

DAVID'S FINALE *program notes*

"Jubilee," from *Symphonic Sketches* **George Whitefield Chadwick**

George Whitefield Chadwick came of age in New England, at a time in the late 19th century when no American composer had yet achieved international acclaim. Chadwick's early education initially gave no indication that he would change the situation. Though musical from an early age, Chadwick never graduated from high school. He attended the New England Conservatory, but was not granted a formal academic degree.

Nevertheless, it is Chadwick (born in 1854, and died in 1931) who now counts as America's first widely established composer of music that is undeniably symphonic in tradition but American in flavor. Despite the barriers that he faced in getting his music performed, Chadwick ultimately composed in a wide variety of idioms. His three symphonies and three quasi-symphonic works, composed generally in traditional forms but with colorful orchestration, hints of American folk traditions, and occasional whiffs of humor, were widely heard and well-received in their day.

The set of four works collectively titled *Symphonic Sketches* dates from 1895–1904, in the period after Chadwick completed his Third Symphony. The music marks a subtle but sure shift in Chadwick's compositional focus — away from serious, grandiose forms and toward a more overtly entertaining approach that clearly echoed the influences of Afro-Caribbean, Scotch-Irish, and other American folk music traditions. Each movement of the *Symphonic Sketches* bore its own title, as well as an introductory poem penned into the score by the composer.

The first movement, titled "Jubilee," carried the following inscription:

No cool gray tones for me!
Give me the warmest red and green,
A cornet and a tambourine,
To paint MY Jubilee!

For when pale flutes and oboes play,
To sadness I become a prey;
Give me the violets and the May,
But no gray skies for me!

Though the music that follows can't be described as programmatically following the poem, it shares its spirit. The seven-and-a-half-minute work begins with an explosive swirl of sound accented by percussion. Then follows a sunny melody reminiscent of African-American spirituals, which is passed between instruments. The remainder of the movement plays out in a similarly light and colorful tone, with only a brief reverie toward the end before a dashing ending.

Symphony #1 in D minor for Organ and Orchestra **Felix Alexandre Guilmant**

Look in the *Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians* — the default catalogue of who's who in classical music — and you won't find much about Felix Alexandre Guilmant. Accorded less than half a column of text, Guilmant is described by *Grove* as a church organist who achieved some recognition for his compositions for organ and his skills as a teacher. In contrast, composers such as Brahms and Beethoven are afforded dozens of pages in that same multi-volume dictionary.

But, after tonight, you may want to know a lot more about this neglected French composer.

Felix Guilmant was born in 1837, into a long line of organists and organ-builders. Young Felix developed an early proficiency on the instrument, such that by age twelve he was occasionally substituting for his father at St. Nicholas Church, Boulogne. He was appointed organist at St. Joseph's at age sixteen, and soon began studying with the influential Belgian organist, Nicolas-Jacques Lemmens. According to the historian Aglo, "at that time the art of playing the organ was not current, but Lemmens gave new impulses, and he caused a renaissance of organ-music in France and Belgium." Historians acknowledge that Felix Guilmant played an instrumental part (if you'll forgive the pun) in this renaissance, along with Charles-Marie Widor, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Cesar Franck.

Like the rest of Guilmant's output, his First Symphony has never enjoyed substantial popularity. That fate seems particularly cruel in this instance. As

historian Philip Borg-Wheeler notes, "it is surprising that, in the context of the meagre repertoire of works for organ and orchestra, this Guilmant Symphony is so rarely performed."

Composed in 1874 and dedicated to King Leopold of Belgium, the symphony was actually adapted from Guilmant's First Sonata for organ. While many composers — notably Saint-Saëns in his Third Symphony (which we will also hear on this concert) — utilized the organ simply as support for the orchestra, Guilmant approached his symphony with a different philosophy. He referred to two schools of organ-playing:

"In one, the organ is treated as an orchestra," Guilmant wrote. "The other holds that the organ has so noble a tone quality...that it need not servilely imitate the orchestra. I belong to the latter school. Berlioz said, 'the organ is Pope; the orchestra emperor'...each is supreme in its own way."

The symphony is structured in three movements. Beginning with a majestic introduction, the work moves into a symphonic allegro with strongly contrasting themes. The idyllic second movement builds slowly on a single theme, in A-B-A form. The romping finale is a neo-Baroque toccata in d minor, in which the rapid figurations of the solo part contrast with more sustained, lyrical themes. The symphony ends triumphantly in the key of D major.

Symphony No. 3 in C Minor **("Organ Symphony")** **Camille Saint-Saëns**

From our early-21st century vantage, Camille Saint-Saëns appears to linger in a secondary tier of historically notable composers. A handful of his colorful works — including the *Danse Bacchanale*; his playfully evocative orchestral suite, *The Carnival of the Animals*; and the symphony we will hear on this concert — remain fixtures of the orchestral repertoire. But by and large, his reputation today is eclipsed by the Mozarts and Beethovens of history.

Yet in his day, Saint-Saëns was easily the most acclaimed composer of his home country and his music was a fixture on concert programs worldwide. His gifts as a performer were also recognized

by such luminaries as Gounod, Rossini, Berlioz, and Liszt (who proclaimed Saint-Saëns the best organist in the world).

This fame gave him lifelong access to the finest soloists of the day. As a result, Saint-Saëns composed numerous concertos and smaller showpiece works, including five piano concertos (which he himself often played), two concertos and some other works for cello and orchestra, and no fewer than eight works for violin and orchestra. As well, his Third Symphony could just as well be viewed as an organ concerto, so famously prominent is the instrument in the work's overall effect.

The crowning achievement of Saint-Saëns' career, the Third Symphony was written in the mid-1880s, at the behest of the London Philharmonic Society. The glorious incorporation of the organ in this work was no doubt inspired by the availability of a great organ

in the hall where the work was to be premiered (unfortunately, unbeknownst to Saint-Saëns until rehearsals began, the organ had been replaced by a much lesser instrument). By the time of the Symphony's composition, Saint-Saëns was already a much-celebrated composer throughout Europe, but he himself recognized that he had reached his zenith. "I have given all that I have to give," Saint-Saëns said after composing the Third Symphony. "What I have done I shall never do again."

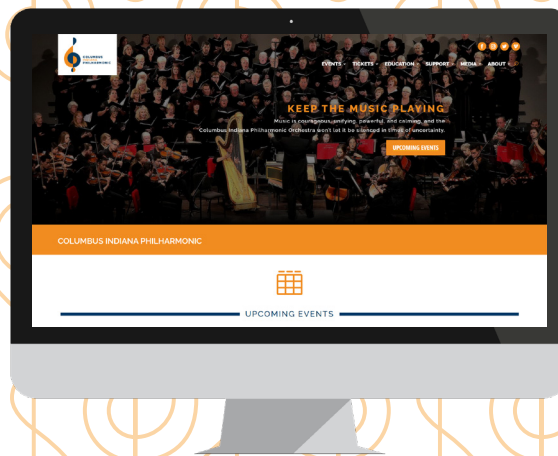
The symphony is structured in an unorthodox two-section form that Saint-Saëns previously pioneered with his Fourth Piano Concerto. Each of the two sections is divided into two parts, thus recalling the traditional four-movement symphonic form.

The whole work is built around a leading theme that appears in successive transformations throughout. The first section begins with a slow adagio,

followed by an agitated, pessimistic section. The entrance of the organ, coming after such unsettled music, seems like a revelation: simple octaves and open harmonies, rich and unhurried. The mood gradually softens, and the first section ends in a spirit of quietude.

The mood shifts dramatically at the opening of the second section, with a sudden sense of urgency replacing the luminous placidity that has come before. The music builds energy, to the point of near-breathlessness. Once again, the entrance of the organ marks a turning point — here not so much a calming influence as an organizing force: The music turns away from frenetic energy and toward majesty. Massive, rich chords frame the path forward. The orchestra, tamed, submits to a supporting role as the organ illuminates the path to an exuberant ending.

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