Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Serenade for Strings in E minor, Op. 20...................Sir Edward Elgar
(1857-1934)

Composed in 1892.
Premiered on April 7, 1893 in Hereford.

Though the name of Elgar brings to mind the splendid large compositions for which he is most widely known — two symphonies, the concertos for violin and for cello, the "Enigma" Variations — he was equally recognized by the audiences of his day for his many small orchestral miniatures. More than once accused of writing beneath his abilities in such works as the perennially popular *Pomp and Circumstance Marches*, he responded, "I look on the composer's vocation as the old troubadours and bards did.... I know that there are a lot of people who like to celebrate events with music; To these people I have given tunes. Is that wrong? Why should I write a fugue or something that won't appeal to anyone, when the people yearn for things which can stir them?" He composed many short occasional pieces throughout his life. His first professional position after leaving college was as director of music at the Powick Lunatic Asylum, where he not only conducted the band made up of inmates and attendants, but also composed sheaves of quadrilles for their use at five shillings each. (His superior believed that the quadrille was the only type of music the residents of the establishment could appreciate.) Elgar's last completed piece, *Mina*, was a tonal portrait of his Cairn terrier.

One of Elgar's most familiar short orchestral works is the *Serenade for Strings*. In its present form, the piece was completed in May 1892, but it was almost certainly derived from the now-lost *Three Pieces for String Orchestra* that Elgar composed in 1888, just after leaving his position as music director at the Powick Asylum. The manuscript has disappeared, but the program leaflet recording the *Pieces'* performance by the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society, conducted by Reverend Edward Vine Hall, shows the tempo markings of the movements to have been very similar to those of the *Serenade*. In addition, it seems unlikely that the composer would have let vanish completely the *Three Pieces*, of which he once said, "I like 'em — best thing I ever did." The *Serenade* was first heard publicly at the Hereford Festival on April 4, 1893, though it had received an earlier reading by the Ladies' Orchestral Class in Worcester that Elgar trained and conducted during those years. (The work was not played professionally until 1896, in Antwerp.) In his biography of Elgar, Percy Young wrote that the *Serenade* was finished to celebrate the third wedding anniversary of the composer and his wife, Alice, his chief prod, critic and inspiration throughout his life (he virtually stopped composing after she died in 1920), a contention supported by a line in the manuscript of the piano duet transcription of the piece that notes, "Braut [German for 'bride' — his term of affection for Alice] helped a great deal to make these little tunes." Elgar retained a deep fondness for the *String Serenade*, referring to it often in later life as his favorite among his works. It was the last piece that he recorded, on August 29, 1933, only six months before his death.

Though the movements of the *Serenade* bear no descriptive titles, those of the earlier *Three Pieces* could well serve to summarize their characters: "Spring Song," "Elegy" and "Finale." Though nominally in the key of E minor, the first movement is more wistful and nostalgic than grave in mood. The opening theme, swaying, almost playful in nature, is succeeded by a more earnestly lyrical melody in the middle section with some dialogue between solo and ensemble. The initial strain returns to close the movement. The nocturnal *Larghetto* grows from a long, tender melody supported by a rich accompaniment that becomes more active as the music unfolds. The closing *Allegretto*, one of those inimitable Elgarian creations effortlessly combining vigor and languor, recalls a theme from the opening movement in its closing pages to round out this touching miniature masterwork.

Violin Concerto No. 5.................................Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
in A major, K. 219, "Turkish" (1756-1791)
Composed in December 1775.

The name of Mozart first calls to mind the breathtaking array of compositions he left to posterity. To his

contemporaries, however, he was almost equally well known as one of the foremost performers of his day. His masterful piano playing was lauded in Vienna and elsewhere, and his reputation for excellent musicianship was common knowledge for several decades after his death. Less known than Mozart's keyboard ability was his extraordinary talent on the violin. His father, Leopold, was a renowned teacher of the instrument who issued a popular tutor for violin instruction in 1756, the year of Wolfgang's birth. Young Mozart learned to play the violin early and well, and it was one of the chief accomplishments with which he dazzled his listeners on his first tour, in 1763. He was seven. On his initial trip to Italy seven years later, two of the greatest violinist-composers — Giovanni Sammartini and Pietro Nardini — were so impressed with the boy's playing that they each wrote special sets of exercises for him.

Back in Salzburg after his southern travels, Mozart was appointed concertmaster of the Court Orchestra on November 27, 1770, a position he held until he moved to Vienna in 1781. Leopold had a justifiably high opinion of his son's ability, and told him, "You have no idea how well you play the violin. If you would only do yourself justice, and play with boldness, spirit and fire, you would be the first violinist in Europe." Wolfgang was, however, more interested in the keyboard than in the violin, and replied tartly, "When performing is necessary, I decidedly prefer the piano and I probably always shall." Even Leopold's argument that, since the violin was the most popular instrument of the time, he could gain greater financial success as a violinist-composer than as a pianist-composer, did not sway Wolfgang. After Wolfgang left Salzburg in 1781, he refused to touch the violin again, even preferring to play the viola in his informal string quartet sessions in Vienna.

Mozart's five authentic Violin Concertos were all products of a single year — 1775. At nineteen he was already a veteran of five years experience as concertmaster, for which his duties included not only playing, but also composing, acting as co-conductor with the keyboard player (modern orchestral conducting was not to originate for at least two more decades) and soloing in concertos. It was for this last function that Mozart wrote these concertos. He was, of course, a quick study at everything that he did, and each of these works builds on the knowledge gained from its predecessors. It was with the last three (K. 216, 218, 219) that something more than simple experience emerged, however, because it was with these compositions that Mozart indisputably entered the era of his musical maturity. These are his earliest pieces now regularly heard in the concert hall, and the last one, No. 5 in A major, is the greatest of the set. A. Hyatt King wrote that this is not only the best of Mozart's concertos for violin, "but has no rival throughout the second half of the 18th century."

The opening movement is in sonata-concerto form, but has some curious structural experiments more usually associated with the music of Haydn than with that of Mozart. After the initial presentation of the thematic material by the orchestra, the soloist is introduced with the surprising device of a brief, stately *Adagio*, a technique perhaps derived from the D major Clavier Concerto of C.P.E. Bach, Johann Sebastian's musically adventurous Son No. 2. When the *Allegro* tempo resumes, the soloist plays not the main theme already announced by the ensemble, but a new lyrical melody for which the original main theme becomes the accompaniment. More new material fills the remainder of the exposition. The development section is invested with passages of dark harmonic color which cast expressive shadows across the generally sunny landscape of the movement, and lend it emotional weight. The recapitulation calls for restrained, elegant virtuosity from the soloist.

The second movement is a graceful song in sonatina form (sonata-allegro without development). The final movement is an extended rondo in the style and rhythm of a minuet. It is from one of the episodes separating the returns of the theme that the work acquired its sobriquet, "Turkish." This passage occurs before the theme is heard for the last time, and stands in surprising contrast to its elegant surroundings by changing its tempo, meter and mood to recreate a vivacious contradance in the style popular at the time in the dance halls of Vienna. A number of short tunes comprise this section. Most are, according to A. Hyatt King, derived from Hungarian folk music (known, vaguely, as "Turkish" in the 18th century), though one was part of a ballet titled "Harem Jealousies" that Mozart borrowed from his own 1773 opera, *Lucio Silla*. After the wonderful clangor of this episode, which even calls for the basses to strike their strings with the wood of the bow, the return of the minuet theme is guaranteed to bring a smile — as though the dancers had collapsed from exertion and had only enough strength left for something slow and easy. The end of the work is quiet, and wistful, and unforgettable.

Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90, "Italian" ...... Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Composed 1831-1833; revised 1834-1837.
Premiered on May 13, 1833 in London, conducted by the composer.

Felix Mendelssohn never learned how to take it easy. As a boy, he was awakened at 5:00 every morning to begin a full day of private tutelage, exercise, social instruction and family activities — the busy regimen he learned as a child shaped the rest of his brief life. Inactivity was anathema. Two months of bed rest occasioned by a leg injury in London in 1829 were more painful for the confinement they necessitated than for the medical condition. Throughout his days, Mendelssohn preferred travel to quiet life at home: he trooped across Europe, from Vienna to Wales, from Hamburg to Naples, and was welcomed and admired at every stop. Some of his journeys inspired music — the first of his ten trips to Great Britain, for example, which included a walking tour of Scotland (during which he enjoyed "a half-hour of inconsequential conversation" with Sir Walter Scott), gave rise to the "Scottish" Symphony and the *Hebrides Overture*.

When he was 21, Mendelssohn embarked on an extensive grand tour of the Continent. He met Chopin and Liszt in Paris, painted the breathtaking vistas of Switzerland, and marveled at the artistic riches (and grumbled about the inhospitable treatment by the coachmen and innkeepers) of Italy. "The land where the lemon trees blossom," as his friend Goethe described sunny Italy, stirred him so deeply that he began a musical work there in 1831 based on his impressions of Rome, Naples and the other cities he visited. The composition of this "Italian" Symphony, as he always called it, caused him much difficulty, however, and he had trouble bringing all of the movements to completion. "For the slow movement I have not yet found anything exactly right, and I think I must put it off for Naples," he wrote from Rome to his sister Fanny. The spur to finish the work came in the form of a commission for a symphony from the Philharmonic Society of London that caused Mendelssohn to gather up his sketches and complete the task.

The new Symphony was met with immediate acclaim at its premiere on May 13, 1833 in London, and was one of the series of British successes that helped enshrine Mendelssohn in the English pantheon of 19th-century musical genius as Queen Victoria's favorite composer. Mendelssohn, however, was not completely satisfied with the original version of the Symphony, and he refused to allow its publication. He tinkered with it again several years later, paying special attention to the finale, but never felt the work to be perfected. It was only after his death that the score was published and became widely available. Despite Mendelssohn's misgivings, the "Italian" Symphony has become one of the most enduring and popular pieces in the orchestral repertory, declared to be virtually perfect by the demanding British critic and scholar Sir Donald Tovey; it was a special favorite of that cantankerous curmudgeon and one-time music critic, George Bernard Shaw.

Mendelssohn cast his "Italian" Symphony in the traditional four movements. The opening movement is a sparkling sonata-allegro with an elaborately contrapuntal development section. The *Andante*, in the style of a slow march, may have been inspired by a religious procession that Mendelssohn saw in the streets of Naples, but it also evokes the chorale prelude sung by the Two Armed Men in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. The third movement, the gentlest of dances, is in the form of a minuet/scherzo whose central trio utilizes the burnished sonorities of bassoons and horns. The finale turns, surprisingly, to a tempestuous minor key for an exuberant and mercurial dance modeled on the whirling *saltarello* that Mendelssohn heard in Rome.

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