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The three late romantic works on today's program achieve great dramatic expression with surprisingly limited orchestral forces. The unusual orchestration of Sibelius' *The Swan of Tuonela* features solo English horn, harp, bass clarinet, and bass drum, but leaves out the higher pitched flutes, clarinets, and trumpets. Elgar's Cello Concerto and Brahms' Symphony No. 3 use a standard early romantic orchestra with doubled winds, with the addition of the contrabassoon in the Brahms; the brass section includes trombones but no tuba. Other composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries such as Strauss, Mahler, and Rimsky-Korsakov employed far larger and more varied orchestral forces. This choice to use a more restricted sound palette reflects a seriousness of musical expression on the part of the composers. They achieve beautiful orchestral colors, but the music is driven more by the substance of the musical ideas than by orchestral effects.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

"The Swan of Tuonela" from the Lemminkäinen Suite, Op. 22 **Composed in 1893, revised in 1897 and 1900**

Sibelius originally composed the music of *The Swan of Tuonela* as the prelude to his unfinished opera *Veenen luominen* (The Burning of the Boat). On the score, he wrote, "*Tuonela, the land of death, the hell of Finnish*

mythology, is surrounded by a large river of black waters and a rapid current, in which the swan of Tuonela glides majestically, singing." This darkly evocative piece opens with the English horn singing the lonely song of the swan in dialogue with the solo cello and viola and accompanied by muted strings. There is a brightening of the mood with the major key entrance of the harp and the calls of the hero's

Premiere

1895 – part of the full suite in Helsinki with the composer conducting

Instrumentation

English horn, oboe, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trombones, timpani, bass drum, harp, and divided strings

Duration

9 minutes

hunting horn, but a still darker and more ominous orchestral sonority soon descends, accompanied by an eerie texture in the strings, whose whispering tremolo accompaniment is played with the wood of the bow, *col legno*.

Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934)

Cello Concerto in E Minor, Op. 85 **Composed 1919**

The tremendous success of the *Enigma Variations* in 1899 brought Elgar international fame, but by 1913 he sensed that his Brahmsian, late romantic style of composition was falling out of fashion. The cello concerto was his last major composition, but unfortunately the premiere did not come off well due to insufficient rehearsal. Elgar went ahead with the performance out of respect for the soloist, Felix Salmond, who had invested significant

effort in preparing the piece. Elgar conducted the work himself at the premiere and on several recordings with cellist Beatrice Harrison. But it was the young Jacqueline Du Pré's performances and her 1965 recording that made the concerto a staple of the solo cello repertoire.

The relationship between soloist and orchestra is unusual in this concerto, with the heroic-tragic soloist performing alone at the opening and

then playing almost continuously throughout the concerto, with only the briefest passages of orchestral *tutti*. The opening solo is at once defiant, sorrowful, and searching. The main theme of the first movement, first

Premiere

1919 – Felix Salmond soloist,
London Symphony Orchestra,
Elgar conducting

Instrumentation

two flutes, two oboes, two
clarinets, two bassoons, four
horns, two trumpets, three
trombones, timpani, and strings

Duration

30 minutes

continued...

heard in the violas and cellos, rolls along wearily, futilely attempting to gain strength, but falling ever lower with each passing bar. Elgar had been much affected by the war, the loss of friends, and a sense of his and his wife's failing health and mortality. The voice of the soloist in this concerto feels intensely personal, intimate, and pained, and the cello playing is expressive and free with short cadenzas occurring throughout the work. The second movement begins without pause, introduced by pizzicato chords and followed by several false starts as the cello tries to initiate the *moto perpetuo* of the movement proper. The third movement Adagio is a gentle, heartfelt lament, accompanied by an intimate ensemble of strings, clarinets, bassoons, and horns. The solo cello enters the final movement with an accompanied recitative version of the theme before embarking on the movement proper with a resolute energy of purpose and conviction. The impassioned music in the solo cello eventually subsides to a more prayerful resolution, which is then disrupted by the bitter return of the material from the beginning of the first movement.

Johannes Brahms

(1833–1897)

Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Op. 90

Composed 1883

Brahms composed his third symphony in the space of only four months, which is especially noteworthy because it had been six years since the completion of his second symphony. The symphony in F major is the shortest of Brahms' four symphonies. It has a remarkably unified and compact structure, with thematic material reappearing across multiple movements, and a sophisticated key structure. Brahms' longtime friend and musical confidant Clara Schumann observed this cohesiveness, saying:

All the movements seem to be of one piece, one beat of the heart, each one a jewel! From start to finish one is wrapped about with the mysterious charm of the woods and forests. I could not tell you which movement I loved most.

Premiere

December 2, 1883 – Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Hans Richter

Instrumentation

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings

Duration

33 minutes

Clara heard the woods and the forests, but the river should also be mentioned. The first theme, which returns at the end of both the first and last movements, is a quote from Robert Schumann's Rhenish Symphony, and Brahms composed the work while staying in the town of Weisbaden, on the Rhine. In addition to the passionate turbulence so common in Brahms' works, there is a gentle intimacy to this symphony, whose four movements all end softly. The most

striking unifying aspect is the three note "motto" F, A-flat, F, which opens the work and reappears throughout. This motive was something of an inside joke for Brahms, a response to his friend violinist Joseph Joachim's musical motto FAE standing for "*Frei aber einsam*" (free but lonely). FAF (or in this case, F, A-flat, F) represented "*Frie aber froh*" (free but happy) for Brahms. The tension between the major and minor modes is one of the primary drivers of the symphony, with A natural and A-flat juxtaposed constantly, as they are in the first three chords. Another defining characteristic is the prevalence of rhythmic instability, first heard in the opening theme with its ambiguity between duple and triple meter. The second movement has the character of a wind serenade with an austere second theme that returns again in the last movement. Clara Schumann described the delicately melancholy third movement as "*a pearl, but it is a grey one dipped in a tear of woe.*" The unsettled turbulence of the last movement is resolved in the coda, with the return to F major and the gentle echo of the end of the first movement.

~By Nell Flanders, Assistant Conductor
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