

Santa Barbara Symphony
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Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Ash (1988)

Michael Torke (born in 1961)

Composers since the age of the Renaissance have incorporated popular songs and styles into works of elevated purpose: students of music history will recall the profusion of Masses erected upon the 15th-century French ditty *L'Homme armé* ("The Armed Man"); Bach wove two popular melodies of the day (*Long Have I Been Away from Thee* and *Cabbage and Turnips*) into the contrapuntal complexities of the *Goldberg Variations*; Chopin's peerless piano creations are rooted in the dance patterns and melodic gestures of his native Poland; jazz and the blues have served as a wellspring for American composers ever since Copland returned from France in 1924. For all of their creative hybridization, however, these earlier attempts at stylistic interpenetration recognized distinct boundaries among the various types of music — the *Rhapsody in Blue* is clearly intended for the concert hall and not the jazz club. However, as this new millennium begins the conventional distinctions among musical idioms have blurred. The world is now so suffused with music — rock, pop, rap, punk, folk, metal, jazz, new age, soul, and even the venerable forms of symphony, opera and ballet — that the old melting pot has become a veritable cauldron of trans-stylistic musical immersion. Many of today's young composers and performers are not only inevitably exposed to this invigorating universe of musics, but can move comfortably and creatively from one to another, drawing from them a cross-fertilized inspiration that defies traditional categorization. Michael Torke is among the lead guides along this musical pathway into the new century.

Michael Torke (TOR-kee) was born in Milwaukee on September 22, 1961. His parents enjoyed music, but they were not trained in the field, so they entrusted Michael to a local piano teacher when he early showed musical talent. He soon started making up his own pieces, and by age nine he was taking formal composition lessons. His skills as a pianist and composer blossomed while he was in high school, and he chose to take his professional training at the Eastman School in Rochester, where he studied with Joseph Schwantner and Christopher Rouse. Though he had surprisingly little familiarity with popular idioms before entering Eastman in 1980, Torke absorbed all manners of music from the students and faculty at the school, coming to realize that he could make pop, rock and jazz coexist with the "classical" idioms in his music. His distinctive style was already well formed in *Vanada*, which he composed for a student ensemble at Eastman in 1984, his last year at the school. He spent a year at the Yale School of Music as a student of Jacob Druckman before moving to New York City, where his practice of submitting scores to every available competition had already made his name known to a number of contemporary music buffs. (He has won the American Prix de Rome and grants and prizes from the Koussevitzky Foundation, ASCAP, BMI and the American Academy & Institute of Arts and Letters.) A commission from the Brooklyn Philharmonic in 1985 resulted in *Ecstatic Orange*, his first orchestral score and one of his many works influenced by his drawing relations between color and sound. That same year his music was taken on by the prestigious publishing firm of Boosey & Hawkes, who introduced him to Peter Martins, director of the New York City Ballet. Martins was immediately struck by the freshness and vitality of Torke's work, and choreographed *Ecstatic Orange* in 1987; the company has since commissioned and premiered *Purple* (1987), *Black & White* (1988), *Slate* (1989), *Mass* (1990) and *Ash* (1991).

In 1990, Torke received a first-refusal contract for all of his compositions from Decca/London Records, the first such agreement that that company had offered since its association with Benjamin Britten; in 2003, he launched his own label, Ecstatic Records. Torke now has more requests for commissions than he can accept, and he is one of only a handful of American composers supporting themselves entirely through the income from their compositions. He writes mainly for orchestra, sometimes with an added soloist or concertante group, and the list of ensembles that have performed his music includes the orchestras of Philadelphia, Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Pittsburgh and New York, Danish Radio Symphony, Munich Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta and Ensemble InterContemporain. In 1997, Torke was appointed the first Associate Composer of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, in which capacity he has advised on programming and educational activities and composed *Rapture*, a concerto for Scottish percussionist Colin Currie, and the tone poem *An American Abroad*. In 1999, Torke

premiered two large-scale, high-profile pieces: *Strawberry Fields*, a one-act opera jointly commissioned by Glimmerglass Opera, New York City Opera and WNET's "Great Performances" television program (PBS), made its debut at Glimmerglass in Cooperstown, New York; and *Four Seasons*, a 62-minute symphonic oratorio for vocal soloists, two choruses and large orchestra commissioned by the Disney Company in celebration of the new millennium, was introduced by Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic.

Ash, commissioned by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and premiered by that ensemble on February 3, 1989 under the direction of the noted American composer and conductor John Adams, is electric with energy, a gleaming modernization of the dynamic motor rhythms that drives the Baroque masterpieces of Johann Sebastian Bach. Concerning the means he used to create the work's harmonic and instrumental content, Torke gave the following explanation: "In trying to find a clear and recognizable language in which to cast this chamber orchestra piece, I have chosen some of the most basic, functionally tonal means: tonics and dominants in F minor, a modulation to the relative major (A-flat), and a three-part form which, through a retransition, recapitulates back to F minor. What I offer is not an invention of 'new' words or a new language, but a new way to make sentences and paragraphs in a common, much-used existing language. I can create a more compelling musical argument with these means because, to my ears, potential rhetoric seems to fall out from such highly functional chords as tonics and dominants more than certain sonorities and Pop chords that I have used before. My musical argument is dependent on a feeling of cause and effect, both on the local level where one chord releases the tension from a previous chord and on the larger structural level, where a section is forced to follow a previous section by a coercive modulation. The orchestration does not seek color for its own sake, as decoration is not a high priority, but the instruments combine and double each other to create an insistent ensemble from beginning to end. Only occasionally, as in the middle A-flat section, do three woodwind instruments play alone for a short while to break the inertia of the ensemble forging its course together."

Concerto for Piano, Four Hands and Strings in G minor (2016)
(after the Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25 [1857-1861])
by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Arranged by Richard Dünser (born in 1959)

The high-minded direction of Johannes Brahms' musical career was evident from his teenage years — as a lad, he studied the masterpieces of the Austro-German tradition with Eduard Marxsen, the most illustrious piano teacher in his native Hamburg, and played Bach and Beethoven on his earliest recitals; his first published compositions were not showy virtuoso trifles but three ambitious piano sonatas inspired by Classical models; he was irresistibly drawn to Joseph Joachim and the Schumanns and other of the most exalted musicians of his day. When Schumann hailed him as the savior of German music, the rightful heir to the mantle of Beethoven, in his famous article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1853, Brahms was only too eager to accept both the renown and the responsibility inherent in such a lofty appraisal. He tried sketching a symphony as early as 1855 (not completing it, however, until two decades later), but his principal means of fulfilling Schumann's prophecy during the early phase of his creative life were focused first on the genres of piano works and songs, and then on chamber music.

Finished compositions did not come easily for Brahms, however, and he made numerous attempts to satisfy himself with a chamber piece before he allowed the publication of his Piano Trio, Op. 8 in 1854. (He destroyed at least three earlier efforts in that form.) The following year, he turned to writing quartets for piano, violin, viola and cello, a genre whose only precedents were the two by Mozart and a single specimen by Schumann. Work on the quartets did not go smoothly, however, and he laid one (in C minor, eventually Op. 60) aside for almost two decades, and tinkered with the other two for the next half-dozen years in Hamburg and at his part-time post as music director for the court Lippe-Detmold, midway between Frankfurt and Hamburg.

Brahms was principally based in Hamburg during those years, usually staying with his parents, but in 1860, when he was 27 years old and eager to find the quiet and privacy to work on his compositions, he rented spacious rooms ("a quite charming flat with a garden," he said) in the suburb of Hamm from one Frau Dr. Elisabeth Rössing, a neighbor of two members of the local women's choir he was then directing. Hamm was to be his home for the next two years, and there he worked on the *Variations on a Theme of Schumann* for Piano Duet (Op. 23), the *Handel Variations* (Op. 24) and the Piano Quartets in G minor (Op. 25) and A major (Op. 26). Brahms dedicated the A major Quartet to his hospitable landlady. The two Piano Quartets were finally finished by early autumn 1861, and given a private reading by some unknown local musicians and Clara Schumann during her visit to Hamm shortly thereafter. Brahms basked in the glow of Clara's approval of both his new pieces and the direction of his career.

In September 1862, Brahms succumbed to a long-held desire and visited Vienna. He had already made several professional contacts in the city, perhaps most notably with Joseph Hellmesberger, Director of the Vienna Conservatory and leader of a highly regarded string quartet. Hellmesberger introduced his German visitor to Julius Epstein, professor of piano at the school, and an evening of Brahms' music was planned for Epstein's apartment, located, fortuitously, at Schulerstrasse 8, the very building in which Mozart had composed *The Marriage of Figaro*. Hellmesberger and his colleagues eagerly joined Brahms in reading the two new Piano Quartets, and the violinist echoed Schumann's pronouncement when it was over: "This is indeed Beethoven's heir." Hellmesberger insisted that they mark Brahms' arrival in Vienna by presenting the G minor Quartet at his recital on November 16th in the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde; the program garnered sufficient success to warrant scheduling another concert two weeks later to introduce the A major Quartet. Those events solidified Brahms' reputation in Vienna, and were instrumental in helping him decide to settle in the city for good in August 1863, the same month that Fritz Simrock published the G minor Piano Quartet.

The first movement of the G minor Piano Quartet contains an abundance of thematic material woven into a seamless continuum through Brahms' consummate contrapuntal skill. Balanced within its closely reasoned sonata form are pathos and vigor, introspection and jubilation, storm and tranquility. The second movement (*Intermezzo*), cast in the traditional form of scherzo and trio, is formed from long-spun melodies in gentle, rocking rhythms. The *Andante* is in a broad three-part structure, with the middle section taking on a snappy martial air. The *Gypsy Rondo* finale is a spirited essay much in the style of Brahms' invigorating *Hungarian Dances*.

The arrangement of the G minor Piano Quartet as a Concerto for Piano, Four Hands and Strings was done for Sivan Silver and Gil Garburg in 2016 by award-winning Austrian composer Richard Dünser (b. 1959), who studied at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, Tanglewood, and privately with Hans Werner Henze, teaches at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, and had his works performed across Europe.

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55, "Eroica" (1803-1804) Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

The year 1804 — the time Beethoven finished his Third Symphony — was crucial in the modern political history of Europe. Napoleon Bonaparte had begun his meteoric rise to power only a decade earlier, after playing a significant part in the recapture in 1793 of Toulon, a Mediterranean port that had been surrendered to the British by French royalists. Britain, along with Austria, Prussia, Holland and Spain, was a member of the First Coalition, an alliance that had been formed by those monarchical nations in the wake of the execution of Louis XVI to thwart the French National Convention's ambition to spread revolution (and royal overthrow) throughout Europe. In 1796, Carnot entrusted the campaign against northern Italy, then dominated by Austria, to the young General Bonaparte, who won a stunning series of victories with an army that he had transformed from a demoralized, starving band into a military juggernaut. He returned to France in 1799 as First Consul of the newly established Consulate, and put in place measures to halt inflation, instituted a new legal code, and repaired relations with the Church. It was to this man, this great leader and potential saviour of the masses from centuries of tyrannical political, social and economic oppression, that Beethoven intended to pay tribute in his majestic E-flat Symphony, begun in 1803. The name "Bonaparte" appears above that of the composer on the original title page.

Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor of France in 1804 and was crowned, with the new Empress Josephine, at Notre Dame Cathedral on December 2nd, an event forever frozen in time by David's magnificent canvas in the Louvre. Beethoven, enraged and feeling betrayed by this usurpation of power, roared at his student Ferdinand Ries, who brought him the news, "Then is he, too, only an ordinary human being?" The ragged hole in the title page of the score now in the library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna bears mute testimony to the violent manner in which Beethoven erased Napoleon from this Symphony. He later inscribed it, undoubtedly with much sorrow, "To celebrate the memory of a great man."

The "Eroica" ("Heroic") is a work that changed the course of music history. There was much sentiment at the turn of the 19th century that the expressive and technical possibilities of the symphonic genre had been exhausted by Haydn, Mozart, C.P.E. Bach and their contemporaries. It was Beethoven, and specifically this majestic Symphony, that threw wide the gates on the unprecedented artistic vistas that were to be explored for the rest of the century. In a single giant leap, he invested the genre with the breadth and richness of emotional and architectonic expression that established the grand sweep that the word "symphonic" now connotes. For the first time, with this music, the master composer was

recognized as an individual responding to a higher calling. No longer could the creative musician be considered a mere artisan in tones, producing pieces within the confines of the court or the church for specific occasions, much as a talented chef would dispense a hearty roast or a succulent torte. After Beethoven, the composer was regarded as a visionary — a special being lifted above mundane experience — who could guide benighted listeners to loftier planes of existence through his valued gifts. The modern conception of an artist — what he is, his place in society, what he can do for those who experience his work — stems from Beethoven. Romanticism began with the “Eroica.”

The Symphony’s first movement, by far the largest sonata design composed to that time, opens with a brief summons of two mighty chords. At least four thematic ideas are presented in the exposition, and one of the wonders of the Symphony is the way in which Beethoven made these melodies succeed each other in a seemingly inevitable manner, as though this music could have been composed in no other way. The development section is a massive essay progressing through many moods which are all united by an almost titanic sense of struggle. It is in this central portion of the movement and in the lengthy coda that Beethoven broke through the boundaries of the 18th-century symphony to create a work not only longer in duration but also more profound in meaning. The composer’s own words are reflected in this awe-inspiring movement: “Music is the electric soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents.”

The beginning of the second movement — “Marcia funèbre” (“*Funeral March*”) — with its plaintive, simple themes intoned over a mock drum-roll in the basses, is the touchstone for the expression of tragedy in instrumental music. The mournful C minor of the opening gives way to the brighter C major of the oboe’s melody in a stroke of genius that George Bernard Shaw, during his early days as a music critic in London, admitted “ruins me,” as only the expression of deepest emotion can. A development-like section, full of remarkable contrapuntal complexities, is followed by a return of the simple opening threnody, which itself eventually expires amid sobs and silences at the close of this eloquent movement.

The third movement is a scherzo, the lusty successor to the graceful minuet. The central section is a rousing trio for horns, one of the earliest examples (Haydn’s “Horn Call” Symphony is an exception) of the use of more than two horns in an orchestral work.

The finale is a large set of variations on two themes, one of which (the first one heard) forms the bass line to the other. The second theme, introduced by the oboe, is a melody which appears in three other of Beethoven’s works: the finale of the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, the *Contradanse No. 7* and the *Variations and Fugue*, Op. 35 for piano. The variations accumulate energy as they go, and, just as it seems the movement is whirling toward its final climax, the music comes to a full stop before launching into an extended *Andante* section which explores first the tender and then the majestic possibilities of the themes. A brilliant *Presto* led by the horns concludes this epochal work.