



Program Notes

for kids

Harp Magic
Saturday, March 12, 2016
8:00 p.m.
Michigan Theater

Handel Overture and Ballo from Ariodante
Ginastera Harp Concerto

Intermission

Brahms Symphony No. 2 in D major



The statue of Handel at the site of his grave in London's Westminster Abbey

Overture and Ballo from Ariodante

by George Frideric Handel

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

These are two *movements*, or sections, from an *opera* called *Ariodante*. The first is the *Overture*, or the opening instrumental section of an opera. The start of an overture would signal to the audience that it was time to quiet down and find their seats as the performance was about to begin. It would preview some of the important tunes that would be sung later in the opera. The second movement is the *Ballo* or ballet: a dance number meant to entertain the audience between acts of the opera.

Listen for...

Only a small portion of the orchestra plays this piece. During Handel's life, orchestras weren't yet the big groups they are today. They traditionally only had string players and maybe a couple flutes, oboes and French horns.

Fun Facts

Bach and Handel were born only weeks apart in the same country, but they never met. One time, when Handel was home from London visiting his mother, Bach walked 20 miles from his home to Handel's, only to arrive just after Handel had left.

In the advertisements for the first performance of Handel's *Messiah*, women were asked to wear skirts without hoops and men were asked to leave their swords at home so that they could pack more people into the theater for this much-anticipated work by a very popular composer.

When was it written?

Handel wrote 40 operas in 30 years to entertain the English Nobility. *Ariodante* was first performed in 1735 at the Covent Garden Theatre in London.

What is it about?

Ariodante is the story of prince named Ariodante who is set to marry a princess named Ginevra, when a jealous duke named Polinesso tries to break them up by spreading rumors of Ginevra's infidelity. After a whole lot of shenanigans – including a failed suicide attempt, an avoided assassination, and a tournament to fight for Ginevra's honor – Polinesso confesses his guilt on his death bed and Ginevra's honor is restored.

About the Composer

George Frideric Handel | Born February 23, 1685 in Halle, Germany | Died April 14, 1759 in London, United Kingdom

Family & Career

Handel was born to a decidedly un-musical family. In fact, Handel's father forbade him to play musical instru-

ments because he wanted his son to focus his attention on studying law. Somehow, Handel snuck a *clavichord* – a small keyboard instrument that is a precursor to the modern piano – into his bedroom. He would only play it when his parents were sleeping. One day Handel, after much secret practice, surprised his father with a performance. This convinced his father that he should be allowed to study music.

Music

Though Handel was German, he spent most of his career in London writing Italian operas. He also wrote a lot of choral music like the oratorio *Messiah*, which is still performed regularly at Christmastime all over the world. Handel was wildly successful in London during his lifetime. He never married and lived a very private life. Yet 3,000 people attended his funeral.

Harp Concerto

by Alberto Ginastera

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the harpist is the soloist, so she sits at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three *movements* or sections.

When was it written?

Ginastera worked on this piece from 1956-58, and it was first performed in 1965.

About the Composer

Alberto Ginastera | Born April 11, 1916 in Buenos Aires, Argentina | Died June 25, 1983 in Geneva, Switzerland

Career

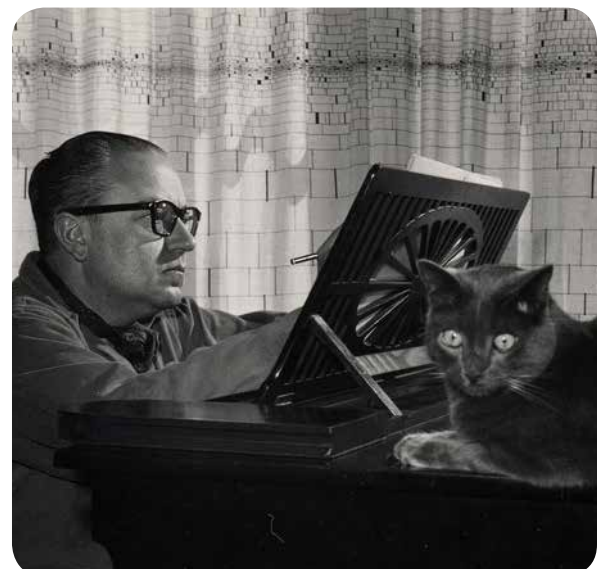
Ginastera began studying piano at age 7 and by age 12 was accepted to study music at a Conservatory.

Political unrest in Argentina caused him to spend much of his life in the United States and Europe.

Listen for...

In his early works, Ginastera often used Argentine folk melodies. By the time he wrote his *Harp Concerto*, however, he was done doing that. But you'll still hear the influence of his country's music: he uses several Latin American percussion instruments and rhythms you would hear in Argentine folk music.

This is not your typical angelic harp playing. Watch for the harpist to perform some interesting sound effects like knocking on the wooden part of the harp or using her fingernails to do *glissandos*, or runs up and down the strings.



Ginastera and his cat.

Symphony No. 2 in D major

by Johannes Brahms

Listen for...

Much of the first movement of this Symphony is based on Brahms's famous *Lullaby*. See if you can hear that familiar tune.

upbeat and lively, while others may be slower and more song-like. This symphony has four movements and is about 45 minutes long.

When was it written?

Brahms wrote his second Symphony during the summer of 1877. He composed it with impressive speed, considering it took about 15 years for him to complete his first Symphony.



Brahms playing the piano

Fun Facts

Brahms never really grew up. He didn't care much about how he looked, he left his clothes lying all over the floor of his house, he loved merry-go-rounds and circus sideshows, and he continued playing with his childhood toys until he was almost 30 years old. And his voice apparently sounded like a little boy's until well into his 20s.

Brahms loved children. He would often be seen with a whole parade of kids following him since he was known to give out candy.

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

A *Symphony* is a long piece of music containing three or four *movements*. These movements, or sections, each have their own characteristics. Some movements may be

upbeat and lively, while others may be slower and more song-like. This symphony has four movements and is about 45 minutes long.

About the Composer

Johannes Brahms | Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany | Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna, Austria

Family & Career

Brahms's father, Johann Jakob Brahms, was a *bierfiedler*: literally, a "beer fiddler" who played in small bands at bars. The young Brahms inherited his father's love of music but wanted to study piano rather than becoming a bierfiedler. But, his father still capitalized on his son's talents by hiring him out to play dancing music on piano at bars.

Brahms eventually escaped the life of a bar musician and went on to study composition.

Music

Brahms's music isn't overly-emotional like that of his colleagues, Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The stylistic feud that broke out between the more rational, old-fashioned composers (Brahms and Robert Schumann) and the more emotional ones (Liszt and Wagner) was called The War of the Romantics. The "War" got so bad at one point that, after Brahms performed one of his piano concertos, the audience sat in silence, refusing to clap in order show their support for Liszt.

Brahms is now regarded as one of the "three Bs," three of the greatest composers of classical music: Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.