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Performances

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The English Chamber Orchestra

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Conductor and Pianist

JOSÉ-LUIS GARCIA, *Leader*

FRIDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 10, 1978, AT 8:30

HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PROGRAM

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge	BRITTEN
Introduction and Theme	Wiener Walzer
Adagio	Moto Perpetuo
March	Funeral March
Romance	Chant
Aria Italiana	Fugue and Finale
Bourée Classique	

Concerto in F major for Piano and Orchestra, K. 459	MOZART
Allegro	
Allegretto	
Allegro assai	

VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY, *Pianist*

INTERMISSION

Divertimento for Strings	BARTÓK
Allegro non troppo	
Molto adagio	
Allegro assai	

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major	SCHUBERT
Allegro	
Andante con moto	
Menuetto	
Allegro vivace	

Vladimir Ashkenazy: London, Monitor, and RCA Records.

English Chamber Orchestra: Columbia, Angel, DGG, London, Vanguard, Klavier, Philips, Lyrichord and RCA Records.

PROGRAM NOTES

by STEFAN DE HAAN

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–1977)

This work has for many years been one of Britten's most widely admired compositions—and not without reason, for it contains the very essence of the composer's talents: his ability to limit himself in form and material and then to stretch the limits beyond all expectations, his scoring which imparts to the most banal chord an unmistakable "Britten sound," his sense of humor, his lyrical expressiveness, and the seriousness of his musical thought.

The self-imposed limitations in the case of the Variations are the orchestration for strings alone, the concise form of the eleven movements and the harmonic simplicity is so characteristic of much of Britten's music. Within these limitations the range of effects achieved is truly astonishing, both as regards the sound and the development. The theme of the Variations is taken from the Second Idyll for string quartet by Frank Bridge who was Britten's teacher. The work is dedicated to him as "a tribute with affection and admiration." It was composed within six weeks for a performance given by the Boyd Neel Orchestra at the Salzburg Festival of 1937.

After the flourish of the introductory bars, the theme from the Idyll by Frank Bridge is played by the solo violin. It begins with the note 'E' held pianissimo for three bars against fortissimo pizzicato chords and thus is only recognizable as such when it begins to move (*Allegretto poco lento*). Even then it uses no more than three notes in six bars (E, A, B), but these notes are of great importance in the ensuing variations which begin as soon as the theme is played, and before the first variation proper (*Adagio*) which follows without a break. The titles of the other movements are self-explanatory, and the very choice of name and language indicate whether the listener should take them seriously or not.

Concerto in F major for Piano and WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART Orchestra, K. 459 (1756–1791)

1784 was one of the happiest and most productive years in Mozart's life. Between the end of February and the beginning of April 1784 he took part in no less than twenty-two concerts. In March he wrote to his father: "You can imagine that by necessity I have to play new stuff, and so I have to write. The entire morning is devoted to pupils, and I have to play almost every evening." That left the afternoon for composing, arranging concerts and collecting names for the subscription lists of his benefit performances. Yet, in spite of the limited time for composition at his disposal, Mozart wrote no less than six of his major piano concertos in 1784.

The F-major Concerto, K. 459, is the last of these six concertos. It was completed in Vienna on the 11th of December for Mozart's own use during the 1784–85 season. Five years later, on October 15, 1790, he also played the work at a most auspicious occasion—the coronation of the Emperor Leopold II in Frankfurt. One appreciative member of the audience at that concert wrote that it had "a gentillesse et un agrément extraordinaire." This does indeed sum up the characteristics of the work. It certainly has much of Mozart's particular brand of "gentillesse," and it is full of the happiest inventions. The woodwinds converse freely with the soloist and have long passages on their own in the exquisite second movement which is reminiscent of Susanna's famous aria "Deh vieni" from *Figaro*. In the finale the simple little theme does not seem to lend itself to development, but what Mozart does with it is truly astounding. The quaver figure with which it begins on an upbeat is reversed, played on the beat, tossed by the soloist to various parts of the orchestra and back again—not to mention the host of intervening themes. It is perhaps because of such effective devices—which are by no means confined to the finale—that many orchestral players (notably in the wind) prefer this work to all other Mozart concertos.

Divertimento for String Orchestra BÉLA BARTÓK 1881–1945)

Like Bach and Beethoven, Bartók stands at the end of an era, summing up the achievements of the past and pointing the way to the future. The system of tonality, based on the harmonies of

common chords, dissonances and resolutions, began to disintegrate during the second half of the nineteenth century and was completely demolished by Schönberg and his pupils by about 1920. This led to the free experimentation with sounds which became a feature of our time. Bartók, who was a contemporary of Schönberg, did not reject tonality but developed his style from the traditional Hungarian and Rumanian folk music. Like Beethoven, he applied a strict discipline and architectural design to his music, particularly in his later compositions, including the Divertimento for String Orchestra.

The Divertimento has three movements. The first is based on a series of Rumanian dances with a strong rhythm of even quavers. Of great importance are the six notes with which the first violins begin their melody. The character of this melody is determined by the ambiguity of the seventh note in the scale of F major—it should always be “e,” pointing upwards, but it also appears as “e-flat,” and thus as a signpost to the darker, flat keys. The harmonies move in both directions until the upward and downward streams meet at the end of the movement. The last chord, like the first, is the common chord of F major.

Since the Divertimento was written in 1939 when Bartók was acutely aware of the imminent world war, his anxiety may well have found an expression in the second movement. No tonal center is established at the beginning of the *Molto adagio*. The opening is vague, yet the quaver movement in the bass proceeds relentlessly. The violins move around the notes for which they are searching but fail to realize their importance when they have found them. The darkness expressed by the music is not unlike that of an aria in Handel's *Messiah* (“the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light”). The search, interrupted by four fortissimo chords, continues, and it is only at the end that the first and last note (C-sharp) reveals itself as the tonal center in which the music finally comes to rest.

The short rising and descending scales at the beginning of the last movement introduce the principal theme of the finale, but they also play an important part in the development. In spite of the earthy tunes and rhythms, the different instrumental parts enjoy a remarkable independence, and the repeated return of the first theme establishes a satisfying musical form. The end is as exciting as that of Bartók's last orchestral work, the Concerto for Orchestra.

Symphony No. 5 in B-flat major FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

Schubert wrote his Fifth Symphony when he was only nineteen years old, and had no other ambitions than that the new work should provide an evening's entertainment for his friends. The first public performance of the symphony took place in London in 1873, but it is only since the 1940s that Schubert's early symphonies—and the Fifth in particular—have caught the imagination of the public at large.

Form and content are perfectly matched in Schubert's Fifth Symphony. The orchestration is that of the 18th-century chamber symphony: one flute, oboes, bassoons, horns and strings. In the first movement, the first subject or principal theme is stated in the fifth bar by the violins and echoed a bar later by the celli and basses. Schubert then modulates conscientiously in order to introduce his second subject, according to the rules, in the dominant key of F-major. The whole of the exposition is separated from the development by two loud chords which emphasize the conventional double bar line, the joint between the two sections. The melodic nature of Schubert's themes reduces the scope of the development, and the recapitulation follows faithfully the text of the exposition, except for the modulation necessary to bring the second subject back to the home key of B-flat major.

As in all symphonies of Schubert, the second movement is not a slow one. In this case it is an *Andante con moto*. The mood is lyrical here, and the romantic melodies are extensive enough to allow for a number of those striking harmony changes between light and dark tonalities which are so characteristic of Schubert's music. The third movement is entitled *Menuetto*, but the tempo indication (*Allegro molto*) proves that it is in fact a *Scherzo*, it is the most energetic movement of the symphony. The main section is in C-minor, while the typically Viennese “Trio” is in the major mode of the same key. The *Finale* is once more in B-flat major. As regards the form, it is more ambitious than the third movement since it has two contrasting themes and clearly defined sections, but the pulse is so fast and lively that the joints of the construction never disturb the flow of the music, or, for that matter, the enjoyment of the listener.

“Any anniversary is a milestone, but when it commemorates a century dedicated to the presentation of fine music, the anniversary becomes of singular importance. I have always enjoyed the warmth of my reception in Ann Arbor; this year it is an especial honour to be a part of your centennial celebrations. My sincerest congratulations and best wishes for the continued success of the University Musical Society and its Choral Union Series.”

—VLADIMIR ASHKENAZY

About the Artists

Long considered one of the world's foremost musicians, Russian-born **Vladimir Ashkenazy** electrified the musical world by winning the First Prize in the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 1956. He was then only nineteen years old and was selected unanimously for the honor by a distinguished panel which included Arthur Rubinstein, Emil Gilels, and Robert Casadesus. Following this triumph, tours of Belgium, Holland, Germany, and Poland ensued, and in 1958 his first performances in the United States won enormous and unprecedented acclaim. In 1962 he was a joint First Prize winner in the Second Tchaikovsky Competition and since then has been hailed in all musical capitals of the world.

Mr. Ashkenazy has performed in Ann Arbor on three previous occasions—recitals in 1968, 1970, and 1975. When not touring on the international concert circuit or maintaining his heavy recording schedule, he resides in Reykjavik, Iceland.

The English Chamber Orchestra has been a major force in Britain's musical life since its founding in 1960 and is recognized today as one of the world's foremost chamber orchestras. Its personnel is a unique blend of well-established solo and chamber music players and the most promising of the younger generation of musicians. For many years the orchestra has been a favorite of artists such as Benjamin Britten, Pinchas Zukerman, Daniel Barenboim, and Raymond Leppard. Britten, in fact, made it his “resident orchestra” at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1961, using it over the years for the premières of many of his orchestral works and operas. The ensemble also appears frequently on European television and radio and records for all major companies with several discs winning coveted international awards.

Tonight, with yet another eminent musician, the English Chamber Orchestra makes its Ann Arbor debut.

COMING EVENTS

BARBARA STRZELECKA, <i>Harpsichordist</i>	November 14
NEW IRISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA/PRIEUR, GALWAY	November 21
HANDEL'S <i>Messiah</i>	December 1, 2, 3
ISAAC STERN, <i>Violinist</i>	December 7
TCHAIKOVSKY'S <i>Nutcracker</i> BALLET	December 14, 15, 16, 17

Marilyn Horne, Soprano
in recital

Thursday, April 12 at 8:30, in Hill Auditorium

This celebrated American artist replaces Nicolai Ghiaurov who has cancelled his North American engagements this season. Those holding tickets for Ghiaurov should retain them for admission to the Horne recital. Additional tickets are available from \$4 to \$12.