

Friday Evening, January 25, 2013, at 8:00
Isaac Stern Auditorium/Ronald O. Perelman Stage
Conductor's Notes Q&A with Leon Botstein at 7:00



presents

What Makes a Masterpiece

LEON BOTSTEIN, *Conductor*

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 13
Allegro
Andante sostenuto e molto cantabile
Allegro feroce
Allegro con brio

HEINRICH VON
HERZOGENBERG Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 50
(U.S. Premiere)
Adagio—Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo
Allegro agitato
Allegro

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98
Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

This evening's concert will run approximately two and a half hours, including one 20-minute intermission.

American Symphony Orchestra welcomes students and teachers from ASO's arts education program, Music Notes. For information on how you can support Music Notes, visit AmericanSymphony.org.

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THE Program

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Symphony No. 4

Born September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, Czechoslovakia

Died May 1, 1904, in Prague

Composed January 1–March 26, 1874, in Prague, revised in 1887–8,

Premiered April 6, 1982, in Prague

Performance Time: Approximately 38 minutes

Instruments: 2 flutes, 2 piccolos, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns,
2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (triangle, cymbals, bass drum),
harp, and strings

HEINRICH VON HERZOGENBERG

Symphony No. 1

Born June 2, 1843, in Graz, Austria

Died October 9, 1900, in Wiesbaden, Germany

Composed in 1885

Performance Time: Approximately 42 minutes

Instruments: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 French horns, 2 trumpets,
3 trombones, timpani, and strings

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 4

Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna

Composed in 1884–85, in Müzzuschlag, Austria

Premiered on October 25, 1885, in Meiningen, Germany with Brahms conducting

Performance Time: Approximately 39 minutes

Instruments: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon,
4 French horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (triangle), and strings



ABOUT THIS Concert

What Makes a Masterpiece by Leon Botstein

It is rare that one gets to match wits with a distinguished colleague before the public on a subject, and debate a matter of importance. As a reader of the program notes to tonight's concert will discover, my good friend David Brodbeck and I do not quite see eye to eye. Therefore tonight may, in retrospect, have the feel of a public debate. It is a pleasure to be part of a controversy in an art form that often appears to be so staid.

After all, tonight's concert was designed to challenge received wisdom about the merits of musical works, and the criteria by which we judge music. The premise of the concert is one that has been responsible for much of the ASO's programming over the past two decades. We believe that inherited verdicts of quality are too readily accepted, and that we succumb uncritically to the so-called judgment of history. Is what has been handed down to us as canonical and superior really so, or is the standard concert repertory more of a biased and perhaps lax selection from the past? Could the standards that earn a historical work of music a regular place on today's concert stage be narrow and even arbitrary, and perhaps reveal a distortion of history?

In order to pursue this challenge, highlight the inadequacy of today's account of our musical heritage, and expose the poverty of the accepted selection of works from the past which are performed all too frequently in concert life, the ASO has chosen to organize a closely argued experiment in the form of a concert. We will perform three symphonies that exhibit common formal characteristics, share aesthetic premises,

and are all in minor keys. All three were either composed or revised in the decade of the 1880s by composers who shared biographical connections and one language in common: German.

The three works on tonight's program are all properly identified in the notes to this concert written by the eminent scholar, David Brodbeck. He acknowledges the program as being made up of an obscure symphony by an obscure composer, a neglected work by a famous composer, and a famous work by a famous composer.

But there is where the debate begins. Brodbeck offers the accepted judgment of history, and therefore the standard view. Herzogenberg's symphony is judged the work of an epigone, and little more than a pale reflection of Brahms. Its presumed lack of originality has been the source of its obscurity. Brodbeck deems the work workmanlike and cleanly executed and therefore from time to time worthy of being heard. The Dvořák, even in its revision, is judged a failure, except for the two inner movements. The symphony's merit seems to rest in the idea that these better movements prefigure the mature Dvořák we all know and love. In other words the main reason to tolerate Dvořák's Fourth Symphony is because of our longstanding attachment to the Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth symphonies (and possibly Nos. 5 and 6). But is this the best that can be said of the Fourth? What exactly is deficient about it?

Brahms' Fourth is an acknowledged masterpiece the merit of which Brodbeck rightly knows requires no defense or argument. There is indeed no point or purpose in taking issue with the





accepted view of Brahms' E-minor symphony. But is Brodbeck's comparative assessment of the weakness of the other two—the standard view in the critical and scholarly literature—justified? How can we locate and challenge the presumed objective criteria that render the account of the supposed shortcomings of the other works valid? That prescriptive notion is precisely what this program, in explicitly juxtaposing these three symphonies, attempts to explode.

For do we always listen, look, or read only in a comparative mode, thinking about experiences with works of art that strike us as better or worse? If that were the case we could conceivably select one kind of novel, one painting, or one film to enjoy and then disregard all the rest. Rather, we enlarge our experience by understanding that, beyond issues of personal taste, what makes a worthy piece or even a masterpiece are not necessarily some immutable objective attributes, but the shifting discriminations within the passing eras of history. Is Dvořák's Fourth somehow lesser or not worth hearing because we also have Brahms' Fourth? Is Dvořák's Fourth somehow weak or not deserving of performance because his Eighth and Ninth symphonies have become more popular?

How does Herzogenberg's Symphony No. 1 hold up now, more than a century after it was written? Brahms was not generous in his assessment, but during his lifetime, Herzogenberg was considered by many to be a composer of stature, albeit in the orbit of Brahms. What caused the difference in the way we hear both of their symphonies? How do our reactions differ from the way their original audiences heard them? Perhaps we should not be guided by Brahms' well-known harsh opinions. At age 60 he destroyed many of his own works, much to the dismay of his most ardent admirers, including Clara Schumann.

This concert exists because we welcome the opportunity for an audience to come to its own conclusions. Faced with these three comparable works, no one expects our collective opinion about Brahms to change. But perhaps the time has come to revisit a less familiar Dvořák symphony—a powerful and ambitious work—as well as to give the Herzogenberg symphony a second chance.

At issue are our reactions to the way musical time is framed by composers from this historical era. What is the character of their musical materials, what is the manner in which they elaborate them, and how do they choose to construct a musical argument? Given a shared musical grammar and vocabulary, what seems to be at stake for each of these composers? Absent an explicit program or narrative, what do these works tell us about musical meaning and communication at the end of the 19th century—the transaction between composer and listener? How have our expectations regarding tradition and innovation in music changed? What are the continuities and discontinuities in our musical culture? How does the meaning of music change over time?

Such reflections are hard for us to engage in if we only play and listen to a few works that have been repeated so often that they have lost all connection to their historical context. They stand, cut off from their roots, as revered relics burdened by their own extensive performance history and a daunting body of criticism.

By placing these three works side by side we invite audiences to find new ways of thinking about familiar subjects. Dvořák is still known primarily for a few works, and for his reputation as a Czech and quintessentially a voice within the concert repertory suggestive of a particular ethnic folk tradition.



Placed alongside Brahms, Dvořák may appear to lack the gravitas we attribute to Brahms, even though Brahms would have recoiled at such a judgment and found it ludicrous. Brahms, after all, volunteered to proofread Dvořák's works for publication, a singular gesture of respect.

And what shall we make of Heinrich von Herzogenberg, whom we now remember largely on account of his wife? Her famous correspondence and friendship with Brahms (who deeply admired her) provide essential clues to understanding that enigmatic composer. The music in this symphony suggests depth and eloquence. It possesses the capacity to reward both player and listener by offering a touching and memorable encounter with music. Is it possible to see Herzogenberg as an artist of distinction rather than a forgettable epigone?

Such a conjecture does no harm to the belief that Brahms' Fourth is an exceptional work. In fact, let us hope that hearing these infrequently performed works tonight alongside an acknowledged masterpiece might just stimulate our curiosity to search out other neglected works from the past, and to anticipate with pleasure the prospect of hearing Dvořák's Fourth and the music of Herzogenberg again soon.

A Master, a Protégé, and an Epigone

by David Brodbeck

Tonight's program brings together a familiar symphony by a canonic composer, an unfamiliar symphony by another canonic composer, and a forgotten symphony by a forgotten composer. This may at first seem an unlikely combination, but in fact the works on tonight's bill provide a good overview of the symphonic landscape in Central Europe during the last quarter of the 19th century. The grouping is fitting,

too, in that the senior member of tonight's trio of composers, Johannes Brahms, acted as a supporter of or inspiration for the two junior members.

Antonín Dvořák came to Brahms' attention in the mid-1870s, when the latter served on the Austrian state committee that awarded him several stipends in support of his work. Brahms subsequently persuaded his Berlin publisher, Simrock, to take on Dvořák's music as well, thereby playing a key role in disseminating the composer's reputation beyond his native Bohemia. The two men soon developed an enduring friendship based in mutual respect of each other's rather different artistic strengths.

Composed in 1874, toward the end of Dvořák's early flirtation with the New German School, the Symphony No. 4 was thoroughly revised in 1887–88 for a performance in London that didn't pan out. This isn't the work of a master, however, despite these revisions, although it does point the way toward Dvořák's mature style. The inner movements are the finest. The lyrical *Andante e molto cantabile*, a theme with variations that often sound like something from *Tannhäuser*, reveals a passion for Wagner that Dvořák never really got over. By contrast, the ensuing scherzo gives an early sign of the Czech style that would soon endear Dvořák to his non-Czech audiences. The vigorous scherzo theme, sounded at first in the unison woodwinds, is based on the same 16th-century Hussite hymn that Smetana used in *Má vlast* to evoke a strong and glorious Czech nation.

Brahms' acquaintance with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, an Austrian-born composer of French aristocratic descent, dates to the early 1860s. Herzogenberg eventually married Elisabeth von Stockhausen, a former piano student of Brahms and later an astute critic on

whom the latter came to rely for insightful and frank readings of his new works. Although Brahms fell out of contact with the newly married couple when they left Vienna to set up home in Graz, the friendship was renewed after they moved on to Leipzig and began to drum up support for his music in a city that had long resisted it.

Herzogenberg's admiration for the older composer is evident in the *Variations on a Theme by Johannes Brahms* for four-hand piano that he published in 1876. When Herzogenberg later composed his Symphony No. 1, he took Brahms' own First Symphony as his point of departure: both are in the key of C minor, show a similar serious demeanor, and share certain rhythmic and harmonic features. Moreover, with opening movements in which a slow introduction gives way to an allegro in 6/8 time, and finales in C major, each realizes the same narrative from darkness into light that characterizes Beethoven's Fifth Symphony.

Brahms was evasive when Elisabeth prodded him to comment on her husband's newly published score. Begging off from responding in detail, he merely expressed regret that "Heinz...put such a strain on his audiences with his first symphony." There is irony a plenty in these remarks, given all the challenges that Brahms had just tossed out in his own newly completed Fourth Symphony,

a work of rigorous tonal and motivic logic. Indeed, in response to Brahms' request for her thoughts about his new piece, Elisabeth feared that it was

designed too much for the eye of the microscope, as though all the beauties were not laid bare for every simple admirer, and as though it were a tiny world for the wise and learned, only a small part of which might be had by the common people who walk in darkness.

Herzogenberg's First Symphony soon fell into obscurity. It sounds like Brahms but isn't Brahms, and we don't need a microscope to determine why. Even in a favorable early review of the work, what comes through is the primacy of the model: "The symphony seems to us to be one whole gigantic reminiscence, though in the best sense of the word, of Johannes Brahms." At the same time, however, this reviewer reminds us that originality was not essential to gaining a favorable hearing, and that workmanlike, cleanly executed music such as this had its place in the concert culture of the later 19th century. It is well worth hearing again from time to time in our own concert culture.

Dr. Brodbeck is professor of musicology and the Robert and Marjorie Rawlins Chair of Music at the University of California, Irvine.

MEET THE Artists

LEON BOTSTEIN, *Conductor*

This season, Leon Botstein celebrates his 20th anniversary as music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra. He is co-artistic director of the acclaimed Summerscape and Bard Music Festivals, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, designed by Frank Gehry for Bard College. He is also conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11. He has been president of Bard College in New York since 1975.

Mr. Botstein leads an active schedule as a guest conductor all over the world, and can be heard on numerous recordings, including operas by Strauss, Dukas, and Chausson, as well as works of Shostakovich, Dohnanyi, Liszt, Bruckner, Bartók, Hartmann, Reger, Gliere, Szymanowski, Brahms, Copland, Sessions, Perle, and Rands. Many of his live performances with the American Symphony Orchestra are now available for download on the Internet.

Mr. Botstein is highly regarded as a music historian. He is the editor of *The Musical Quarterly* and the author of numerous articles and books. Last year he gave the prestigious Tanner Lectures



PHOTO BY MATT DINE

in Berkeley, CA. For his contributions to music he has received the award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and Harvard University's prestigious Centennial Award, as well as the Cross of Honor, First Class from the government of Austria. In 2009 he received Carnegie Foundation's Academic Leadership Award, and in 2011 was inducted into the American Philosophical Society. He is also the 2012 recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award for the Elevation of Music in Society.

Maestro Botstein is represented by Columbia Artists Management, LLC.

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The American Symphony Orchestra was founded 50 years ago by Leopold Stokowski, with the specific intention of making orchestral music accessible and affordable for everyone. Under music director Leon Botstein, the ASO has kept Stokowski's mission intact, and has also become a pioneer in what *The Wall*

Street Journal called "a new concept in orchestras," presenting concerts curated around various themes drawn from the visual arts, literature, politics, and history, and unearthing rarely performed masterworks for well-deserved revival. These concerts are performed in the Vanguard Series at Carnegie Hall.

In addition the orchestra performs in the celebrated concert series Classics Declassified at Peter Norton Symphony Space, and is the resident orchestra of the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, where it appears in a winter subscription series, as well as Bard's annual SummerScape Festival and the Bard Music Festival. In 2010 the American Symphony became the resident orchestra of The Collegiate Chorale, performing regularly in the Chorale's New York concert series. The orchestra has made several tours of Asia and Europe, and has performed in countless benefits for

organizations including the Jerusalem Foundation and PBS. ASO's award-winning music education program, Music Notes, integrates symphonic music into core humanities classes in high schools across the tri-state area.

In addition to many albums released on the Telarc, New World, Bridge, Koch, and Vanguard labels, many live performances by the American Symphony are now available for digital download. In many cases, these are the only existing recordings of some of the rare works that have been rediscovered in ASO performances.

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