

Double Barreled BBBs

In the world of classical music the three Bs - Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms - stand as towering giants. If there were a Mt Rushmore dedicated to music, these composers would surely loom large as Katja Battarbee has so fittingly depicted in her artwork for our concert tonight, which features works from all three of these musical icons. Two of our compositions are double concertos - compositions for two solo instruments. Featured are Amy Hiraga, violinist who plays professionally in the San Francisco Symphony, and Julian Brown, Concertmaster of SVS playing the Bach *Double Violin Concerto*. Amy is the wife of Peter Wyrick, Associate Principal Cellist of the San Francisco Symphony and one of our previous soloists from last year. Peter joins the SVS cello section as his daughters, Mayumi Wyrick, violin soloist and Mariko Wyrick, cello soloist play the Brahms *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello*. Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, probably the most well-known symphony of all time, completes this "monumental" performance.

J.S. Bach - Double Violin Concerto in D minor (1720-1730?)

1. Vivace
2. Largo ma non tanto
3. Allegro

While Johann Sebastian Bach spent much of his professional life working for the church, he occasionally found opportunities for writing secular works. One such period began in 1717 when he became Kapellmeister for Prince Leopold in the German city of Köthen. Leopold was more easy going than Bach's previous employer (who actually had the composer locked up for a while) and Bach found freedom to explore instrumental forms. It was during his time with Leopold that he wrote his famous Brandenburg concertos, and his solo works for violin and cello. However, it remains an open question contested by Bach scholars whether his three violin concertos including the double were composed then or later in 1730 when he moved to Leipzig.

The D minor concerto doubles in more than one sense. Not only does it feature two solo instruments but it also exhibits two facets of Bach's musical style: a certain Italian grace, owing much to the influence of Vivaldi whom Bach much admired, layered within the complexities of contrapuntal composition that so fascinated Bach. The outer movements feature themes that crisscross playfully between soloists and the orchestra - the last movement presenting in particular a fugal dance - while the slower middle movement introduces a highly expressive almost improvisational mood whose yearning appeal partly explains why this is one of the composer's most popular works.

Johannes Brahms - Concerto for Violin and Cello in A minor Opus 102 (1887)

1. Allegro
2. Adagio
3. Vivace non troppo

There's more than a touch of soap opera to the story behind the Brahms double concerto which proved to be Brahms last major orchestral work (though he wrote plenty of chamber works afterwards). It began with the composer's no doubt well intentioned intervention in the marital breakup of his close friend, the preeminent violinist of the day, Joseph Joachim. The violinist

suspected his wife of having an affair with Brahms's publisher Fritz Simrock but Brahms, firmly believing the allegation groundless, wrote a supportive note to Joachim's wife which was produced in evidence in the subsequent divorce case. Joachim felt deeply betrayed and broke off contact with Brahms for years.

Given their close personal and professional relationship the rift between them took a major toll on both men. One day, though, the cellist in Joachim's quartet, Robert Hausmann, asked Brahms to write him a concerto. In this Brahms saw an opportunity to reconnect with his estranged friend and wrote Joachim a note offering to write a double concerto for both violin and cello. Sure enough this did the trick and they started talking and collaborating once again. In 1887 Joachim and Hausmann with Brahms at the podium gave the first performances of the concerto in many German cities including Cologne and Berlin.

Although Joachim appreciated Brahms' conciliatory act the two men never fully recovered the same camaraderie again and the concerto was not fully to his liking. Though the solo parts demanded virtuoso skills of the highest order, he complained that they lacked brilliance. In fact, Brahms had chosen to write more of symphonic work rather than a typical romantic showcase for soloists to dazzle with background orchestral accompaniment. Perhaps partly for this reason the concerto did not enjoy the same popularity as his solo violin concerto which he had also written for Joachim. Nevertheless, over the years appreciation of it has grown considerably as tastes have changed and with the availability of many fine recordings of it played by the world's leading violinists and cellists. To be sure, the work now stands proud like Bach's double violin concerto as one of the few great works that successfully marries two instruments with an orchestra.

Beethoven Symphony No. 5 in C minor Opus 67

1. Allegro con brio
2. Andante con moto
3. Scherzo: Allegro
4. Allegro

The emblematic opening motif in Beethoven's 5th is one of the best known phrases - perhaps *the* best known - in all of classical music. While the story that it represents "Fate knocking at the door" remains apocryphal the C minor key of the symphony indicates we are in for a stormy though ultimately heroic ride. In World War II the same dot dot dot dash pattern, which in Morse Code represents the letter "V", acquired even more resonance with the powerfully symbolic "V for Victory". However, just as focusing exclusively on the enigmatic smile of the *Mona Lisa* or the missing arms of the *Venus de Milo* rather misses the point, there's a great deal more to this symphony than simply its powerful opening theme.

Like Beethoven's revolutionary 3rd and 9th symphonies, the entire work had a huge impact influencing and inspiring future composers. Although some of the innovations often credited to the 5th - the first use of the trombone in a symphony, the merging of the last two movements, the use of a reprise of an earlier motif in the finale, and the double variations in the slow movement in which two themes are presented in alternation in varying forms - were not totally new, taken as a whole the symphony was still groundbreaking.

The scherzo movement intriguingly has a powerful dot dot dot dash motif of its own - one that has been cited as an example of how the "fate" theme of the first unifies the whole symphony. A

case of the *Mona Lisa*'s smile lingering like the smile of the Cheshire Cat perhaps? Musicologists like to squabble over such things. Another point of contention in this movement is over whether one should perform a repeat of the scherzo and trio as Beethoven had originally marked or whether this should be ignored as publishers have mostly chosen to do. Recent thinking favors the repeat, which is what you will hear tonight, as it makes the bridge passage into the triumphant finale all the more surprising.

The exhilarating last movement itself features its own unexpected diversion in the form of a reprise of the horn theme from the scherzo. Such reiteration of themes from other movements was virtually unheard of before that time. But the work gets back on track again and eventually heads into a fast moving presto culminating in a 29 bar blast of C major chords. The distance between the stormy opening C minor of the symphony and the blazing resolution in C major at its conclusion might seem but a small step in terms of fundamentals yet what an immense musical journey we have travelled.

Julian Brown