

The Bellingham Music Club Presents the
Concert of the Century

A Centennial Gala for the benefit of the Student Award Fund - Sunday, June 21, 2015

Program Notes

Today is June 21st—the Summer Solstice, when Youth itself is reborn. What better date to celebrate the dawn of the Bellingham Music Club's new century, along with the career of the ageless lady we honor, Joanne Donnellan. The Centennial Strings open the program with the lush **Prelude** to Grieg's "Holberg" Suite, reflecting both her Norwegian heritage, and the fact that all but one of them learned it at her knee as students in Ferndale. After which Joanne and son Grant, past and present Concertmasters of the Whatcom Symphony Orchestra, will reciprocate with a musical gift of their own.

Summer is just another word for weather in Seville, the site of **Escena andaluza**. The viola soloist delivers an ardent serenade, half mating-call. Actually Turina composed it in Paris, during his decade as a student there. In 1914, he and Manuel de Falla went back home to Spain to escape the coming war, leaving behind such French friends as Maurice Ravel.

The Great War casts a long shadow across the Midsummer landscape of our concert. Is **La valse**—begun three months after Armistice Day—really about Europe's descent into madness? Ravel insisted it's "merely an ascending progression of sonority." (In his circle, representational art was distinctly *de trop*.) True, there's something centrifugal about the waltz per se, always threatening to spin into exhaustion and dissolution. All the same, Ravel had volunteered for front-line duty, ferrying explosives under the nose of German guns.

At that very moment, his former pupil, Ralph Vaughan Williams, was ferrying the wounded as a medical volunteer on Flanders Field (and a Ladies' Music Club was being organized in Bellingham). **On Wenlock Edge** sings of a Shropshire ploughboy, brought back from the war to share an earthen blanket with a Roman Centurian and a Saxon warrior. The lad's unquiet ghost cries out to know whether "a better man's" arms grasp the tiller, and circle his sweetheart's waist. A familiar voice answers: Yes lad—never ask whose." Finally the twilight scene is drenched in a nightingale's **Serenade** (Richard Strauss), and **Sleep** (Rachmaninov) comes to all.

After intermission comes "The Battle of the Bands"!

Carlos Gardél's **Tango por una cabeza** is familiar from two films, "Scent of a Woman" and "Easy Virtue." *Por una cabeza* ("by a head") compares loving a woman to betting over and over on a noble horse that fades in the stretch. The man swears off betting—till the next likely pony catches his eye. The song made a marvelous vehicle for the author, a celebrated Argentine composer, singer and actor known as "The King of the Tango."

Both the **Fandango** and **Passa calle** are the work of Luigi Boccherini, an Italian who at age 18 was attached to the court of Luis Antonio, younger brother of King Carlos III of Spain. Luis eloped with a commoner; Boccherini refused to amend a musical passage the King disliked. The two scamps were exiled to a remote village, where Boccherini proceeded to write over 100 compositions, among them several recalling good times among the rabble of Madrid.

Unconscious in Brasil (Dušan Bogdanović) is the wild-card in our deck, innovative and cosmopolitan. The composer, a celebrated Serbian guitarist with a U.S. passport, displays special interests in jazz improvisation, World music, and the complex cross-rhythms and meters of both 14th-century *Ars nova* and African tribal music. He resides and works in Geneva, renowned for its internationalism.

Ravel's **Ondine** unites French Impressionistic "water-color" with the Romantic tradition of supernatural storytelling (both the diabolical and spritely varieties). It is literally awash in notes—bring towels! Poulenc's **Toccata** will brush any excess droplets off the keys, only to see them splashed anew by—

Schubert's **"Trout" Quintet**. Schubert possessed a rare gift for creating instant folksongs, that seem to spring from the soil like a linden tree—or leap from a brook. He delighted in displaying his creations in differing seasons or moods, the better to reveal the infinite variety of Mother Nature and human nature.

Schubert, Mozart, Mendelssohn: the Trinity of Teutonic lyricism. Their melodic fluency puts them at ease in a concert of Midsummer music—Mozart's amorous shepherd, wreathed in melodic garlands (**L'amerò, sarò costante**); Mendelssohn's fiddlers, chasing one another through a merry round of musical Tag (**Octet**).

And the encore? How about another century.

Jack Frymire