

Program Notes By Ed Wight

RAYMOND HORTON

Make Gentle the Life of This World (2006)

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets (1st doubling flugelhorn), three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, field drum, glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, and strings

Duration: about 13 minutes

American composer Ray Horton has advanced degrees in trombone, composition, and church music from the University of Louisville and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He enjoyed a 45-year tenure as bass trombonist for the Louisville Orchestra that included 175 recordings. Horton's compositions and arrangements include works for orchestra, brass ensemble, choir, and organ.

On April 4, 1968, Robert Kennedy was scheduled to speak in Indianapolis as part of his campaign to win the Democratic presidential nomination. After Martin Luther King was assassinated earlier that day, however, Kennedy threw away his prepared remarks and extemporized one of the great speeches of the 20th century. Ray Horton set an orchestral accompaniment to that speech in *Make Gentle the Life of This World* in 2006, and the following are his paraphrased comments about the work.



“The musical techniques in the piece are simple. Some text painting is used; a simple motif of bi-tonal chords (quiet triads of trombones versus flutes) is heard whenever Kennedy speaks of racial tension. It is followed by the same harmonies—now resolved—as Kennedy invariably suggests solutions. A snippet of an old spiritual is heard in the woodwinds, one that will be more fully formed at the end of the piece. As Kennedy reminds them of his own loss (his brother’s assassination four years earlier), an Irish bagpipe melody, the drum cadence that droned endlessly, and *Taps* all hazily recall the 1963 funeral.”

“Kennedy comes to the heart of the speech with the tearful beauty of ‘What we need in the United States is not division...’ The music here is a string chorale played four times, each time with another layer of lyrical counterpoint added over-top. The Senator wraps up quickly and ends, but the music does not. It reflects for another minute what the listener, unfortunately, knows; that despite Robert Kennedy’s pleas, the violence does not end that April day.”

This skillful and effective composition was awarded a “Special Judges Citation, Recognizing Unique Artistic Achievement” in the 2012 *American Prize* Composition: Orchestral Division.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Violin Concerto in E minor, op. 64 (1845)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

Duration: about 26 minutes

Mendelssohn was perhaps the greatest and most accomplished child prodigy in the history of music. Mendelssohn’s twelve string symphonies written at ages 13 and 14 could break your heart. At age 16 he wrote the Octet for Strings and the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* Overture: “mature masterpieces of extended form, the equal of anything anyone was writing at the time” (Richard Taruskin). His Op. 13 quartet in A Minor, written at age 18, was one of the greatest string quartets of the 19th century. With these and other masterpieces before he turned 20, many historians and critics consider that Mendelssohn peaked early. This view, however, tends to undervalue a series of extraordinary works Mendelssohn produced in his final decade. *The Scottish Symphony*, the oratorio *Elijah*, the String Quintet



in B-flat Major, and the D Minor Piano Trio all appeared after 1840. Similarly, tonight's E Minor Violin Concerto of 1844-45 remains one of the glories of the entire concerto repertory.

Mendelssohn wrote this concerto for his friend, the gifted violinist Ferdinand David. After a long gestation, he finished it in September 1844. This original score still exists, but was never performed. Instead, David suggested considerable revisions, many of which Mendelssohn accepted for the 1845 revised version—the one performed ever since. David premiered it in March 1845.

Mendelssohn wrote three distinct movements, but provides links between them. There had been scattered precedents for single-movement concertos, but such structures were still rare. More importantly, by starting the violin solo immediately, Mendelssohn abandoned the long orchestral expositions of Mozart, Beethoven and the early 19th century—the first composer to do this. Mendelssohn also moved the cadenza earlier in the first movement, and in unprecedented fashion it forges the connection between the virtuoso figuration patterns of the development section and the recap. Mendelssohn created a revolutionary work which influenced many later 19th century concertos.

But “more importantly than any technical innovations, the beauty of the work is profound” (historian Steve Lindemann). The soaring violin theme immediately sets the tone for the **Sonata-form** drama which follows. After a long transition of glorious virtuoso figuration, the woodwinds announce the tender secondary theme over a low

‘G’ pedal in the solo violin. The violin’s statement then adds further expression to an already lovely theme.

Perhaps only the slow movement of the Bruch G Minor violin concerto matches the sheer beauty and expansive, chromatic enrichment of the *Andante’s* opening theme. A dramatic contrasting central section in minor mode provides the perfect foil for the return of the gentle and poignant opening theme in this **A B A** movement.

Mendelssohn brought a distinctly original style to 19th-century Scherzo writing: lightening quick 16th note passages in soft dynamics. Critic Harold Schonberg wrote that it presents “a kind of music unheard-of at the time. It buzzes along in its elfin manner, light as bees wings.” This sprightly style dominates the **Sonata-form** finale. At times we must listen hard for the violin, as Mendelssohn so often sets it at *pianissimo* level in this jaunty, tuneful conclusion.

The great violinist Josef Joachim studied with Ferdinand David, and Mendelssohn encountered another prodigy when he conducted the 13-year old Joachim in an 1844 London concert. Joachim resuscitated Beethoven’s violin concerto, which had languished for 40 years. Mendelssohn’s concerto never needed such treatment, however, holding the stage ever since its 1845 premier. Near the end of his life, in 1906, Joachim wrote of violin concertos “The greatest and most uncompromising is Beethoven’s. The one by Brahms vies for it in seriousness. The richest, the most seductive is Max Bruch’s. But the most inward, the heart’s jewel, is Mendelssohn’s.”

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 8 in G major, op. 88 (1889)

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, and strings

Duration: about 34 minutes

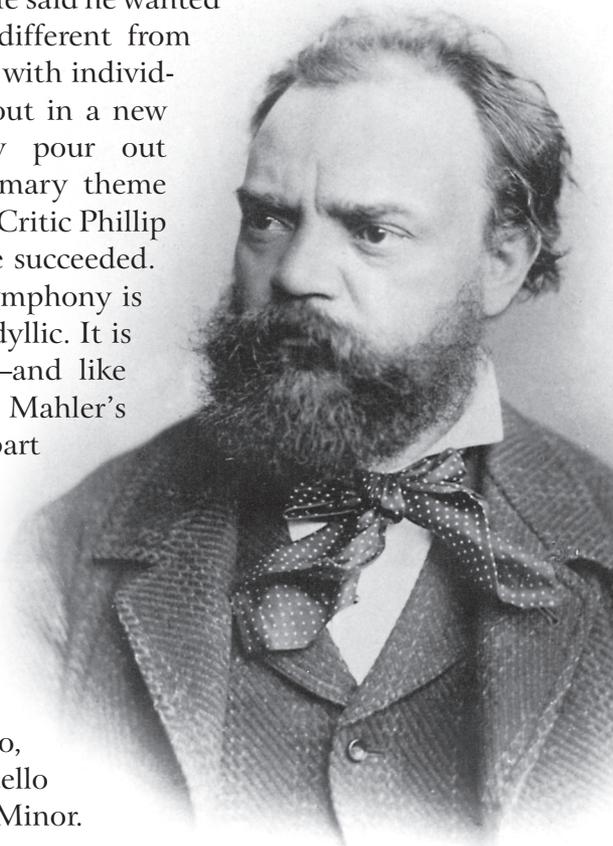
After a glorious run lasting over 100 years, the symphony entered a period of decline in the mid-19th century. The programmatic, single-movement symphonic poems and concert overtures supplanted the symphony in popularity. “Nearly two decades separate Schumann’s final symphony (1850) from any later work of distinction” in the genre (Carl Dahlhaus). However, a geographically widespread rebirth occurred in the 1870s and 1880s—with major sym-

phonies by Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Brahms, Bruckner, and Franck that “continue to dominate a large segment of the concert repertoire even today” (Dahlhaus).

Dvořák began writing his nine symphonies in 1865, and thus was in on this rebirth from the start. His later symphonies include some of the greatest works in the genre. Yet he triumphed in the new genres as well, with popular concert overtures (*My Home, Carnival, Hussite, Othello*) and symphonic poems (*The Water Sprite, Golden Spinning Wheel, The Wood Dove*). His three concertos (Violin, Piano, Cello) include “a work many consider the supreme concerto in the cello repertoire” (musicologist Richard Taruskin). Tchaikovsky, his only rival in the scope of such diverse orchestral genres, could not approach Dvořák’s prolific and monumental works of chamber music. This leads Taruskin to state that “Dvořák was arguably the most versatile, ‘universal’ composer of his time.”

Dvořák wrote Symphony No. 8 in 1889 at his countryside summer home in Vysoká. He said he wanted to compose a work “different from the other symphonies, with individual thoughts worked out in a new way...Melodies simply pour out of me.” With the primary theme modeled on a birdcall, Critic Phillip Huscher writes that he succeeded. “Dvořák’s G Major Symphony is his most bucolic and idyllic. It is in effect his *Pastoral*—and like Brahms’s Second or Mahler’s Fourth, it stands apart from his other works in the form.”

But there is far more to the **Sonata-form** first movement than a birdcall. Dvořák opens the G Major work at tempo, but with an extended cello introduction in G Minor.



Dvořák employs this passage structurally. After concluding the exposition in B Major, he states it again—at pitch—to announce the development section: a very unusual gesture. A variant version in the brass section also heralds the recap, successfully reflecting ‘thoughts worked out in a new way.’ The minor mode also highlights the shift to major for the birdcall in glorious fashion. Listen also for the repeated two-note figure for the strings in the lush secondary theme—answered by a new, delightful birdcall figure in the woodwinds.

Dvořák alternates between C Minor (‘A’ section) and C Major (‘B’ section) for the two-episode, **A B A B Coda** structure of the lovely *Adagio* movement. He heavily varies both parts upon their return, and the ‘coda’ constitutes a mere 5-bar reference to the first episode. Led by the haunting clarinet motive, that opening episode recalls Schubert as he unpredictably alternates between major and minor.

He writes a lilting Waltz in G Minor for the following dance-like **Scherzo and Trio**. The G Major Trio provides gentle contrast, ultimately leading to a complete *da capo* repeat of the Scherzo. A dramatic coda offers a more forceful, *Molto vivace* transformation of the Trio theme. And the **Theme and Variations** finale recalls his orchestral mastery of this genre in the *Symphonic Variations, Op. 78*. After the dramatic trumpet fanfare, his seemingly simple cello theme “cost its normally tuneful composer nine drafts before he was satisfied.... The variations incorporate everything from another sunny flute solo to a determined march in the minor mode” before closing with “one last rip-roaring page” (Huscher).

Though he occasionally incorporated Czech elements into his symphonies and chamber music, his technical mastery extends far beyond that of a mere ‘nationalist’ composer. The Beethovenian immersion of the introduction throughout the first movement, the sophisticated Schubertian harmonic palette in the second, the thematic transformation in the Scherzo’s coda, and the distant variations of the finale all reflect “the overpowering formal mastery of Dvořák’s development of ideas...Dvořák successfully integrated a natural melodic beauty with formal depth” (Leon Botstein).