

## Program Notes

### Brandenburg Concerto No. 3

Johann Sebastian Bach

Composed between 1711 and 1720, the six Brandenburg Concertos by Johann Sebastian Bach remain some of the finest, if not the finest, examples of the baroque concerto grosso. Interestingly, each concerto represents a masterful balance of instrumentation, with each featuring different instrumentation than the last (the sixth concerto doesn't even include violins). The pieces were commissioned by the margrave of Brandenburg, Christian Ludwig, after hearing Bach perform in Berlin in 1719. It's well-known that Bach was never paid for these works; it's likely that the margrave didn't pay because these works weren't original pieces written for him, but were revisions of pieces Bach wrote nearly 10 years prior. Also, it's possible the pieces were never even performed in Ludwig's court as his instrumentalists were not the most skilled group of musicians and most likely couldn't perform the pieces well.

Despite the fact that Bach's 3rd Brandenburg Concerto used the unique instrumentation of three violins, three violas, and three cello parts, the piece is in a traditional fast-slow-fast concerto form (although, the second movement is unique in that it's very short, being basically a violin cadenza). Both fast movements (the first in a duple meter and the last in a triple) feature interchanging melodies between all instruments; all parts alternate between melody and accompaniment at numerous points in the concerto.

### High Speed Rail

Elaine Fine

American composer Elaine Fine composed *High Speed Rail* in 2011 for the mixed-level Summer Strings orchestra that she helps run in Charleston, Illinois. *High Speed Rail* reflects her love for the possibilities of making train sounds with stringed instruments. The repeated pattern of an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes (long-short-short), while conveying the feel of a train in motion, also serves the needs of developing string players. But make no mistake--while the piece was written for youngsters, its infectious energy and harmonic sophistication make it every bit an "adult" piece as well. Bright and optimistic, it reflects Fine's hope that one day the United States will have a high-speed rail system that can take passengers long distances in a relatively short amount of time. Elaine Fine grew up in Boston. She began her musical life as a violinist, but switched to flute as a teenager and received a Bachelor of Music degree in flute performance from the Juilliard School of Music. She later studied recorder in Vienna, baroque flute in Boston, and received her Master's degree in composition from Eastern Illinois University. She spent twenty-three years on the reviewing staff of the American Record Guide and served for twelve years as the Classical Music Director for WEIU-FM in Charleston. In addition to composing, she performs on the violin, viola, viola d'amore, and recorders, mostly in East Central Illinois, where she has resided since 1985.

## **Adagio for Strings**

**Samuel Barber**

Originally written as the second movement of his String Quartet, op. 11, *Adagio for Strings* has appeared in countless movies and shows over the years, perhaps most notably in the 1984 movie *Platoon*. Despite its popularity today, the initial reception when it was performed in 1938 was mixed, with some critics calling the piece “overrated.” Nonetheless, it became popular enough that Barber later went on to use the piece as a setting for his 1967 choir composition *Agnus Dei*. Since then, the piece became more and more popular, with critic Alexander J. Morin writing that the piece is “full of pathos and cathartic passion” and “rarely leaves a dry eye.” Despite the sadness and beauty of his own composition, the piece became so popular that Barber himself insisted it not be played at his own funeral.

## **St. Paul’s Suite**

**Gustav Holst**

Gustav Holst is probably best known for his epic work *The Planets*, but two other pieces rise to the top of his “fan favorites”: the string pieces *Brook Green Suite* and *St. Paul’s Suite*. Both were written as Holst was music director of the St. Paul Girls’ School in Hammersmith, England. While the *Brook Green Suite* was one of the last pieces Holst composed during his 20 or so years at the school, *St. Paul’s Suite* was one of the first. Both suites are skillfully composed; Holst wanted to write music that was accessible to students while still sounding sufficiently musical and complex. *St. Paul’s Suite* features folk themes in both the first and last movements (possibly from the influence of his lifelong friend Ralph Vaughan Williams, as generally the music of Holst and Vaughan Williams is quite different from one another) that sandwich two slower, more plaintive movements.

The first movement features a lively jig that alternates between 6/8 and 9/8 time, giving way to a second movement entitled “Ostinato” that features a simple repeating figure played by the 2nd violins. Both the second movement and the third movement, “Intermezzo,” feature solos from the violin and viola, while the last movement, “Dargason,” features a beautiful amalgamation of the that folk song with another familiar tune, “Greensleeves,” to end the suite.

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