

**Gwinnett Concert - October 25, 2015**

## **Notes on the Program**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

**Salzburg, 27 January 1756—Vienna, 5 December 1791**

***Quartet for Flute and Strings in D Major, K. 285***

What we know (or think we know) about Mozart is frequently contradictory. His life has been romanticized to such an extent that he is often remembered as no more than the sickly former child prodigy who died in poverty, buried in a pauper's grave. More recently, the popular stage play *Amadeus* and the Oscar-winning film based on it have given us the portrait of a Mozart whose personal quirks included thoroughly scatological language and an infantile sense of humor—traits seemingly at odds with the composer of so much sublime music. Personalities are complex things, however, and artistic personalities perhaps more so than those of most mortals. It is true that Mozart was frequently penniless and it is also true that some of his racier correspondence cannot be quoted here with propriety. But the reality of the man lies not in romanticized history nor in popular portrayal but in the music itself, the symphonies, concertos, operas, and vast body of chamber music he produced. The fact is that, despite external tragedies and personal shortcomings, Mozart composed some of the greatest music ever written.

The *Flute Quartet in D Major, K.285*, is the first in a set of three flute quartets commissioned by a wealthy Dutch amateur flutist named (according to Mozart) “de Jean,” but whose real name appears to have been one Willem Van Britten Dejong. It was composed in Mannheim in late 1777 or early 1778. Dejong's commission was to have included three flute concertos and “a couple” of flute quartets for the handsome fee of 200 gulden. The first of the three quartets is a complete work in three movements, but the second and third are in two movements only. Mozart also wrote only two of the three flute concertos, K.313 in G major and K. 314 in D major. Given the incomplete state of the commission, it is not surprising that Dejong was reluctant to pay in full and accordingly withheld a substantial portion of the original offer. Mozart eventually settled for about half his fee, 96 gulden.

One further reason for the incomplete state of Dejong's commission is the fact that Mozart is known to have disliked the flute. In a letter to his father, Leopold, written from Mannheim on 14 February 1778 during the period of composition on these works, Mozart complained petulantly "you know I become quite powerless whenever I am obliged to write for an instrument I cannot bear." Fortunately for lovers of flute music, the composer's prejudice is not apparent in these attractive and appealing works. Indeed, Mozart was far too polished a professional to allow his personal bias to affect the quality of his public work. In the same letter to his father quoted above, Mozart also affirmed "a composition goes into the world, and naturally I do not want to have cause to be ashamed of my name on the title page."

--Note by Edmund Trafford

### **Sir Arthur Edward Drummond Bliss**

**London, August 2, 1891–London, March 27, 1975**

#### ***Quintet for Oboe & String Quartet, Op.44, F.21***

The **Quintet for Oboe and String Quartet** was written by Bliss in 1927 and commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864–1953), a key patron in promoting modern works in America. Bliss had a variety of musical influences, particularly Igor Stravinsky, Maurice Ravel, and jazz styles. He completed his studies at Cambridge University and the Royal College of Music in London. In addition, he taught at the Royal College of Music (1921) and The University of California at Berkeley from 1934–1941 before returning to England to serve as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) music director from 1942–1944. To round out his oeuvre, he was knighted in 1950 and became Master of the Queen's Music beginning in 1953.

The Quintet for Oboe and Strings was inspired by the world-renowned oboist Léon Goossens (1897–1988) and by Arnold Bax's Oboe Quintet (1922) written for the same instrumentation. The first movement of Bliss's Quintet for Oboe and Strings, marked *Assai sostenuto*, begins in a quasi-atonal style featuring the strings, followed by a lyrical entrance of the oboe. The pastoral warmth created by the solo oboe at the beginning of the second movement initially sounds as though it belongs to a different stylistic period than does the first movement. This is but one instance of the sudden changes of mood and sonorous orchestration that color the piece. Another occurs in the last movement, featuring an Irish jig that competes with insistent and foreboding timbral contrasts and regular dissonance that, at times, verge on nervous cacophony, creating a wonderfully diverse arrangement of musical evocations.

--Note by Kathryn White

## **Franz Peter Schubert**

**Vienna, January 31, 1797–Vienna, November 19, 1828**

### ***Fantasia for Piano Four-Hands in F Minor, D.940***

Schubert is the only member of the first great “school” of Viennese composers (including Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven) to claim that city as his original home. All the others were mere interlopers, attracted to the glittering capital of the musically inclined Hapsburg royal family. Schubert was the youngest of four children. He studied violin with his father and took piano lessons from his brother Ignaz. In 1808, Schubert became a member of the Vienna Imperial Court chapel choir and entered a court school for singers, where he studied with the famous Antonio Salieri, the supposed nemesis of Mozart. (Salieri evidently thought highly of the young Schubert. When Schubert left the school in 1813, Salieri continued his lessons. Salieri later said that Schubert “knew all there was to know about music.”)

Though Schubert had obviously demonstrated an early and deep interest in music, he was thereafter educated to follow in his father’s footsteps as a schoolmaster, a vocation he pursued without enthusiasm for three years, 1814-1817. He then abandoned teaching and, with the sometimes precarious financial support of a small circle of devoted friends (sometimes called the “Schubertiad”), he spent his last decade following his first and greatest love. A shy and gentle man, Schubert found it difficult to cope with the world’s vagaries. Music historian Donald Jay Grout aptly described Schubert’s personal tragedy and “genius overwhelmed by the petty necessities of everyday existence.” Schubert died at the age of 31 — younger even than Mozart — but like Mozart, he managed to concentrate a lifetime of creativity into his hundreds of works.

---Biography by Edmund Trafford

Composed in 1828, the last year of his life, Schubert dedicated the **Fantasia for Piano Four-Hands** to Karoline Esterházy, his pupil and the object of his unrequited love. First performed on May 9, 1828 by Schubert and Franz Lachner, it was published in March of 1829, just a few months after the composer’s untimely death.

The work is written in four connected movements, performed without pause. They can be discerned as an allegro, largo, scherzo, and an allegro with fugue. Similar in structure to his *Wanderer’s Fantasy* duet, these two pieces acted as a bridge from the rigid sonata form to the relatively formless tone poems that were to come.

Tragically sweet and full of subtle, complex emotions, this duet is one of the greatest four-hands pieces in the repertoire. Like most of Schubert's chamber music, it is a demanding piece for the performers, but it was written (like all of his four-hands music) for domestic enjoyment, intended for performance in intimate circles and not concert halls.

--Note by Rachel Ciprotti

## **Henry Purcell**

**London, September 10, 1659–London, November 21, 1695**

### ***Chacony in G Minor (arranged for string quartet by Benjamin Britten)***

In addition to chamber music, Henry Purcell wrote numerous secular songs, sacred musical works, royal commissions, and incidental music for theatre and opera. Despite dying at just 36 years old, he is one of the most important composers of the Baroque period. He became the official organist of Westminster Abbey as a young man in 1679, and he is buried there next to the organ. Purcell enjoyed success and acclaim during his life, but his wife Frances secured his legacy by publishing much of his music after he died.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976), the renowned British composer, was enamored with the music of Purcell and used themes of his in multiple works. Britten also arranged dozens of Purcell's compositions to make them playable on modern instruments. Some of these "realizations," as Britten called them, were changed rather drastically, but he remained quite faithful to the original material with the *Chacony in G Minor*, and it is one of the most successful of his Purcell arrangements. The *Chacony* was written for viols, a 17<sup>th</sup>-century stringed instrument with frets like a guitar, but bowed and played upright like a cello. Not much more is known about the original piece; we do not know exactly when it was composed or why. It is also strange that Purcell termed it a "chacony," a term found nowhere else in the literature. The French term chaconne was well known, even in his time. In any case, a chaconne is a form of variations set over a repeated bass line. Purcell displays his Baroque mastery of the form in this brief, melancholy piece that includes 18 variations of an 8-bar theme.

--Note by Rachel Ciprotti

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