

CONCERT COMMENTARY by Edmund Trafford

Johann Sebastian Bach
Eisenach, 21 March 1685 – Leipzig, 28 July 1750
Flute Sonata No. 4 in C Major, BWV 1033

“BACH! A colossal syllable, one which makes composers tremble, brings performers to their knees, beatifies the Bach lover . . .”

This assessment, offered by Leonard Bernstein in his book *The Joy of Music*, wasn't always so, and the awesome fame implied would have astounded Bach himself. He thought of himself first and foremost as a conscientious craftsman doing a job to the best of his ability for the glory of God and the satisfaction of his superiors. The tremendous body of his work covers every established form of Baroque music, sacred and secular, with the sole exception of opera. The BWV catalog numbers are more or less equivalent to the opus numbers of later composers; they climb all the way to BWV 1987 and comprise some 35 volumes of collected works, of which less than a half-dozen individual works were actually published in Bach's lifetime.

To say that Bach was a dedicated musician toiling in obscurity ignores the fact that, like any other accomplished professional, he was known and respected among like professionals – North German church organist-composers principally – as a fine performer and improviser. His modest standing was far outshone even while he was still alive by his musical sons, yet his reputation was such that, on the birth of his second surviving son, Carl Philipp Emmanuel, a musician of no less stature than Philipp Georg Telemann stood as godfather.

In a sense, Bach's genius was no more than being in the right place at the right time. He was not an innovator but a superb culminator. His works represent one man's monumental summation of Baroque musical practice.

In the years 1717-1723, Bach served as director of court music for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. The Prince was a strict Calvinist and so had little use for Bach's talents in the way of church music. He was, however, an accomplished amateur musician, and most of the secular music we have from Bach (including the glorious “Brandenburg” concertos) comes from this period of his career. Bach composed six recognized flute sonatas, some with harpsichord accompaniment and some merely with figured bass indications, which are believed to date from the Cöthen period. Unfortunately, this sonata is not absolutely confirmed to have been completely composed by J.S. Bach, as the earliest surviving copy is by Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, a composer himself. There is some speculation that the work was originally a sonata for unaccompanied flute by J.S. Bach, to which Carl Philipp, acting as his father's copyist, added the figured bass.

Elliott Cook Carter
New York 11 December 1908 –
Enchanted Preludes

Carter entered Harvard University in 1926 to study literature and languages. By 1930 he had decided to devote himself entirely to music; he studied with Walter Piston and attended lectures by Gustav Holst. After graduation, Carter studied in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in 1932-913, as did so many other American composers, including most notably Aaron Copland. Upon returning to America, Carter's career was a procession of distinguished teaching positions at St. John's College, Peabody Conservatory, Columbia University, Yale University, and Cornell, among other prestigious institutions. His career has been marked by constant achievement: fellowships, prizes, residencies, and professorships. Among so many other honors, Carter won the Pulitzer Prize twice: in 1960 for his String Quartet No. 2 (which also

received the New York Music Critics Circle Award) and in 1973 for his String Quartet No. 3. In 1985, President Ronald Reagan bestowed the National Medal of Arts on Carter.

Carter's music has been variously described as prickly, complex, and difficult (analyses of his compositions are routinely studded with such terms as "serial organization," "metric modulation," and "a preoccupation with taxonomic considerations"), but there is no doubt that he has created a body of work which places him in the first rank of American composers. His 100th birthday was celebrated in 2008 with concerts around the world, and he still continues to write challenging works. In 2004, he finished a composition that was aptly named *Fons Juventatis* (Source of Youth), and in August 2008 he finished a piece for large ensemble called *Wind Rose*.

The composer has written the following about the piece on tonight's program:

"Enchanted Preludes is a birthday present for Ann Santen, commissioned by her husband, Harry, and composed in gratitude for their enthusiastic and deeply caring support of American music. It is a duet for flute and cello in which the two instruments combine their different characters and musical materials into statements of varying moods. The title comes from a poem of Wallace Stevens: The Pure Good of Theory, "All the Preludes to Felicity," stanza no.7: Felicity, ah! Time is the hooded enemy,/The inimical music, the enchanted space/In which the enchanted preludes have their place. "

Enchanted Preludes was premiered at Merkin Hall, New York, on 16 May 1988 by Patricia Spencer, flute, and André Emelianoff, cello, of the Da Capo Chamber Players.

Igor Feodorovich Stravinsky
Oranienbaum, 17 June 1882--Los Angeles, 6 April 1971
L'Histoire du Soldat ("The Soldier's Tale")

Igor Stravinsky was beyond any doubt one of the towering composer of our time. Few composers have come close to surpassing his achievement. There is no form to which he did not turn a masterful hand—opera, concerto, ballet, oratorio, symphony, chamber music—all are represented in the collected output of a long and extraordinarily productive life.

Stravinsky was the son of Feodor Stravinsky, famed basso at the St. Petersburg Opera, and so was surrounded with French, German, and Italian opera from childhood. He began piano lessons at the age of nine, and progressed to studying the scores of Brahms, Wagner, and other major composers. If not precisely a professional musician, Stravinsky was certainly becoming a well-informed amateur. Despite his love of music, he was sent to study law at the University of St. Petersburg. Here he became friends with the son of Rimsky-Korsakov, and ultimately sought out Rimsky-Korsakov's advice on a choice of careers. Stravinsky studied privately with Rimsky-Korsakov from 1903 until Rimsky-Korsakov's death in 1908. The major work of this early period is the 1908 *Fireworks*, Opus 4, in whose orchestral flair and color he showed himself the outstanding student of Rimsky-Korsakov; it was composed as a wedding present for Rimsky-Korsakov's daughter.

The period 1910-1913 is marked by the composition of the great ballets for Serge Diaghilev—the brilliant *Firebird*, of course, then the charming *Petrouchka*, and finally the shattering *Rite of Spring*. World War I intervened, and Stravinsky's style underwent a marked change. Gone were the pre-war exoticism and extravagance (*Rite of Spring*, for example, required an orchestra with eight French horns). A new world demanded a new style, and in the next 35 years—from the 1918 ballet-pantomime *The Soldier's Tale* through the 1952 opera *The Rake's Progress*, a period which also includes the oratorio *Oedipus Rex* and the magnificent and moving *Symphony of Psalms*—Stravinsky embarked on the series of masterpieces which came to be termed "Neoclassic." These works stressed economy of style and the use of traditional forms (symphony, concerto, etc.) combined with an increasingly progressive compositional language.

Stravinsky lived long enough to come to terms with the 12-tone method of Schoenberg, and incorporated some 12-tone techniques in his most important late works in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Soldier's Tale, a "narrative ballet in five scenes to be read, played, and danced," was composed in 1918, as World War I was coming to a close. This little moralistic fable tells the story of how the devil leads astray a wandering soldier, homeward bound. The score owes its bite and biting irony to the widespread disillusionment which followed the Armistice. Stravinsky's earlier and more famous ballets were perhaps more polished in workmanship and certainly more sophisticated in the choice of musical materials. Perhaps to make his point clearer in *The Soldier's Tale*, he deliberately scaled down his medium and broadened his musical approach. And certainly, the choice of reduced instrumentation accepted the practical fact that during the course of the war, the great theatres and concert houses of Europe had suspended operations. Gone was the pre-war orchestral opulence of *The Firebird* and *The Rite of Spring*; in their place stood a racketing cabaret ensemble of seven musicians playing a waltz, a ragtime, and a tango.

L'Histoire du Soldat was premiered in Lausanne, Switzerland, on 28 September 1918. Stravinsky subsequently prepared a trio version for clarinet, violin, and piano from the original score. During the summer of 1985, the Atlanta Chamber Players accompanied Boston's Underground Railway Theatre performing this version of the score in a production which premiered at Atlanta's Center for Puppetry Arts and toured to Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. On that occasion, the *Los Angeles Times* praised the Atlanta Chamber Players' performance as "impeccably interpreted." Tonight's program features the full version of Stravinsky's original score as composed for septet.