

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes

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Elgar's boisterous *In the South* opens this program—a musical souvenir of a holiday in Italy. Norwegian violinist Henning Kraggerud has played here in 2009 (the Sibelius *Violin Concerto*), in 2011, (the Tchaikovsky *Violin Concerto*), and 2013 (Mozart's fourth concerto). Here he return as both a violinist and as a composer, starting with one of the great Romantic solo works, Bruch's *Violin Concerto No.1*. He then presents three postludes from his *Equinox*—a large-scale work that explores the varying emotional impacts of the 24 major and minor keys...while taking the listener on a kaleidoscopic trip around the globe. We end in the countryside with Beethoven, and his gentle "Pastorale" symphony.

Edward Elgar (1857-1904)

In the South (Alassio), Op.50

Elgar composed much of this work in Italy in 1903-1904, completing it shortly after he returned to England, on February 21, 1904. He conducted the first performance in London less than a month later, on March 16. This is our first performance of the work. Duration: 20:00.

At the turn of the 20th century, century Elgar was the most prominent composer in England: his *Enigma Variations* of 1899 was widely regarded as a masterpiece, and he had just completed a oratorio, *The Apostles*, whose performance in October 1903 was one of the great successes of his career. Plans were made for a three-day festival of his music at Covent Garden in London in March 1904—an almost unheard-of honor for any English composer. In the midst of all of this success, Elgar was downcast—still depressed over the death of his mother, and suffering from the dreary English weather. He and his wife decided shortly after the premiere of *The Apostles* to take a holiday in Italy, both to recuperate and to produce a new work for the festival. (His backers were clearly hoping for a symphony, but would have to wait four more years for Elgar's *Symphony No.1*.) The Elgars went first to the popular resort town of Bordighera, but found it too full of English tourists to be a proper getaway. They moved on to Alassio, on the Italian Riviera, south of Genoa. Though Elgar complained to friends back home of unexpectedly cold and wet weather, he clearly enjoyed the food and wine. He made no progress on the hoped-for symphony, but Elgar did find sudden inspiration for a programmatic overture while walking in Alassio—as he recalled:

“I was by the side of an old Roman way. A peasant stood by an old ruin and in a flash it all came to me—the conflict of armies in that very spot long ago, where now I stood—the contrast of the ruin and the shepherd—and then all of a sudden, I came back to reality. In that time I had ‘composed’ the overture—the rest was merely writing it down.”

Elgar half-jokingly titled the opening section “Love of Life (wine and macaroni).” The blustery opening theme—sounding very much like music by his friend Richard Strauss—was not from not-so-sunny Italy, but a melody he had written a few years earlier inspired by his friend George Robertson Sinclair’s bulldog Dan. (Dan also made a cameo appearance in Elgar’s *Enigma Variations*.) This stormy opening eventually subsides into more wistful and pastoral music for clarinets and strings—according to Elgar, representing “a shepherd with his flock straying about the ruins of the old church—he piping softly and reedily and occasionally singing.” The mood suddenly shifts to warlike and dramatic—to “paint the relentless and domineering force of the ancient day, and to give a sound picture of the strife and wars, the ‘drums and tramlings’ of a later time.” This character shifts once more and a solo viola introduces an Italian-style song—though written by Elgar and later published separately under the title *In the Moonlight*—a gentle interlude before a grand finale that brings together all of the earlier themes. Though this overture was partly inspired by the landscape and music Elgar experienced in Italy, he also includes a few literary quotations in his score—two from Tennyson’s poem *The Daisy*:

“What hours were thine and mine
In lands of palm and southern pine
In lands of palm, of orange-blossom
Of olive, aloe, and maise and vine.”

and

“What Roman strength Turbia show’d.
In ruin, by the mountain road.”

Another is drawn from Byron’s epic *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*:

“...a land
Which *was* the mightiest in its old command
And *is* the loveliest...
Wherein were cast the men of Rome!
Thou art the garden of the world.”

Max Bruch (1838-1920)

Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Op.26

Bruch's first violin concerto was completed in 1866, and the final version was performed for the first time by soloist Joseph Joachim in January 1868. The Madison Symphony Orchestra has performed the work four times previously, with soloists Gilbert Ross (1927), Arthur Kreutz (1936), Chee Yun (2002), and Joshua Bell (2007). Duration 23:00.

Max Bruch is known today primarily for two solo violin works, the G minor concerto heard here, and the *Scottish Fantasy*, and his *Kol Nidrei* for cello and orchestra. However, Bruch was a tremendously successful composer in his day, with a catalog of nearly a hundred works that included three operas, three symphonies, and many solo pieces, sacred and secular choral works, art songs, and chamber music. He was a well-regarded conductor and one of the most sought-after composition teachers in Europe—Ottorino Respighi and Ralph Vaughan Williams were among his more famous pupils. [Note: Dr. Sigfrid Prager, who was the founding conductor of the Madison Civic Symphony—predecessor of today's MSO—studied with Bruch, before Prager left his native Berlin.]

Bruch made his first sketches for a violin concerto as early as 1857. He finished the work early in 1866, and in April of that year, and conducted a preliminary version at a benefit concert in Koblenz, where the solo part was played by a violinist from Cologne, Otto von Königsglöw. Bruch made several significant revisions after hearing this performance, even considering recasting the work as a “Fantasy” because of its relatively free form. Finally, Bruch solicited the advice of the greatest Austrian virtuoso of the day, Joseph Joachim, who was impressed, and suggested several additional changes. Joachim played the premiere of the revised concerto, and Bruch dedicated the published score to him. Almost forty years later, Joachim cited the Bruch G minor as one of *the* “four German violin concertos”—alongside the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, and Mendelssohn—calling it the “richest, most seductive” of the four.

The concerto is set in the traditional three movements, but none of the three follows a strict Classical form. Bruch titled the first movement “Prelude” and it serves as a kind of extended free-form introduction to the second movement. Two ideas are introduced and briefly developed: a very lyrical solo line played over a quiet orchestral accompaniment and a contrasting melody, played above *pizzicato* basses. The prelude builds to a peak and then dies away, leaving space for a lovely cadenza, which ties directly into the second movement (*Adagio*). The *Adagio* is

carried entirely by the solo part, which plays almost without pause until a brief orchestral passage in the middle. The violin introduces three unhurried and beautiful themes, developing each in turn.

Joachim placed this piece alongside the famous violin concertos of Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Brahms, and it is in the finale (*Allegro energico*) that the resemblance is clearest. Though Bruch does not use the same Classical Rondo form as the others, the spirit is the same. After an opening orchestral flourish, the violin introduces the main theme—a lively Gypsy-style melody played in double stops. The family resemblance between this and the main theme of Brahms’s finale is particularly close, though Brahms’s concerto was written some ten years later. The movement proceeds in a loose sonata form, with a slightly more solemn second subject. The main theme dominates throughout in both the solo part and accompaniment, eventually becoming the basis for a flashy and exhilarating coda.

Henning Kraggerud (b. 1973)
Three Postludes from *Equinox*

Kraggerud completed Equinox in early 2014 and it was first performed in January of that year by the Arctic Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in the city of Tromsø in northern Norway (some 200 miles north on the Arctic Circle), during the city’s Northern Lights Festival. This is our first performance of the work. Duration 9:00.

Mr. Kraggerud’s bio from his website: www.henningkraggerud.com

Equinox, Kraggerud’s most ambitious composition to date, is a set of 24 postludes for solo violin and orchestra in all major and minor keys, with a concluding 25th movement, an *Overture*. Part of the inspiration is purely musical: he became fascinated with the enormous body of historical writing on the emotional characters of the various keys, and the style of each postlude reflects these ideas. One quote (by the late 18th-century composer and mystic Christian Schubart, describing the key of B-flat minor) gives a small taste of this literature:

“A quaint creature, often dressed in the garments of night. It is somewhat surly and very seldom takes on a pleasant countenance. Mocking God in the world; discontented with itself and with everything; preparation for suicide sounds in this key.”

The 24 postludes are organized according to the progression known to musicians as the “circle of fifths,” starting in C Major (no flats or sharps), moving through the “flat” keys, and back through the “sharp” keys, with the concluding *Overture* closing the circle by returning to C Major. Kraggerud further organizes the 24 postludes into four “concertos,” of six movements each.

Overriding this musical organization is a literary one. Kraggerud collaborated with the Norwegian novelist Jostein Gaarder, who wrote a narration titled *24 Keys to a World Before it Slips Away*. The protagonist of his story finds himself in Greenwich, England on the day of the Vernal Equinox, March 21. (The Greenwich meridian—0° West—has been the basis of world maps from the 18th century through today’s GPS, and Greenwich Mean Time has been the basis of the basis of the world’s timekeeping since the 19th century.) It is 24 hours before he finds the result of a medical test, to determine if he is losing his memory to Alzheimer’s Disease, and as he stumbles through Greenwich Park, carefully recording all he sees in a notebook, he meets a mysterious young woman. This sets him off on an imaginary, mystical journey around the world, eastward through all 24 time zones, with a stop in a city each hour. In the original performance, Gaarder’s chapters were read by a narrator, with Kraggerud’s postludes following each of them.

If all of this intellectual background seems a little daunting, Kraggerud’s music is not—the postludes are short character pieces, each expressing an emotion, and in many cases capturing in a witty way a bit of the flavor of the protagonist’s various stops on his imaginary circumnavigation of the globe. We present three of the postludes here. In *No.2 in D minor (Prague)*, the setting is the famous Charles Bridge in Prague, where street artists, salesmen, actors (and ghosts) entertain the crowds with the castle looming in the background, while all the time the water flows under the bridge. This is a spooky waltz, with a blistering Gypsy-style solo line. *No.9 in A-flat Major (Hangzhou)* takes place just after sunset by the beautiful lakes Marco Polo once visited. Here, to the sound of water and insects, we meet an old man writing his autobiography, because he’s not satisfied with the *Unauthorized Biography* written so long ago. Kraggerud emulates a delicate, wistful pentatonic melody that sounds distinctly Chinese. In the narration for *No.19 in A Major (New Orleans)* a lonely musician plays a tune, while a woman wildly tells people about the need to lower the water level. She carries an enormous number of buckets. The situation, quite chaotic, is somewhere between very serious and completely absurd. The music is a kind of Creole dance tune—complete with blue notes and finger snaps—which develops into a blazingly fast passage for the entire string section.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No.6 in F Major, Op.68 “Pastorale”

Beethoven composed the Symphony No.6 between 1803 and 1808, and it was first performed in December 1808 in Vienna. It has appeared six times previously at our concerts, between 1931 and 2005. Duration 46:00.

“No one can love the country as much as I do.”
 - Beethoven

At some point in 1803, Beethoven sketched a brief musical passage of flowing triplets he titled “the murmuring of the brook”—what seems to have been the very earliest idea related to what would become his pastoral symphony. While he collected additional ideas over the next few years, the bulk of the *Symphony No.6* was written in 1808, at roughly the same time as the *Symphony No.5*. Both symphonies were performed for the first time at a benefit concert in Vienna on December 22, 1808. The program for this landmark event also included excerpts from his *Mass in C* and the concert aria *Ah, perfido*, together with premieres of two works with Beethoven himself at the piano, the *Piano Concerto No.4* and the hastily-composed *Choral Fantasy*.

Despite their pairing, the fifth and sixth symphonies are astonishingly different works. While later writers worked hard to hear a “program” (a “story line” or other extra-musical idea) in the fifth, it was probably conceived as an expression of purely musical ideas: particularly the intense, almost relentless development of musical themes. The sixth is clearly programmatic, however. Beethoven suggested in his own writings that this work should bring up associations of country life in the minds of its audience. The title “pastoral” is from Beethoven himself, though he was careful to make the distinction between the kind of subtle feelings he was trying express in the sixth symphony and the sensational programmatic pieces that were all the rage in France and Austria at the time. Beethoven claimed to disdain what he called mere “tone-painting”—though just five years later (somewhat to his own embarrassment) he perpetrated the cheesy “battle symphony” *Wellington’s Victory*. It was this programmatic aspect of the sixth that most excited Romantic musicians—it was clearly the inspiration for Berlioz’s *Fantastic Symphony* and Schumann’s “Spring” symphony to give just two examples. It was successful in Beethoven’s own time as well: one review of the premiere called the “Thunderstorm” movement “unsurpassedly beautiful.” Another reviewer of an early performance remarked that: “The whole work is sure to meet with great

approval everywhere, so long as one enters cheerfully and with good will into the spirit of the author's intentions, without a preconceived opinion."

The "author's intentions" in the sixth seem to be summed up best in an annotation to one of Beethoven's sketches: "Pastoral Symphony — who ever also treasures country life can discover for himself what the author intends." Beethoven's love of the country is well-known: he enjoyed long walks in the countryside, and much of the sixth was written in a country house in the small town of Heiligenstadt outside of Vienna.

The sixth is formally innovative, abandoning the traditional four-movement plan in favor of five movements in which the last three form a single dramatic unit. The opening movement (*Allegro non troppo*) is set in a generously-proportioned sonata form, but unlike most of Beethoven's first movements, there is no furious intensity in his development, but a remarkable gentleness of tone throughout. In a violin part, Beethoven made brief notes at the beginning of each of the five movements that suggest specific associations, in this case, "Pleasant, cheerful feelings aroused on approaching the countryside." Both main themes are quiet and happy, first a country-dance tune above what might be an unchanging bagpipe drone and then a more active second theme. There are only occasional hints of the minor in the long development section, and when the recapitulation arrives, there is no great drama preceding it, but just the quiet satisfaction of a really good tune being restated by the full orchestra. The coda is also understated: a final rounding off of the main idea surrounded by witty clarinet lines.

This placid mood continues in the second movement (*Andante molto moto* — "Scene by the brook"). Here again he uses sonata form with none of the usual fire and fury. If he did indeed intend this as musical picture of a brook, the constantly undulating string accompaniment is the aquatic background to a series of lovely woodwind themes. Near the end there is a birdlike cadenza for solo woodwinds. As if anyone could miss his intention, Beethoven labeled these passages in the score: "nightingale," "quail," and "cuckoo."

The final three movements are played without a pause. The third movement (*Allegro* — "Happy gathering of villagers") is set as a scherzo, but the tempo is relaxed, as Beethoven launches a set of rustic dances. Two triple-meter themes begin this set, a jolly bagpipe-style tune and a more delicate idea passed among the flute, clarinet, and horn. The contrasting section is a rustic duple-meter dance for the full orchestra. All of these ideas are restated, and just when it seems that he is going to round off the movement, there is a quiet rumble, and the texture changes

abruptly, as wandering string lines gather intensity above bass tremolos. The “Thunderstorm” doesn’t take long to break, and there is a crashing *fortissimo* chord and a series of lightning strikes. Beethoven used a series of shockingly dissonant chords and surprising orchestral effects to paint his storm. The storm passes quickly however, leaving a calm, pastoral duet of clarinet and horn to introduce the finale (*Allegretto* – “Shepherd’s song. Grateful thanks to the Almighty after the storm”). The main idea is serene and hymnlike: Beethoven wrote the words “*Herr, wir danken dir*” —Lord, we thank you—in his score at this point. This melody appears in both varied and original forms throughout the movement. Once more, the mood is tranquil throughout, as the movement weaves its unhurried way to a quiet conclusion.

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