhaps felt strongly the sorrowful implications of the key, for his E-minor symphony is the "Symphony of Mourning." Raff's E-minor symphony, on the other hand, is by no means the autumnal affair that Brahms's is said by some to be. Its title indicates that, the title being nothing else than "In Summer"!

Whatever the motives may have been that determined Brahms's choice, he selected his key and proceeded to compose. The work was written at Mürz-zu-Schlag in Styria in the summers of 1884 and 1885. And at Mürz-zu-Schlag in the latter year the manuscript was endangered by fire. Brahms had gone out for a walk. On his return he found that the house where he lodged was burning. Fortunately he had devoted friends there who were rushing his papers out of the building. Brahms pitched in with the rest and helped get the fire under control. The precious manuscript was saved.

The audience that heard the Meiningen première liked the symphony. Indeed, a vain effort was made to have the Scherzo repeated. Nevertheless the symphony was slow in winning general favor. In Vienna, where Brahms resided, it disappointed his friends and delighted his enemies. Hugo Wolf, the composer of songs, was then writing musical criticism. He devoted a bitter article to the work, in particular poking fun at the key—at last a symphony in E minor! Brahms's friends, for their part, celebrated the key, in order, it is said, to help cover up their disappointment in the work itself. It was usual to hear the symphony called grim, austere, forbidding, granitic. However, eventually it made its way, and now there are those who would even accord it first rank among its author's four symphonies.

The first theme of the first movement—given out by the violins and answered by flutes, clarinets, and bassoons—is of a thoughtful and somewhat mournful character, but it could hardly be termed forbidding. Rather it invites to meditation. The second theme, introduced by the wind instruments, is harmonically and rhythmically one of Brahms's most fascinating inspirations. Some undiscourageable seekers after resemblances have discovered a likeness in the thirteenth and fourteenth measures to a passage in the second act of Puccini's opera "*Tosca*," which followed the symphony after fifteen years. Such resemblances are often mere coincidences.

The second movement, *Andante moderato*, with its unearthly melody announced in the Phrygian mode by the horns, to be taken up immediately by oboes, bassoons, and flutes, has been termed the most hauntingly beautiful page in all Brahms. Of this section Elisabeth von Herzogenberg wrote to the composer: "The *Andante* has the freshness and distinction of character with which only you could endow it, and even you have had recourse for the first time to certain locked chambers of your soul."

Kalbeck, who finds that the whole symphony pictures the tragedy of human life, compares the *Andante* to a waste and ruined field, like the Campagna near Rome. But in the ensuing Scherzo he sees the Carnival at Milan. The Finale reminds him of a passage in the "*Oedipus Coloneus*" of Sophocles: "Not to have been born at all is superior to every other view of the question." Yet there are those who deny any such pessimistic interpretation, who find a rugged, full-blooded vigor in the Finale as well as in the Scherzo and who attribute the more specifically thoughtful portions of the work to the reactions inevitable to any sensitive and meditative spirit. In form this movement is a *passacaglia* or a *chaconne*—the doctors have never arrived at an agreement with regard to the exact definition of those old and noble dance forms.