

# Quincy Symphony Orchestra

OCTOBER 3, 2009

## PROGRAM NOTES

Compiled by Dr. Lavern Wagner

### **Egmont Overture Op. 84..... Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

Beethoven's admiration for Goethe was unbounded, and he said he read Goethe every day. Beethoven's great opportunity to show his devotion came in 1810 when he was commissioned to write accompanying music for a special performance of Goethe's play *Egmont*, to be given at the Burgtheater in Vienna. The play deals with Count Egmont's leadership of the opposition in 16<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands to the Spanish inquisition, under the Duke of Alva. Egmont's betrayal closes the action, but his beheading in 1568 is made to appear as the provocation for the revolt which will free the Netherlands from Spanish domination.

The introduction begins with a mighty chord in F minor, followed by a marcato phrase in the rhythm of the Sarabande, a dance of Spanish origin. Here it may suggest the despotism of the Duke of Alva. In immediate and striking contrast is the short, pleading phrase imitated in oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and the violins. This may portray the agony of the Dutch people. As the rhythm hastens, the main theme of the overture allegro is heard first in the cellos. The second theme is a diminution of the opening Sarabande-style theme, heard first in the violins, together with its attendant figure of pleading. After a short development, the recapitulation is unmistakable. Here the hard chords of the Sarabande alternate with softer passages in the strings. There is an unaccompanied descent from C to G in the violins, commonly interpreted as indicating the death of Egmont. After a few bars of quiet mourning, the work comes to a triumphant close.

### **Fantasia..... Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837)**

As a child prodigy pianist, Hummel aspired to follow the pattern of Mozart by extensive touring throughout Europe in his earlier years. While these performances at important courts added immensely to his collection of bejeweled artifacts such as rings and snuff boxes, similar to Mozart's experience they did not result in substantial financial rewards. In 1804 he became the successor to Joseph Haydn at the Esterhazy court outside Vienna. However, Hummel was attracted to the interesting musical activity inside Vienna, and spent too much time there performing and composing for the theaters. In 1811 he made a final break with the Esterhazy's. It was not until 1820 that Hummel found a permanent position in Weimar, which remained his career headquarters. Weimar's two tourist attractions in the 1820's were seeing the poet Goethe and hearing Hummel at the piano. As was the practice of the time, Hummel was noted for his pianistic improvisations which would include opera melodies, then close with a four or five-voice massive contrapuntal fugue.

The *Fantasia* for viola is derived from Hummel's 1820 composition, *Potpouri, Opus 94*. (In today's English "potpourri" refers to a musical medley.) The *Fantasia* includes the beginning and ending sections only of the more extensive *Potpouri, Opus 94*. After an introduction, the tenor aria "Il mio tesoro in tanto" from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* is presented and then becomes the subject of variations. The closing section of the *Fantasia* is a six-eight meter melody, also surely from a current opera which Hummel knew. The improvisatory treatment, throughout the *Fantasia* has lead one violist to place this work as a difficulty five out of six possibilities. Certainly it stretches the viola player's technique to a high level.

### **Kol Nidrei, Op. 47..... Max Bruch (1838-1920)**

In the 1870's Max Bruch conducted a Jewish community chorus in Berlin, and knew the prominent cantor there, Abraham Lichtenstein. Moving to Liverpool, England in 1890, the Jewish Society gave Bruch a commission which lead to his composition of *Kol Nidrei*, based on a Jewish chant which Bruch found most attractive. *Kol Nidrei* means "all vows." It is a prayer recited on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Day of

Atonement, which expresses repentance for failure to meet the promises made to God, and asks God's forgiveness for all rash commitments. The prayer vows self-improvement, but knowing we can never achieve perfection, God will understand our humanity. The prayer is over a thousand years old, and the melody comes from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The melody was associated with the Ashkenazic, or German, rite. The prayer was removed from the reformed Jewish liturgy during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only being reinstated in 1945.

**Symphony No. 1 in G-minor ..... Vassily Kalinnikov (1866-1901)**

Vassily Kalinnikov was from an ecclesiastical family, and so began his education at the seminary in Oryol. At age 14 he directed the choir there. Moving to Moscow in 1884, he was a scholarship student at the prestigious Philharmonic Society School. At graduation he was appointed assistant conductor of the Moscow Italian Opera. This post was too strenuous for him. His frail health resulting from tuberculosis led him to the warmer climate of the South Crimea. Here is where Kalinnikov composed his First Symphony between 1894 and 1895. He sent it to the prominent Moscow music critic Semyon Kruglikov, who fell in love with the work. Immediately it was sent on to one of Russia's foremost composers, Rimsky-Korsakov, who had a different view of the symphony. Korsakov and his St. Petersburg colleagues were deeply committed to developing a "pure" Russian music, and they said Kalinnikov was contaminated by Germanic influences; his symphony did not present the "pure" Russian style for which the nationalists led by Rimsky-Korsakov were striving. Fortunately, Kruglikov believed in the symphony, and sent it to Alexander Vinogradsky, musical director of the Kiev branch of the Moscow Musical Society. Here the symphony was premiered in 1897. The work was immediately a resounding success, receiving performances in Moscow, Berlin, and Vienna, then in Schwerin, Paris, London, and even in the United States. Rimsky-Korsakov's original antipathy was offset by the admiration for Kalinnikov's work by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff.

Kalinnikov's First Symphony is thoroughly infused with the spirit of Russian folk song. Its first movement, marked *Allegro moderato*, has an attractive and lyrical principal theme of obvious Russian character, rising from quiet mystery. The second theme is readily recognized by its passionate yearning. The movement is developed in colorful orchestration with contrasting material, then with fugal treatment of the main theme. The slow movement, *andante commodamente*, provides an immediate contrast in texture and color, with Kalinnikov's orchestration so suggestive of Tchaikovsky's skill in this art. A poignant dance melody emerges, answered by the strings, swelling to a climax before proceeding to a more lyrical section, in which again the woodwinds assume prominence. The plaintive oboe melody is heard again, before the movement ends with the serenity with which it had begun. The following Scherzo, even more Russian in its melodic language, changes the mood of introspection to a peasant dance, with a contrasting melancholy in the trio section. The final movement opens with a reminiscence of previous musical material before proceeding to a forthright principal theme. Thematic material from the first movement and new material contrast with each other. The symphony ends with a massive and positive triumph.