

Solano Symphony Orchestra

Program Notes by Gerhard Haas

Concerto pastorale in G **Johann Melchior Molter** (1696-1765)

The violinist and prolific composer **Johann Molter** spent most of his career in the employ of two northern German courts, and, as was expected of a competent Kapellmeister, **Molter** produced chamber music, concertos, cantatas, symphonies, and stage works. Like a number of his German musical colleagues, he had the good fortune of being sponsored for study in Italy, where he absorbed the transparent style of Italy's leading composers, **Corelli** and **Vivaldi**. His Italian education is heard in the Concerto pastorale, along with his skill at spinning gracious melodic lines supported by elegant instrumentation. Pastorales, wildly popular in Europe during the Baroque era, were often featured at Christmastime, their gentle lilt intended to evoke scenes of shepherds, alternately serene—reclining on hillsides—and enthralled—at seeing angels singing of the birth of Christ.

Three German Dances, K.V. 605

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart, the musical polymath, was just as adept at composing music for one of his favorite pastimes—dancing—as he was at composing music for the church, the concert hall, or the opera. Employed by **Emperor Joseph II** as Kammermusicus (Imperial Chamber Composer), **Mozart** was obligated to regularly provide new music for dinners, parties, and balls. For a period of over 20 years, he provided the Viennese court with hundreds of marches, serenades, and dances, consisting of gavottes, minuets, and country—or German—dances, the latter generally more rustic than French dances and intended for groups of dancers. This set of three German dances (1791) consists of two shorter untitled pieces and one longer piece, entitled "Sleigh Ride," which is enhanced by the use of sleigh bells and post horns to add a dash of enthusiasm to the decorous tempo of the ride.

"The Skaters' Waltz", Op. 183 **Émile Waldteufel** (1837-1915)

The Alsatian pianist and composer **Émile Waldteufel** published his first compositions at his own expense: a pair of waltzes that became so popular that they encouraged him to devote himself, almost exclusively, to compositions in the waltz form. Throughout his career, **Waldteufel** composed hundreds of waltzes, often conducting them at lavish state balls. **Waldteufel** explained that "The Skaters' Waltz" (1882) was inspired by his observation of Parisian skaters' on the large frozen pond of the Bois de Boulogne Park. The waltz's velvet melody, accented with a hint of sleigh bells and a vivacious middle section, has made the piece his most well-known work.

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"Sleigh Ride" ("Winter Night")

Frederick Delius (1862-1934)

While many of the Yorkshire-born **Frederick Delius'** orchestral works are pictorial in nature, with titles such as "Florida," "Paris," and "In a Summer Garden," they are not intended to be faithful sound reproductions of a particular setting. Rather, **Delius** is primarily concerned with evoking the effect of the setting upon the observer. Thus, the serene "Sleigh Ride," originally titled "Winter Night," is more of a daydream than a winter soundscape. While the image of the sleigh is conjured by sleigh bells, the music quickly calms and fades, as the observer is lost in a personal reverie. With the return of the rhythmic bells, a boisterous world reappears, but the sprint is short-lived as, once again, the music slows and melts into the tranquil night.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Un ballo in maschera

"Morrò, ma prima in grazia" and "Eri tu che macchiavi"

These arias occur in Act III, after Renato, friend and secretary of Gustavo, King of Sweden, has learned that his wife, Amelia, and Gustavo are in love. Amelia, realizing her life is threatened, begs her husband that she may be granted mercy to embrace her young son one last time ("I will die, but first, I beg this grace"). Thereupon Renato airs his desire for revenge, directed at the friend who has betrayed him ("It was you who stained that soul").

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

La Bohème

"Addio—Donde lieta usci"

The love affair that had united Rodolfo and Mimi has cooled, and, in Act III, Mimi concludes that it is best that she end the relationship and return to her garret. In her tender aria ("Farewell—Back to the place I left") she expresses her regretful farewell to Rodolfo, while simultaneously wishing him well.

La fanciulla del West

"Minnie, dalla mia casa son partito"

In California's gold fields, Sheriff Jack Rance falls in love with Minnie, the owner of the Polka Bar. In his aria he avows his passion, stating that he'd give a fortune for just one of her kisses ("Minnie, I left my home").

Madama Butterfly

"Un bel dì"

The Japanese courtesan, Cio-Cio San, has been abandoned by the American sailor Pinkerton, but, in her soaring aria ("One fine day") she gives voice to her unwavering faith that he will return.

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Charles-François Gounod (1818-1893)

***Faust* "Avant de quitter ces lieux"**

The opera follows the legend of Dr. Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for eternal youth and the hand of the lovely Marguerite. The aria "Avant de quitter ces lieux" ("Before leaving this place") is sung by Marguerite's brother, Valentin, who, having been called up to war, assures his sister that he will always think of her.

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

***La Forza del Destino* "Pace, pace, mio Dio"**

Leonora has taken up the life of a hermit to escape pursuit by her brother, who has sworn revenge for the death of their father, which her brother mistakenly believes was caused by Leonora and her former betrothed. In front of her hut, Leonora prays that she may finally find lasting peace ("Grant me peace, my Lord").

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

***Don Giovanni* Là ci darem la mano"**

The Don's suave style is on full display as he charms and attempts to seduce the peasant girl Zerlina ("With your hand in mine"). He assures her that with her hand in his, she'll say "yes." Zerlina, however, holds her own, replying that, while she would like to go with the Don, it is her fiancé, Masetto, who claims her heart.

Final Waltz and Apotheosis from *The Nutcracker*

Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Act II of *The Nutcracker* takes place in the Land of Sweets, where the children, Clara and Fritz, watch in wonder as chocolates, candies, and flowers swirl in delicious dances. The Final Waltz is performed by all of the sweets, after which Clara and her nutcracker prince are whisked heavenward in a reindeer-drawn sleigh. Despite Clara's wish that her adventure will never end, she awakens back home the next morning, under the Christmas tree, with her nutcracker still in her arms.