COLORADO COLLEGE

SMf Summer Music festival

**Program Notes**
***by***
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# FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA CONCERT

## Scott Yoo, *conducting*

June 24, 2022 | 7:30 PM | Celeste Theatre

**Horn Concerto No. 4 in E-flat Major, K. 495** — W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

*Allegro moderato*
*Romanza. Andante*
*Rondo. Allegro vivace*

Mozart met the French horn player Joseph Leutgeb in Salzburg, where the latter played in the court orchestra. They became lifelong friends. Mozart, when he was 16, predicted a bright future for Leutgeb, thereby revealing his special musical taste at an early age. And he showed his admiration for the performer by writing four concertos for horn and orchestra as well as some additional works left incomplete. The horn player had an international reputation for his skillful and especially expressive playing.

Mozart's concertos, not just those for horn, show a fine balance between the orchestra and soloist. Most audiences expect a concerto to feature a virtuoso soloist and an orchestra that mostly accompanies. Mozart, on the other hand, generally makes the orchestra a real partner in the musical complexion of the work. Thus, most of his concertos begin with an exposition for the orchestra alone and the soloist has to wait his or her turn to enter. And then when it does come in, it often is in a lively dialogue with the orchestra.

This horn concerto is no exception. The first movement, *Allegro moderato*, begins with the orchestra alone for about the first minute. Here, it introduces two characteristic melodies. Then, the soloist enters somewhat timidly by imitating a melodic phrase of the orchestra before it launches into its own melodic exposition. After both the orchestral and soloist expositions, there is wonderful dialogue between the two forces.

The second movement, *Romanza. Andante*, is on a high plane and tests the soloist as an expressive player. The long melodic lines are beautiful, much like Mozart's operatic arias, and difficult to sustain. As the "title" suggests, this is a romance that could serve as a love song expressing the singer's/player's feelings

On the title page of this concerto Mozart inscribed the work as a "Hunting horn concerto for Leitgeb [sic]." He undoubtedly had the third movement, *Rondo. Allegro vivace*, in mind for it is a quintessential hunting type of melody. It dispels all traces of melancholy that may have been present in the prior slow movement and instead suggests the joy of a hunting foray. Here, the soloist needs to show agility and the ability to play arpeggios and scales that would

have been treacherously difficult on the natural horn that Leutgeb would have played. And yet it is a perfect conclusion to this beautiful work.

One final comment on Mozart's general style would be appropriate. All the movements of this concerto reveal Mozart's elegant style. The eminent Mozart scholar Alfred Einstein wrote that the horn concertos "are works intended to please, and nothing more." That pejorative epithet may seem apt after the last movement, which is simply delightful. But it is certainly not descriptive of the aesthetic beauty of the first two movements. They are not only elegant and pleasing, but quite expressive, intelligent and, frankly, Mozartian in the best sense!

***Music for strings, percussion, and celesta*, Sz. 106** — Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

*Andante tranquillo*
*Allegro*
*Adagio*
*Allegro molto*

Béla Bartók was born in Hungary and lived much of his life there. In 1940, however, he was forced to leave war-torn Europe and move to New York, a city he found very alien. He managed to write a few masterpieces during his time there but in these last five years of his life always missed his homeland.

Bartók's music is truly universal. Although often imbued with Hungarian national musical idioms which he drew from his extensive study of folk music, it is also in the mainstream of Western European modern thought. It is often extremely intellectual in its structure, but always has a sense of direction and a facade of sheer musical sound that is unique, sensuous and beautiful. All three of these musical dimensions are integral parts of *Music for strings, percussion, and celesta*.

Composed in 1936, the selection of instruments for this work is indeed curious. Besides the usual orchestra strings, it has a variety of drums, xylophone, harp, piano and, of course, celesta, which is singled out in the title. This unusual combination was designed by Bartók to create the special tone colors and textural effects he wanted his music to project. And it is important to note that Bartók wanted the strings divided into two smaller ensembles, facing each other on the stage; this "antiphonal" arrangement produces a kind of natural stereophonic sound.

The form of the first movement, *Andante tranquillo*, is based on complex tonal procedures which will not be explained in detail here. Suffice it to mention that the violas begin on an A, and then each successive entrance is either a fifth (five notes) higher or a fifth lower, in alteration, until it progresses through to E-flat or D-sharp; then it retraces its steps back to A. While this aspect of the form is hard to hear, other musical aspects are more audible and comprehensible. For example, the movement begins very quietly, builds up to a very loud center, and then retreats to quietness; the strings also begin with mutes, remove them toward the middle, and then replace them toward the end; to enhance the climax in the middle, Bartók adds some percussion (tympani, cymbals, and bass drum) and then removes them after the climax begins to wane; and finally, during the second half the main melodic subject is inverted (played upside down). At the very end, one can hear the main subject played right side up and upside down at the same time. It is like a spider doing push-up on a mirror. In loudness, orchestration, and tonal structure, then, the movement is like a giant palindrome. Finally, the listener should be aware that Bartók was meticulous in creating proportional values in his music. This often involved constructing rhythms, measures

and sections of a movement according to mathematical principles such as the Fibonacci Sequence and the "Golden Mean." This first movement (as well as the others) is constructed to reflect these principles in a multitude of ways.

The second movement, *Allegro*, is impetuous and exuberant and very unlike the first. The rhythms are hard driving and accentuated by the use of the piano, side-drums, harp and tympani. Bartok also uses the antiphonal effect with great drama. Occasionally the two orchestras seem to be having a heated discussion like two neighbors across the back fence.

The third movement, *Adagio*, is one if the finest examples of Bartók's "night music." He liked to create very delicate and impressionistic textures to create the aura of nighttime. Here, he begins with a few notes on the xylophone, with soft glissandi (changing pitches) on the tympani and a mysterious theme in the violas. Soon the fugue theme from the opening movement is heard in the strings, surrounded by the shimmering night sounds in the other instruments. This overall movement is another palindrome, with the form A-B-C-B-A; while the symmetries in the middle are hard to hear, the return of the night music at the end is distinctive and easy to identify. It is also worth mentioning that the diminutive opening xylophone solo is a perfect rhythmic palindrome and representative of the Fibonacci series. The notes get faster and then slow down in precisely measured lengths that can be identified as 1-1-2-3-5-8-5-3-2-1-1. So, this tiny solo for the xylophone is a palindromic model of the Fibonacci series and, at the same time, a microcosm of the shape of the entire movement.

The final movement, *Allegro molto*, reveals Bartók's interest in Hungarian folk music. The strings begin with strummed chords while the melody is full of the jagged and aggressive rhythms heard in so many Magyar folk dances. In the middle of the movement, at the height of exuberance, the theme of the first movement comes back one more time before yielding to the dance melody which opened the movement. This recollection brings amazing structural unity and closure to the entire four-movement composition.

This is a true masterpiece of orchestral music from the first half of the 20th century. We are fortunate to hear it because it is not often performed.

**Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70** — Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

*Allegro maestoso*
*Poco adagio*
*Scherzo. Vivace; Poco meno moso*
*Finale. Allegro*

Antonin Dvořák was born in Czechoslovakia and remained devoted to the culture of his homeland throughout his life. And he did so in spite of the fact that he was often away, including residency in the United States from 1892 to 1895, to take advantage of career opportunities. His period of greatest growth was during the mid 1880s, however, when he made no fewer than nine trips from Czechoslovakia to London where his works were received with great warmth.

The Seventh Symphony, in D minor, was composed for Dvořák's trips to London in April of 1885; that trip was made to celebrate his election to honorary membership of the Philharmonic Society. Much of his international acclaim was in response to his nationalistic compositions, particularly the *Slavonic Dances*, which had great appeal. Western European audiences heard them as slightly exotic, somewhat folk-like, and a bit popular-sounding.

He was determined in this symphony, however, to write in a style that would be more cosmopolitan. He wished to be seen as a pure colleague of Brahms (who had befriended him and given him important support particularly in Vienna) and not a country boy from the Czech hinterlands. In fact, Brahms' Third Symphony (which we heard on our first orchestra program last week) had just been finished a year earlier, and Dvořák consciously thought about his new work as a kind of response to his more-famous friend's new symphony. The cosmopolitan nature of this work did not, however, come easily. Not only did Dvořák's supporters and publishers want more Czech-sounding music, but he himself was proud of his national heritage. He had his own inner conflict over the issue.

The first movement, *Allegro maestoso* (majestic), contains a complex of themes in the exposition. The first theme emerges in the lower strings over a single note held (like an organ pedal point) in the basses. From the very beginning, there is a tragic and dark mood to the work. This first theme grows through various sub-themes (including a notable one in the French horns) to a grand climax with big brass chords before giving way to a more lyrical second theme heard in the woodwinds. At the end of the movement, a long coda brings the listener back to the opening melancholy.

The second movement, *Poco adagio*, opens with a melody in the woodwinds that sounds hymn-like and, especially in its first four measures, is imbued with remarkable classical purity. This theme is soon followed by one that features the horn. There are passages here that often sound like Wagner, the great German opera composer who used brass in a most lush and romantic way. Such an homage on Dvořák's part would not be unexpected for a composer trying to achieve a cosmopolitan recognition next to his strong Czech heritage. In the third movement, *Scherzo. Vivace*, however, the composer comes closest to writing music that reveals his national heritage. The opening section sounds like a *furiant*, one of the most popular Czech dances which Dvořák already favored in his earlier works. The usual gaiety of the *furiant* is here mollified by the minor key so that this scherzo is no joke. The Trio, or middle section of the movement, turns to a major key and sounds like a picture of a pastoral countryside replete with chirping bird-like themes in the flutes.

The finale, *Allegro*, opens with a stark return to the tragic mood of the first movement. The opening theme soon resolves to a hymn-like march heard primarily in the brass. There is a lovely lilting second theme heard first in the cellos, but soon shared by the higher wind instruments. After substantial development and recapitulation of the original ideas, the movement ends with a dramatic climax, replete with heroic dissonances, which finally resolves to a stirring and triumphal close in D Major. This key is a striking contrast to the pessimistic D minor with which the symphony began, and it expresses optimism. One is reminded of Beethoven's transformation from minor to major in the "victorious" closing of his celebrated Fifth Symphony. Dvořák seems to be expressing a similar moment of triumph at the end of this symphony.