

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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 off-beats 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 twenty-five times that which he was being paid at the Prague Conservatory as well as a yearly four-month vacation and the opportunity to conduct the conservatory orchestra for ten 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