



Flutist, Brian Dunbar

March 10-12

GRACE & ACTION

Program Notes

AMAZING GRACE - JENNIFER HIGDON

If you grew up in the United States, the tune to “Amazing Grace” will likely seem at least familiar if not deeply nostalgic. The ubiquity of this tune undoubtedly stems, at least in part, from its long history as a folk hymn. Like most folk hymns - the setting of religious texts to folk melodies - Amazing Grace originated in the context of oral traditions and was later transcribed as a shape-note hymn. Shape-note music allowed people with less musical education to sight read music accurately and confidently by replacing the normally round note-heads with different shapes that corresponded to the different solfege (do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do) in any given scale.

By doing so, shape-note music allowed singers to more easily understand the relationship between pitches without having to worry about the sharps, flats, and tonic (the first note in a scale) of the key signatures. As a result, reading music became much easier for a larger group of people. Shape-note music also helped to prompt more public musical education, especially through singing schools, many of which were established in the American south. Although many of these hymns were abound with religious connotations, especially as the emphasis on religious singing cultures expanded significantly through southern religious revivals, the act of singing was often seen as more of a social activity than a liturgical one.

In addition to making musical participation more accessible, shape-note notation also led to more folk melodies and hymns being written down, rather than remaining a solely oral tradition. The tune for Amazing Grace was one such melody that was included in a number of religious hymnals that made use of shape-notes. The exact history of the tune’s publication is difficult to track, especially as the same tune has appeared under different names such as “Harmony Grove” and “New Britain” in some songbooks and include different words. One of the first known publications was in a song book titled *The Columbian Harmony* in 1829 by Charles Spilman and Benjamin Shaw, both of whom attended Centre College. However, one of the most well-known publications of Amazing Grace was in William Walker’s *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* (1835), which was the most popular song book in the pre-Civil War south and one of the first and only southern hymnody collection to make its way across the country at that time. As a result, melodies like Amazing Grace became extremely well-known in more than just the American south.

AMAZING GRACE - JENNIFER HIGDON (CONT.)

The popularity of Amazing Grace has since lent itself to a number of appropriations well-past its mid-19th century publications. Some notable popular music incorporations of the tune include Melvin Lyman's 20-minute harmonica improvisation as part of the 1965 Newport Folk Festival and Aretha Franklin's inclusion of the song in a live album, also titled Amazing Grace, recorded in January 1972. And, the song is no stranger to classical musical renditions, including a quotation of the melody in Aaron Copland's Emblems written for band in 1964 amongst others. The arrangement of Amazing Grace by Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962) will seem both intimately familiar and refreshingly modern in her setting for string orchestra, as she incorporates the tune's rich history while also participating in a new, forward-thinking future for Amazing Grace. And while these two aspects of Higdon's setting may seem contradictory, it is perhaps an extremely fitting adaption of this melody, as the piece has been both for the musically knowledgeable and unfamiliar, used for both liturgical and social purposes, and now as both a folk-hymn and decidedly classical.

MOVEMENTS FOR FLUTE AND ORCHESTRA - CARLOS SIMON

A concerto in classical music most often refers to a piece written for solo instrument and orchestral accompaniment in today's terminology. However, the genre has been through a number of historical iterations. While we often think of concertos as being predominantly an instrumental genre, they actually began primarily as vocal music, often using either vocal soloists or a small group of vocalists that would be contrasted against larger choirs and/or instrumental accompaniment. They were especially prominent in Italy during the first part of the 17th-century and were often deployed for liturgical reasons. Similar configurations of vocal soloists/small groups with larger ensemble accompaniments were also present in Germany during the same time period, with concerto-like pieces being written for a variety of Christian-based religions, including Catholicism and Protestantism. What separates the concerto from other similar vocal genres like a motet or madrigal - multi-voiced vocal works - is the emphasis on a soloist or small ensemble with larger accompaniments.

MOVEMENTS FOR FLUTE AND ORCHESTRA - CARLOS SIMON

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By the last two decades of the 17th century, the concerto began to more closely resemble what we think of as a concerto today thanks to the genre's Roman model. In this model, a concerto, or a concerto grosso, incorporated a ripieno and concertino section. The ripieno was a small group of musicians who played the more soloistic and virtuosic sections while the concertino acted as a large ensemble accompaniment. Composers like Arcangelo Corelli would take advantage of this type of configuration to experiment with larger instrumental ensembles that emphasized the string section. As a result, many of Corelli's use of the concerto grosso form is considered one of the early prototypes of the modern-day symphony orchestra. The first published concertos, composed by Giuseppe Torelli in 1692, also demonstrate a move away from the ripieno into actual soloists as Torelli instructs that the solo part should only be played by one musician.

With the passage of time Torelli's emphasis on the solo part of a concerto became the increasingly common way to write in the genre and composers began to emphasize more than just the strings as the solo part. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, for example, wrote a number of concertos in the 18th-century that used keyboards as the solo parts and helped to establish conventional forms and more intricate interactions between soloists and the accompanying ensemble. Ludwig van Beethoven also wrote a number of concertos and began incorporating a narrative element to the music, in which the solo part acts as a kind of "protagonist" that the listener follows through a musical journey rather than a display of virtuosity against a more simplistic background accompaniment. The 20th century continued to see innovations with the form, combining more modern compositional techniques and styles into a familiar soloist-larger-ensemble-accompaniment, including trends of neo-classicism (a return to 18th-century formal techniques while maintaining innovations in harmonic and melodic lines) and serialism (by assigning numbers to pitches and using a mathematically derived process to determine their order in the piece).

MOVEMENTS FOR FLUTE AND ORCHESTRA - CARLOS SIMON **(CONT.)**

In the concerto performed at this concert, Dr. Carlos Simon's Movements for Flute and Orchestra, you will hear the continued progression of this genre through the relationship between the orchestra and soloist Brian Dunbar's mesmerizing flute solo in this performance. While this sort of relationship follows in the historical footprints of those written centuries beforehand, one of the newer iterations of the concerto has to do with the composer himself. Dr. Simon's flute concerto comprises one of only two American flute concertos written by a Black composer. This project, a collaboration between Simon and Dunbar, then seeks to create "a more diverse and inclusive environment for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) musicians, and a richer repertoire for the orchestral community." As such, Simon's concerto becomes a site where the historical legacy of the concerto meets and challenges classical music's inheritance of primarily white men's contributions. The result will hopefully pave the way for the innovations of the concerto as a genre and also to contribute to a more diverse and inclusive musical landscape.

For more information about Carlos Simon and Brian Dunbar, you can visit their websites at CarlosSimonMusic.com and BrianDunbarFlute.com respectively.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN - SYMPHONY NO. 7

It would be difficult to overstate the influence that Beethoven's compositions have had on our current ideas of music. His career and compositional style development has often been categorized as consisting of three distinct sections that span the beginning, middle, and end of his career. Although Beethoven's compositional output does not fit as neatly into distinct periods as these categories might imply (there's arguably much more overlap), the middle portion, also sometimes referred to as the "heroic" period, is one of Beethoven's most prolific periods of composition. This period is also where his style began to solidify and his seventh symphony, which you will hear at this concert, is one of the culminating pieces of this part of his career.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN - SYMPHONY NO. 7

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In addition to this period containing a large number of Beethoven's compositional works, his "heroic" period also helped to establish a particular aesthetics around the symphony that would heavily impact how the genre was viewed, conceived of, and listened to by both audiences and future composers. Starting with Beethoven's Symphony No. 3, nicknamed the Eroica Symphony, he began to compose with a more intentionally expanded musical range and began to challenge the limits of the symphony. For example, Beethoven's third symphony began to incorporate elements of narrative into the music, allowing the music to tell a story about a journey from darkness to light or, as the initial dedication to Napoleon might imply, a story of a battle. His symphonies during this time also began to view the typical four movement structure of a symphony as more cohesive. Whereas many symphonies in the 18th century were written in a way that each movement could stand alone in a concert, and often were separated from each other during performances, Beethoven began to incorporate thematic material that appeared throughout more than one of the movements. The famous dun-dun-dun-dun from his fifth symphony (and if you're familiar with this piece, you know exactly what those chords are), for example, appears in different iterations throughout the symphony. Beethoven's symphonies also became longer and more musically complex than those of his predecessors - the first movement of his third symphony is actually longer than most entire symphonies at the time. These changes in writing for the symphonic form also changed the culture around listening to the symphony. Many instrumental pieces were considered background music to events that were otherwise decidedly social in nature, but the increase in complexity from Beethoven's symphonies began to demand increased attention and study and began to turn listening from a social practice into an intellectual one. The consequences of this shift have been interpreted in a myriad of both positive and negative lights, but whichever opinions one has about it, it would be nearly impossible to deny the long-lasting effects this change has brought.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN - SYMPHONY NO. 7

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With all of the changes to the aesthetics of the symphony during Beethoven's middle period, his seventh symphony has been considered both a continued expansion of these aesthetics and a sort of postscript to this middle section of his compositional legacy. Completed on April 13, 1812 and first performed on December 8, 1813, his seventh symphony continues to push musical boundaries. You will still hear an expanded, semi-slow introduction, that was one of the largest during that time period, and still is even by today's standards. You will still hear thematic material throughout the movements, especially the two outer ones, that connect the movements together as a whole. And you will hear further departures from standard symphonic expectations through the emphasis on lively quick-paced movements rather than the inclusion of at least one slower movement. Many of these elements are clear expansions of Beethoven's earlier symphonic innovations, but as musicologist Michael Steinberg has noted, that while the piece sounds at times "wild," it is underpinned by a meticulous sense of order that has been developed intentionally throughout this period. As you listen, you can consider how this piece is both a solidification of Beethoven's "heroic" style and simultaneously the solidification of new aesthetic ideals that have shaped both the symphony as a genre and the expectations of the listener in ways that persist today.