



Gustav Meier
Music Director
62nd Season

3rd Subscription Concert
Klein Memorial Auditorium
Saturday, December 8, 2007
8:00 p.m.

Gustav Meier, Conductor
Andrew Armstrong, Piano
Deborah Wong, Violin

CHADWICK

Symphonic Sketches

- I. Jubilee
2. Noel

RACHMANINOFF

Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini, op. 43

Andrew Armstrong, Piano

INTERMISSION

VIVALDI

“Winter” from The Four Seasons

Allegro con molto

Largo

Allegro

Deborah Wong, Violin

BERLIN

White Christmas

HÄNDEL

Hallelujah from Messiah

ANDERSON

Sleigh Ride

arr. HOLCOMBE

Festive Sounds of Hanukah

arr. FINNEGAN

Christmas Sing-along

*Tonight's concert is made possible in part by generous grants from the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism and JPMorgan Chase.
Piano provided by Steinway Piano Gallery of Westport*

PROGRAM NOTES

Tonight's program opens with two classics, one that should be better known and the other a repertoire staple. Chadwick, composer of the first, was a member of the so-called Second School of American composers, most of them New Englanders, who had studied in Europe and were closely allied to German Romanticism. But Chadwick also had "a voice of his own: a wry sense of humor, high Yankee spirits, a vigor" (Ewen) and "a jaunty irreverence" (Hale). America was then just beginning to develop a more independent style and Chadwick's role in this process is now more recognized. The second composer, Rachmaninoff, had two generations of Russian composers behind him to say nothing of his country's centuries-old connections to Europe, a continent of which much of it is geographically part. Never seriously involved with the radical changes to which slightly younger contemporaries like Stravinsky and Bartok were taking music in the early 20th century, he preferred to further extend the hyperbole of late-Romantic style, finding it very suited to the passionately yearning, often dark and melancholy moods he generally favored.

Following intermission the Greater Bridgeport Symphony continues its tradition of performing sacred and secular music that celebrates the nearly simultaneous occurrence of festivals of two of the world's great religions; Christmas (Christianity) and Hanukkah (Judaism). It is worth noting that these and other religious systems have many values in common and extreme parochialism of any kind may be misplaced and is certainly disruptive in the modern world.

Along with such scores, music that references the winter season and/or fond memories of youthful years of innocence and wonder is often included. Vital, intense, uplifting, calming, descriptive and sentimental by turns, there is a certain comfort in hearing the same or similar pieces year after year; good will does exist and to trumpet its values in sound is not totally a fantasy. Unfortunately, turmoil is also often present in the daily lives of individuals and nations; sadly, all cultures seek blessings, but do not necessarily find them on this overpopulated and shrinking earth.

SYMPHONIC SKETCHES

George Whitefield Chadwick (1854 - 1931)

Chadwick's four *Symphonic Sketches* are in effect his *Fourth Symphony*. He prefaced each with a poem. The lines "No cool gray tones for me!/ Give me the warmest red and green,/ A cornet and tambourine,/ To paint MY jubilee! describe the first. The second, Noël, find that "Through the soft, calm moonlight comes a sound/ A mother lulls her babe.../ The gentle snow lies glistening;/ On such a night the

Virgin Mother/.... wrapped the Holy Child,/ While angel hosts were listening." A jubilee is a celebration in a rejoicing spirit and a Noël is often pastoral. Both moods characterize Chadwick's *Sketches* which are skillfully written for the large orchestra of the late-Romantic period.

RHAPSODY ON A THEME OF PAGANINI

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 - 1943)

In the early years of the Romantic 19th century Nicolo Paganini had flashed across Europe as composer and performer with virtuoso violin playing of an order never heard before. Pianists were stimulated to expand the technical feats possible on their own instrument. His *24th Caprice* offered an attractive, but very basic theme, easily accessible to imaginative treatment. Liszt and Brahms had preceded Rachmaninoff with sets of variations on it, so the Russian's use of it for his final concerted work for piano and orchestra in 1934 was a logical and congenial connection to the roots of his era.

Given its variation form, the *Rhapsody* is more tautly constructed than the four piano concertos. The first variation precedes the statement of the theme itself, an effective touch of Romantic mystique. The Dies Irae (Day of Wrath) melody from the medieval plain chant for the dead which was a favorite of the composer is used as a counterpoint in variations 7, 10 and 24. The variations proceed in groups which develop similar moods and figuration, the best known being the lyric vein which starts in the 16th variation and culminates in the spell-binding inversion of the theme in the 18th. This is a hard act to follow, but the composer moves on to a dashing final sequence of six variations.

"WINTER" FROM THE FOUR SEASONS, OP. 8 NO. 4

Antonio Vivaldi (1673 - 1741)

Vivaldi placed a sonnet at the head of each of the first four concertos of his set of 12, Opus VIII, which have become known collectively as *The Four Seasons*. The first movement is characterized by the lines "To tremble frozen in the icy snow/ To be buffeted by the wild wind/ To stamp one's frozen feet/ To have excessive cold set one's teeth to chattering." The second movement is described with the words "To spend peaceful days by the fireside while the storm is shaking the house walls" - and the third with "To hear the Sirocco, Boreas and all furious winds fighting one another" marking the return to an outdoor scene. The music vividly suggests this scenario.

Vivaldi is recognized for his innovative role in the development of the early concerto, a form which scarcely existed before his time. *The Four Seasons*

was well known in his own day and his music was interesting to Bach who studied and arranged some of it for other instrumental combinations.

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Irving Berlin (1888 - 1988)

This classic of American popular music was written by one of the country's greatest song writers for the 1941 movie, *Holiday Inn*, which starred Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire. Ever since, its nostalgic melody and verse recall past Christmases and the anticipation of new ones. All of these were (and future ones should be) accompanied by snow, cards, sleigh bells and bright hope for the future.

The son of immigrant Jewish parents from Byelorussia, Berlin had written *Alexander's Ragtime Band* by 1911, "the theme song of a generation," as his daughter, Mary, wrote. Jerome Kern later said "Irving Berlin has no place in American music, he *is* American music." So much for the idea that the creators of a nation's artistic patrimony should be necessarily limited by race or background, if the talent is there. At 13, after his father's death, Berlin was busking songs for pennies on the streets of New York to help the family.

HALLELUJAH FROM "MESSIAH"

George Friedrich Händel (1685 - 1759)

Händel wrote the oratorio, *Messiah*, in 24 days in 1741 to a libretto by Charles Jennens, an irascible man, but one of taste and artistic sense. Fashioned from the Old and New Testaments as well as parts of the Anglican Service, it is imbued with Christian values of faith, hope, struggle, triumph, solace etc. which are epic in scope, but not church-service specific. The *Hallelujah Chorus*, a paean of praise, is one of the most familiar pieces ever written. Its Baroque splendor was recognized from the beginning and the King of England stood for an early performance. Tonight the voice parts are played by a choir of brass instruments.

SLEIGH RIDE

Leroy Anderson (1908 - 1975)

American composer, Leroy Anderson, was educated at Harvard where he studied both music and languages. From a position as Director of the University Band there, he went on to jobs as arranger in Boston and New York and later to a stint as translator for the U. S. Army during the Second World War. Favoring nostalgia and sentiment often touched by humor, his finely-crafted compositions are characterized by light-hearted tunes, novel orchestration and infectious rhythms. *Sleigh Ride* is no exception. The runners are not about to fall off this sleigh: the harness bells are clearly shaking.

FESTIVE SOUNDS OF HANUKAH

arr. William Holcombe

In 164 B. C. E. a small band of Jewish guerillas under Judas Maccabeus retook Jerusalem from the Syrians. An eight day celebration was declared for the rededication of the cleansed temple; only enough oil was available to burn for one day, but the lamp burned for all eight days, becoming the "Miracle of Hanukah." The modern observance of this event involves the lighting of a menorah, an eight-branched candelabra, one candle a day. Gifts are exchanged each evening and children spin four sided tops called dreidels on each side of which a letter is inscribed that together stand for the words "a great miracle happened there."

Festive Sounds of Hanukah is based on six traditional melodies of the holiday. *Maoz Tsur (Rock of Ages)* and *Mi Ymalel (Who Can Retell)* describe the struggles of Judas Maccabeus: *Hanukab, Hanukab* is sung after the traditional blessings: *My Dreidel* and *S'Vivon (Spin Dreidel)* are children's songs: *Hanukab, Oh Hanukab* is about all the events of the celebration. They are here given a joyous setting for this "Festival of Lights."

CHRISTMAS SING-ALONG

arr. John Finnegan (1926 -)

A graduate of Harvard where, like Leroy Anderson, he made arrangements for the band, teacher/bass player/conductor/composer John Finnegan has set eight of the best-loved carols and songs of the season in *Christmas Sing-Along*, the words to which are inserted in the program. Two are secular; *Jingle Bells*, James Pierpont's 1857 song for his Boston Sunday School class which started life as a Thanksgiving Day tune, but was quickly adapted for Christmas with a few changes of words and *Deck the Halls*, the melody of which seems to be an old Welsh air of unknown vintage and whose words, also somewhat obscurely, are probably of 19th-century American origin.

The other six concern the religious aspects of the season. *Away in a Manger* whose words and music are of uncertain provenance and the Gruber(music)/Mohr(words) *Silent Night*, first written and sung in Oberdorf, Austria on Christmas eve in 1818 by voices and guitars because the church organ was ailing, are quiet lullabys. The Mendelssohn(m.)/Wesley(w.), - both major figures in their fields - *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* is majestic and upbeat. The Willis(m. 1850)/Sears (w. 1849) *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* has a gentle swing. The Mason(m. 1839 [Boston])/Watts(w. 1719 [psalm translation]) *Joy to the World* is triumphant while the Reading (m. 1751)/ Wade (w. 1751, [latin] - Oakeley 1851, [eng. translation]) *Oh Come All Ye Faithful* has a processional character. Collectively the words to these songs are a litany of many of the hopes of mankind.

-Burton Hatheway