



Nathaniel Parke is a free-lance cellist in the area and is principal cello of the Berkshire Symphony. He has also been a member of the Boston Composers String Quartet with whom he can be heard performing new works by Boston composers on the MMC label. He is currently artist associate in cello at Williams College and instructor of cello at Bennington and Skidmore colleges in addition to maintaining a studio of private students. Many of his students have been competition-winners and recipients of awards.

He has served as a faculty member and chamber music coach at the Longy School of Music, SUNY Albany, the Manchester Music Festival and is currently on the faculty of the Chamber Music Conference and Composer's Forum of the East. Mr. Parke performs on an instrument made in 1721 by C.G. Testore.

Composer Allen Shawn (born 1948) grew up in New York City and started composing music at the age of ten. As a teenager he studied the piano with Frances Dillon and Emilie Harris. In his college years he studied composition with Leon Kirchner and Earl Kim at Harvard. Later he spent two years in Paris studying with Nadia Boulanger, and received an M.A. in music from Columbia University, where he studied with Jack Beeson. Since 1985 he has lived in Vermont, and has been on the music faculty of Bennington College.

In addition to composing and teaching, Shawn performs frequently as a pianist, and is the author of many articles and four books, "Arnold Schoenberg's Journey" (2002), "Wish I Could Be There" (2007), "Twin" (2011), and Leonard Bernstein—An American Musician (2014).

Shawn's musical output comprises more than a dozen orchestral works including a Symphony, two piano concertos, a double concerto for clarinet and cello, a violin concerto, an oboe concerto, and two cello concertos; three chamber operas; a large catalogue of chamber music; songs, choral music, piano music, and music for ballet, theater and film. Recordings include many cds of his chamber music; his piano concerto played by Ursula Oppens with the Albany Symphony; a double CD of his five piano sonatas, and a cd of his piano music performed by German pianist Julia Bartha; and his chamber opera "The Music Teacher" to a libretto by his brother, playwright/actor Wallace Shawn. Shawn was the recipient of a 1995 Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and an Academy Award in Music from the Academy in 2001.

~Program Notes~  
Berkshire Symphony Orchestra  
November 15, 2019

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756- 1791)**  
***Symphony No. 31 in D Major, K. 297, "Paris"***

Pre-Revolutionary Paris was the greatest musical center of Europe, and a success there meant a chance to win fame and fortune. Mozart had enjoyed a glorious success when he had appeared in Paris as a child prodigy. He returned in 1778—now twenty-two—as part of an extended concert tour designed to recall to the minds of fickle audiences the musician who had so delighted them not many years before. Alas, he discovered to his chagrin that a former prodigy has little drawing power. Worse still, he had to admit to himself that the music-loving aristocrats through whom he hoped to make a good deal of money giving lessons and private concerts were often unreliable when it came to paying their bills, and his experiences soured his views of the aristocracy.

But there was one place, at least, where Mozart achieved a signal success during his Parisian stay—in the orchestral series known as the Concerts Spirituels. The director, Jean Le Gros, invited Mozart to compose a symphony especially for one of its concerts. Le Gros had never performed a *sinfonia concertante* for four solo woodwinds and orchestra that Mozart had written shortly before (the work is now lost), but when the impresario requested a new symphony for performance on Corpus Christi (June 18), Mozart's reply was "Why not?" Le Gros: "Can I rely on this?" Mozart: "Oh yes, if I may rely with certainty on its being performed, and that it will not have the same fate as my *sinfonia concertante*."

Mozart clearly determined to write a symphony in accordance with French musical taste (which he regarded as generally very low) while at the same time turning out the best work of which he was capable. He reveled in the large orchestra, especially the fine woodwind section (it was the first time he had ever been able to include clarinets in a symphony), and he used the ensemble to brilliant effect. He followed the French taste in writing only three movements (omitting the minuet, a customary feature of Viennese symphonies) and in not calling for the repeat of entire sections. On June 12 Mozart reported to his father that the symphony was finished, adding his confident assertion that it would please "the few intelligent French people who may be there—and as for the stupid ones, I shall not consider it a great misfortune if they are not pleased."

He noted that he had taken special pains in one area that was de rigueur. "I have been careful not to neglect *le premier coup d'archet*." Mozart had been warned—and had no doubt heard for himself in various concerts—that Paris expected every symphony to begin with *le premier coup d'archet* (literally, "the first stroke of the bow") — a powerful tutti passage, often in unison, featuring an energetic downbow on all the stringed instruments. "What a fuss the oxen here make of this trick! The devil take me if I can see any difference! They all begin together, just as they do in other places, it is really too much of a joke." Yet, even while bowing to popular taste, Mozart had his own fun with the *coup d'archet* in the first movement of his symphony, and turned a convention on its ear to the delight of the connoisseurs in the audience.

The opening Allegro assai gave the Parisians plenty of *coup d'archet* for their money. As expected, the entire symphony begins with a series of repeated chords on the stereotyped

rhythmic pattern that signaled the very notion of "symphony" to a Parisian audience. But after the opening bars, the audience had no reason to expect to hear the premier *coup d'archet* for the rest of the work. It had served its primary purpose in getting the symphony started and shushing the audience. But Mozart playfully filled the entire movement with references to that opening gesture, so that it is never absent long: a brilliant demonstration that even the most hackneyed stereotype can become a fresh, new idea in the hands of a genius. And the Parisian audience, to its credit, recognized this fact.

The Andante also found favor during the performance, especially with knowledgeable musicians, though Le Gros felt that it was too complex to win real public approval. Mozart therefore composed a second Andante. His final judgment was "Each is good in its own way—for each has a different character. But the last pleases me even more." The two Andantes for this movement survive, one in Mozart's autograph score, the other in a printed edition of the parts published by Sieber in Paris. The one almost always performed is the manuscript version, which most people believe to be Mozart's later Andante, though there is still some dispute on this point. In any case, we have the composer's word that he considered both slow movements to be worthy.

The last movement is another of Mozart's delicious jokes on the Paris audience. He had noticed that last movements also started forte (if only to hush the conversation that followed the applause between movements). But he caught the audience off-guard with a rushing figure in the second violins followed by a gentle, off-the-beat sigh in the first violins, while no one else plays. The gambit worked: "the audience, as I expected, said 'hush' at the soft beginning, and when they heard the forte, began at once to clap their hands." Even more daring was the second theme, a fugato which must have struck the pleasure-loving Parisians as frightfully learned—yet Mozart wears his contrapuntal learning so lightly that we never for an instant lose our admiration of his sense of timing. Clearly the Paris Symphony is one of those fortunate works that perfectly gauges its audience's ability to follow. We still delight in Mozart's wit and quicksilver brilliance as did the Parisians at the Concerts Spirituels performance in 1778.

~Steven Ledbetter

**Allen Shawn (b. 1948)**  
***Cello Concerto No. 2 (2018)***

My Cello Concerto No. 2 owes its existence to Nathaniel Parke, who commissioned the piece, and who, as its intended interpreter, inspired me and inspired the character of the music. I composed the work in the Spring and Summer of 2018. The Concerto is continuous, but has four clearly defined sections. It could be heard as a kind of stream-of-consciousness Fantasy for cello and orchestra that is full of contradictions and unexpected shifts in mood.

The first section is a kind of chaconne, a repeating harmonic and rhythmic structure, although this is not particularly obvious. The effect is of something serious and even a bit hymn-like, contrapuntal and introspective. The music here is chromatic and a bit dissonant. The orchestra opens the piece, presenting two strains of the chaconne structure in music that is rather neutral, and a bit cold. The cellist then enters with an expressive cadenza that introduces some materials to be used later and reveals him as the emotional center of the proceedings--sensitive, ruminative, exploring the materials of the work, the engine behind its shifting moods. Then the cello states the basic chaconne idea more clearly than the orchestra

did, and with the orchestra gradually coming back in. As the chaconne continues, it becomes increasingly intense and sorrowful.

The chaconne eventually breaks out into a scherzo-like music that is based on a 12-tone row derived from the chaconne. There's something a bit Schoenbergian about the cut of the ideas. However, these materials are juxtaposed with a more tonal-sounding tune that is based on a different scale and introduces a different side of the work. This section pits harshness against tenderness. The orchestration changes--trumpets are added, as well as piano and xylophone. (Perhaps this scherzo might suggest a dialogue two composers I have written about, Schoenberg and Bernstein.)

Eventually a brief solo passage leads into slow music that develops the tonal-sounding tune from the scherzo. It's almost like a love song--very simple and meditative. In the middle of this section there are chords and ideas from the chaconne, and the cello has an extensive cadenza--with some sparse accompaniment in places--that explores ideas from all three sections, including the twelve tone row and the chaconne, eventually breaking out into a kind of cellositic tantrum based on the love theme. This eventually subsides into a low restatement of that theme, quiet and intimate.

The dynamic and rhythmically driven music which follows again exhibits a duality, in this case between almost happy-sounding materials related to the 'tonal' tune, and dissonant, aggressive ones. Non-pitched percussion enters for the only time in the piece; the piano returns, as well. After a brief slower recall of the opening orchestral music, there is a percussive, abrupt close.

~Allen Shawn 2019

### **Johannes Brahms (1833- 1897)** ***Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73***

In a letter to Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms offhandedly revealed something fundamental about himself: "I always write only half-sentences, and the reader. . . must supply the other half." He was talking about his letters, which were often misread, and were often intended to be. In person and on the page, Brahms was chronically given to the oblique, the ironic, the unspoken. Likewise in some of his music we find an ironic play of surface appearance and hidden import; but in his art the irony was no joke, rather a symptom of his own thickly shrouded inner world.

Perhaps the most regularly misread of Brahms's major works is his Second Symphony. From the beginning, critics hailed it as a sunny and halcyon vacation from the turbulent First Symphony. The Second, everybody said, is Brahms's counterpart to Beethoven's Pastoral, and looks back further to Haydn and Mozart at their most congenial.

But if the Second paints an idyll, it is a lost idyll. Brahms himself hinted at its tangled import. To friend and critic Eduard Hanslick he wrote, "It'll sound so cheerful and lovely that you will think I wrote it specially for you or even your young lady." He cited the benevolent influence of his composing spot on the Worthersee: "[there are] so many melodies flying around that you have to be careful not to step on them." Meanwhile, having just finished the First Symphony after some fifteen years of wrestling with it, Brahms completed the Second—and several smaller works — during one delightful four-month working vacation in the summer of 1877.

To Clara Schumann, however, Brahms described the symphony as "elegiac." To his publisher he wrote, "The new symphony is so melancholy that you won't be able to stand it. I've

never written anything so sad. The score must appear with a black border." There the presumable joke is that the symphony usually strikes listeners as suave and enchanting. After all, every movement is in a major key.

The deeper irony hidden in Brahms's words is that the elegiac black border is as much a part of the symphony as its more explicit cheeriness. Brahms's Second is like a vision of nature and youth troubled by shadows that come and go like dark clouds in a summer sky.

In his book on the Second Symphony, *Late Idyll*, Harvard scholar Reinhold Brinkmann calls this supposed hymn to nature and serenity a "questioning of the pastoral world, a firm denial of the possibility of pure serenity." Brahms's testament to the past is haunted by a skepticism and foreboding that seem prophetic.

The questioning begins within the gentle opening. We hear a little three-note turn in the basses (D-C-sharp-D), a melodic shape that will pervade the symphony. The basses are answered by an elegant wind phrase that at once suggests a Strauss waltz (Brahms admired the Waltz King) and the hunting horns of a Haydn symphony or divertimento. But all this gracious simplicity is deceptive. Anyone trying to waltz to this opening will fall on his face: the phrasing of the basses and the answering winds are offset by one measure, with neither predominating. At times the movement falls into tumultuous stretches where the meter is dismantled. The breezy and beautiful first theme is followed by a fervent second theme that, in itself, is in A major—but harmonized in F-sharp minor. Throughout the symphony, the brightness of major keys will be touched by darker minor-key tints.

The more salient voices disturbing the placid surface are the trombones and tuba. After the balmy opening, the music seems to stop in its tracks; there is a rumble of timpani like distant thunder, and the trombones and tuba whisper a shadowy chorale, in cryptic harmonies. That shadow touches the whole symphony. Later, the development section is intensified by braying brasses—startling for Brahms, more startling in this halcyon work.

The second movement begins with a sighing high-Brahmsian cello theme. While the tone throughout is passionate and Romantic, the movement's languid beauties are unsettled by rhythmic and harmonic ambiguity. It ends with a chromatic haze like an expansion of the first movement's trombone chorale—and underneath, the relentless strokes of timpani that for Brahms were an image of fate, and the thought of fate always ominous. The final sustained chord sounds remarkably frail and uncertain for B major.

If the keynote of the first two movements is tranquility compromised, in the last two movements gaiety and frivolity break out. Brahms was generally influenced by the vacation spots where he composed, for example the cliffs and crashing seas of Rugen that helped complete the stormy First Symphony. This time the pleasures of the Worthersee have the last word. The third movement unfolds as a charming and jocular scherzo marked by sudden shifts of rhythm and meter: an elegant Allegretto grazioso leaping into a skittering Presto.

The finale is a romp, with one droll and delicious theme after another, ending unforgettably with a triumphant D major blaze of trombones. Here Brahms does something he was not supposed to know how to do—make an instrument the bearer of meaning. The trombones as harbingers of fate have become the heralds of joy; avant-gardists of the next century would call that "tone-color composition."

Of Brahms's four symphonies the Second often seems the most atavistic, the least ponderous and self-conscious. Yet in its pensive irony as in its masterful craftsmanship, in its dark moments as in its jubilation, the Second is essentially Brahms. He was a composer who looked back to the giants of the past as an unreachable summit, and who looked to the future of music and civilization with increasing alarm. He was a man who felt spurned by his beloved hometown of Hamburg, who called himself a vagabond in the wilderness of the world. So

midway through his journey as a symphonist, Brahms wrote a serenely beautiful masterpiece whose secret message is that you can't go home again.

~Jan Swafford