

Roseville String Ensemble
April 13, 2025
Program Notes

Viva La Vida by Coldplay, arranged by Larry Moore

The late 20th century and early 21st century have seen some significant changes in popular music. Between blockbuster artists like Taylor Swift and lesser-known cult-classic bands like 311, it becomes increasingly more difficult to make your own voice. Coldplay has done just that through their mix of classic rock instruments and classical string ensembles. While not featured on every one of their tracks, they often use a small string group or soloists to add gravity and meaning to their music. Viva La Vida is a primary example of this, and I believe the reason why this particular song of theirs has been arranged into both string orchestra and string quartet versions. This particular arrangement by Larry Moore sounds true to the original with sharp and percussive string strokes found nearly throughout with syncopated melody lines being introduced and reintroduced by almost every instrument in the orchestra.

Viola Concerto in G by Georg Phillip Telemann

Interested in composing for lesser-known instruments, Georg Phillip Telemann wrote the Viola Concerto in G from around 1716 to 1721 as a means to highlight an instrument not normally known as a soloistic one. As a result, not only is this piece still performed today, but it remains as one of the earliest, if not the earliest, viola concertos ever written, with performers often keeping the piece fresh by adding or removing cadenzas and ornaments. The performance today will include only one of the two possible cadenzas while adding new ornaments in key moments. While Telemann himself started on the violin, he endeavored to learn every instrument he wrote a concerto for, so he may very well have performed this piece. In a departure from the three-movement concerto form used by composers like Bach and Vivaldi, Telemann wrote his viola concerto in 4 movements in a slow-fast-slow-fast form. The first movement features a glorious opening in the orchestra with responses by a more reflective viola voice. The third movement, the only one in the relative key of e minor, features still and plaintive movement in the orchestra with moments of longing by the soloist. The second and fourth movements both feature alternating passages between the viola and orchestra and a blazing and energetic finale to close out the concerto.

Capriol Suite for Strings by Peter Warlock

The Capriol Suite was written in 1926 and is considered one of the composer's most popular pieces of music. Originally scored for piano duet and later arranged by the composer for both string and full orchestras, the Capriol Suite is based off a set of French Renaissance dance melodies arranged by the composer in a way that brings new life and a touch of 20th century dissonance to some old tunes. The first movement starts out with a heavy Basse-Danse that features some clever syncopated "stabs" from supporting voices. The light and graceful Pavane moves around some stepwise melodies in the upper strings, with the following swing of the Tordion closing the first half of the piece with some delicate pizzacatos. Bransles is a fun dance that plays with louds and softs rather quickly and is fast, and then faster, and then closes faster still! The fifth movement, Pied-en-l'air, gives us a literal chance to kick your feet in the air before the Mattachins closes the piece with a galloping wallop of an ending!

Sinfonia No. 12 for Strings by Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn wrote 12 completed string sinfonias (and started on a 13th) between the years of 1821 and 1823, during which the composer was between 12 to 14 years old. Mendelssohn wrote a lot of music during his early years, including these sinfonias and a concerto for violin and strings, showing early on that he was a skilled composer. Mendelssohn is largely credited with bringing back the almost-forgotten music of J.S. Bach, and this Sinfonia No. 12 might reveal how much Mendelssohn appreciated and loved the music of that earlier composer and the Baroque period. The piece is in a modified fast-slow-fast form, with the first movement starting out with a stately Grave before the movement suddenly transforms into a Baroque-style fugue in an allegro tempo. Mendelssohn almost completely departs from this harkening back to the Baroque era with his second movement, very much in an early Romantic style, with sweeping melodies and counter-melodies in the upper strings. He still manages to whisper a mention of that earlier time period, though, in that there are two viola parts (a common feature of the Baroque orchestra). The closing movement plays like Mendelssohn's version of an earlier Classical symphony in g minor, with plenty of quick notes in all strings that dance back and forth between the full orchestra and a couple of sections that feature contrasting legato sections played by only a string quintet.

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