

American Philharmonic – Sonoma County

Program notes for 2011-2012 Season

November 20, 2011 – *An Autumn Romance*

Egmont: Overture

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)



Beethoven was born in Bonn to working-class parents in September of 1770. He showed musical talent while very young, so his father had him start a grueling musical education at age five. His father failed to turn Ludwig into a box-office star in the footsteps of Mozart, but his efforts in this direction gained the young Beethoven a good early education.

With his first composition published when he was thirteen, Beethoven began to build a reputation for bold and inventive compositions, as well as for his rough and outspoken manner with people in every level of society. Chronic difficulties with finances, family, romance, hearing loss, and more, could not keep him from continuing to create the music we know and love.

The Overture to Egmont is the first of a set of incidental music for a play by Goethe. The Count of Egmont was a 16th-century Flemish nobleman who took a stand against oppression and was condemned to death for it. The music is serious and heroic, ending with the sound of joyous victory. The piece later gained fame as the unofficial anthem of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

Serenade for String Orchestra

Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

Elgar's father was a musician, piano tuner, and owner of a music shop. Edward's early musical experiences included playing violin in a local orchestra, playing bassoon in his own woodwind quintet, and composing works for a band in a lunatic asylum. He was self-taught as a composer and came from humble Catholic origins, a disadvantage in class-conscious Anglican Edwardian England.

The Serenade was published in 1892, a youthful work but refined and lyrical enough to earn a place in standard orchestral repertoire. The style is as unmistakably English as Copland is American. The first and third movements are lively and elegant, serving as the bookends for a sweet and deeply felt slow second movement.



Songs of a Wayfarer

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)



Gustav Mahler was born in Bohemia and lived most of his life in Austria. He had a difficult life from the beginning. His brutal father treated his delicate mother badly. Seven of Gustav's thirteen siblings died in infancy, one after a long illness with Gustav attending and telling stories to the end. As a boy he was a moody, introspective daydreamer. He once told another composer that the symphony must include everything; it seems that he thought of his song cycles the same way. It seems that every mood in human experience is in these songs.

Mahler wrote the words and the music for the four Songs, his first song cycle, at the age of 23. Some of the themes from these songs reappear in his First Symphony. The first song, "When My Sweetheart is Married," bemoans that his beloved will marry another. "I Went over the Field this Morning" celebrates life and beauty but ends on a sad note. "I Have a Glowing Knife" cries out about the pain of an unrequited love. "The Two Blue Eyes" mourns over the sadness of his love and greets the healing forgetfulness given by rest under the Linden tree.

Symphony No. 2

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Johannes Brahms learned the basics of music from his father, a bass player. He started taking piano lessons at age 10 and began studying composition with a teacher at age 12. By the age of 20, he had met such musical luminaries as Joachim, Liszt, and Robert and Clara Schumann. He came to be thought of as Beethoven's successor, but it took time for the public to understand his profound and reserved style of composition. Until his public success in 1868 with the German Requiem, Brahms was best known as a pianist, even though he was often playing his own works. He didn't complete his first symphony until 1876, so worried was he that he wouldn't be able to live up to Beethoven's example.



The second symphony was premiered in 1877 and met with immediate success. At a performance in the following year, an audience demanded that the orchestra repeat the third movement. At another concert, Brahms conducted and was showered with flowers by ladies in the audience. The first movement begins softly with a short theme that quickly develops into a great musical structure; a second theme sounds like a familiar lullaby. The second movement is a deep, thoughtful voyage. The third is a set of contrasting dances: stately and wild. The fourth is a happy celebration.

