

## Program Notes

Overture to *Der Freischütz* (1821)

CARL MARIA VON WEBER

Born November 18, 1786 in Eutin  
(Northern Germany).

Died June 5, 1826 in London.

Carl Maria von Weber was one of the pivotal composers in the development of German Opera. Born into a theater family, he worked throughout his life to elevate German-language opera to the lofty status reserved for the Italian tradition. His three most noted operas—*Der Freischütz*, *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*—date from the final decade of his life, which he spent as a Kappelmeister in Dresden. Though the full works have faded from the repertory, Weber's overtures remain perennial favorites. It is clear where, for example, young Mendelssohn found inspiration for the overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* written the same year as Weber's death.

Weber's *Freischütz* Overture sets the stage for a tale based on a German legend involving a marksman and magic bullets. The music begins with a slow introduction of halting two-measure phrases, followed by an exquisite C Major melody in the horns, the signature sound to evoke hunting and the forest. A cello melody and ominous offbeats in the timpani lead the transition into the *Molto vivace* body of the overture in a stormy C minor. Near the end, Weber milks the drama of a drawn-out half cadence (i.e. culminating on the dominant chord, in this case G, instead of the tonic C) before unleashing a final surprise.  
-2008 Aaron Grad

Concerto in B minor for

Cello and Orchestra, Op. 104

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Born September 8, 1841

in Nelahozeves, near Kralupy.

Died May 1, 1904 in Prague.

At the invitation in June 1891 of Jeanette Furber, the founder of the National Conservatory in New York, Antonín Dvořák took leave of his position at the Prague Conservatory and came to New York City the following year in order to serve as the Director of the National Conservatory. Dvořák was enticed to leave his homeland with the offer of a salary nearly 25 times that which he was being paid at the Prague Conservatory as well as a yearly four-month vacation and the opportu-

nity to conduct the conservatory orchestra for 10 concerts each year. The composer was to hold this position for the next three years. During this time, Dvořák composed some of his most successful works, notably the "New World" Symphony, Op. 95 and the *String Quartet* in F major, Op. 96 (both written in 1893) and the Concerto in B minor for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 104. While the debate still rages on today in some circles as to the degree to and prominence of which American influences are stamped upon these works, the Cello Concerto was the last work which he composed in America and Dvořák, growing ever more restive and increasingly more homesick, imbued this work with an unmistakable Czech flavor.

Thirty years prior to the completion of the B minor Cello Concerto, the 24-year-old Dvořák attempted to write a Cello Concerto in A major. At this time, while he was supporting himself primarily through teaching, Dvořák became enamored with one of his students, Josefina Cermák, the 16-year-old daughter of a wealthy jeweler; however, the young woman did not feel the same way toward the budding composer. In order to win her heart, Dvořák turned his attention away from orchestrating the A major Concerto and instead composed a song cycle entitled "Cypresses" for her; nonetheless, Josefina remained unimpressed by his attempt to woo her through his music and Dvořák ultimately dedicated the cycle to someone else. The composer subsequently fell in love with Josefina's younger sister Anna, and the two were eventually married. Ultimately, the A major Concerto remained incomplete and abandoned.

One factor in the creation of the B minor Concerto was a request for a piece from Dvořák's friend, Hans Wihan, a member of the Bohemian String Quartet, and considered the finest Czech cellist of the time. Another factor was the composer's appreciation for the Cello Concerto No. 2 by Victor Herbert which Dvořák had heard performed by the New York Philharmonic in Brooklyn in 1894, with Herbert himself as the soloist. Dvořák began work on the B minor Concerto on November 8, 1894, orchestrating it as it went along, completing the first movement in just over a month. The *Adagio* movement was finished in three days, while the Finale, begun after a two-week respite, was finished on February 9, 1895.