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# Symphonic Zenith

Eclipsing the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

This performance is supported in part by the  
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First Church of Christ, Scientist  
Central Park West at 68<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC

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Saturday, 7 March 2020 at 7:30 PM

# EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK

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FREDERICK RENZ - DIRECTOR

violin

Daniel S. Lee, concertmaster

Chloe Fedor, principal

Karen Dekker

Kate Goddard

Francis Liu

Christof Richter

Edson Scheid

viola

Rachel Evans, principal • Stephen Goist

bass

Ezra Seltzer, principal - violoncello • Matt Zucker - violoncello

David Chapman - double bass violone

David Ross • Melanie Williams - transverse flute

Ben Matus - bassoon

Sara Cyrus • Linda Dempf - horn

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# Symphonic Zenith: Eclipsing the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Sinfonia in D (No. 2), 1760

Allegro

Adagio ma non molto

Allegro

William Herschel

1738-1822

Divertimento in D (K. 334), 1779-80

*select movements*

Allegro

Menuetto I

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

1756-1791

Danse des Champs Elysées, 1774

from the opera Orphée et Eurydice

Lent très doux

Christoph Willibald Gluck

1714-1787

String Symphony in c minor, No. 4, 1821

Grave-Allegro

Andante

Allegro vivace

Felix Mendelssohn-Barthody

1809-1847

*interval*

Sinfonia in E major (Wq. 182/6), 1773

Allegro di molto

Poco andante

Allegro spiritoso

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

1714-1788

Symphony in c# minor (VB 140), 1782

Andante di molto - Allegro

Andantino

Menuetto

Allegro

Joseph Martin Kraus

1756-1792

## THE PROGRAM

Exciting art is made in times of transition. The classical period in music – roughly from 1750 to 1825 – was one such time, as some composers built upon the foundation of Baroque-era practice while others sought new modes of expression. The full spectrum of this transitional period will be sampled tonight.

A season fashioned under the rubric “Harmony of the Spheres” provides a splendid opportunity to launch an event with a composition by astronomer **William Herschel**. Though he started out as a composer and instrumentalist, his intellectual interests and scientific curiosity eventually led him to astronomy, which gradually supplanted his musical vocation. Trading earthly sounds for the harmony of the spheres, he began building telescopes and canvassing the heavens. In 1781, Herschel became the first person since antiquity to discover a planet – Uranus – catapulting him to international fame. Among later distinctions, he discovered infrared radiation in 1800, and in 1820 was named the first president of the Royal Astronomical Society.

German-born, from a musical family, Herschel first came to England in 1757, and across roughly a decade composed two dozen symphonies, some concertos and some highly regarded church music. The youthful second symphony, for chamber orchestra, is dated “Richmond, 1760,” and is sometimes referred to as the “Richmond Sinfonia.” In 1933, his granddaughter, Constance Anne Herschel, wrote a family history, *The Herschel Chronicle*, in which she summed up her grandfather’s music: “His own taste in music was simple; music must express emotion. He loved melody and hated fugues; the symphonies which he composed during these early days in Yorkshire are graceful and melodious.”

Those same two adjectives could apply to almost any work by one of the greatest of the classical period composers, **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, though he was known to love a good fugue. You won’t find many fugues in the dozens of his compositions entitled “Divertimento,” however. What you will find are movement after movement of diverting melodies and harmonies and, for the discerning ear, the occasional unexpected twist or turn. Our program includes a horn-flavored Minuet that achieved notoriety in the early 20th century simply as “Mozart’s Minuet” at a time when 78 RPM records could hold only four minutes on a side.

**Christoph Willibald Gluck** is best known for his stage works. Particularly in opera, he is regarded as a pioneer in the transition of the form from the Italian model, a loosely-connected series of virtuoso set pieces designed to display the artistry of its singer-stars, to a concise telling of a dramatic story to which all the components – music, libretto, staging – were subservient. In this he paved the way for all 19th century opera, particularly the works of Berlioz, Weber and Wagner. Indeed, his greatest influence may have been on German opera, in spite of his never having composed one in that language.

Few purely instrumental works by Gluck survive, but thanks to his theatre music there are many opportunities to savor his orchestral mastery. Perhaps the most famous is the “Dance of the Blessed Spirits,” from his ground-breaking opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Originally written in Italian for a production in Vienna in 1762, it was revised in 1774 for Paris, and the Dance expanded from a short interlude to an extended ballet in four sections (catering to the French predilection for dance spectacle). In a scene set in the Elysian Fields (in French, “Champs Élysées”), Orpheus observes the tranquil resting place of noble souls, accompanied by a haunting melody that has become a flute repertoire staple.

It isn't often Early Music New York's audiences get to hear a work that is less than 200 years old; the String Symphony No. 4 of **Felix Mendelssohn** is a relatively young 199. At age 12, he embarked upon a series of symphonies for strings, compositional exercises as part of his studies. These works were performed privately, at musical soirees in the Mendelssohn household, and not published during his lifetime. Indeed, they were considered lost; it was only in 1950, more than a century after his death, that the manuscripts were discovered in the State Library of East Berlin.

These works presage little of the Romantic era genius who only a few years later would stun the world with his Octet and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They are firmly grounded in the esthetics of those classical period composers – Haydn, Mozart, and the sons of J.S. Bach – who served as his models. In Symphony No. 4 one can detect some Baroque-era practices – for example, the short opening *Grave* section and the first movement's contrapuntal passages – as well as a hint of the Romantic-era predilection to use harmonic suspense as a link between movements.

The six symphonies composed by **Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach** in 1773 would never have existed if not for a perceptive government official. Baron Gottfried van Swieten, while a minor composer himself, is better known for his patronage of the classical period's greatest composers. A diplomat by profession but a lifelong devotee of music, he exposed Mozart and Beethoven to the works of Bach and Handel, and collaborated with Haydn on his two great oratorios, *The Creation* and *The Seasons*.

Early in his career, while serving in Berlin as Austrian ambassador to the court of Frederick the Great, Van Swieten commissioned six symphonies from C.P.E. Bach. The composer had often chafed at the restrictions under which he had to work: "Because I have had to compose most of my works for specific individuals and for the public, I have always been more restrained in them than in the few pieces I have written merely for myself."

He must have been thrilled by Van Swieten's commission, which specifically gave Bach's imagination free rein. Sarah Adams, editor of the complete C.P.E. Bach Edition volume that includes these symphonies, writes: "With their virtuosic passagework, startling modulations, and abrupt contrasts in material, dynamics, and key both within and across movements, they would have been difficult for amateurs and thought more appropriate for connoisseurs."

Although these symphonies were never published in the composer's lifetime, they circulated among connoisseurs such as Johann August Patzig, who held student readings at his home. One of his students was Carl Friedrich Zelter, a great admirer of C.P.E. Bach; he later acquired Patzig's library for the Berlin Sing-Akademie. Among his own composition students there who participated in similar reading sessions - likely performing these very symphonies - was a young Felix Mendelssohn. Thus, there is virtually a direct 50-year line from C.P.E. Bach's symphonies of 1773 through to Mendelssohn's string symphonies of 1821-23, composed under Zelter's tutelage.

**Joseph Martin Kraus** is sometimes called "The Swedish Mozart," not only because of the high artistic level of his music, but due to his almost exact contemporaneity with his nickname-sake (five months younger than Mozart, Kraus outlived him by just a year). No less a colleague than Joseph Haydn regarded Kraus as one of the geniuses of the age.

Even among Kraus's surviving symphonies, this one is exceptional. For one thing, it has four movements instead of his usual three, marking it as a serious, forward-looking work. It also is in the very rare key of C-sharp minor, one of only two symphonies in that key composed in the 18th century. The key was not favored much by 17th and 18th century composers, but with the development of the pianoforte, it became a little more common – for example, Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata and several works by Chopin, including the *Fantaisie-Improptu*.

A year later, Kraus rewrote this symphony – at Haydn's suggestion – in C minor, reverting to the three-movement format as well as adjusting and expanding the orchestra (oboes replaced flutes and more horns were added). Haydn's verdict: "The symphony he wrote here in Vienna especially for me will be regarded as a masterpiece for centuries to come; believe me, there are few people who can compose something like that." The same applies no less to the original version.

Daniel Guss

### Special Thanks

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