Concert no. 1 Introductions Program Notes

Edward Elgar
Born June 2, 1857, Broadheath, England. Died February 23, 1934, Worcester, England

In the South, Op. 50 (*Alassio*)

In late 1903 Elgar traveled to northern Italy to spend the winter. He was, at the time, still feeling intense disappointment and personal despair with the sudden death of a close friend Alfred Rodewald. Here in rainy and windy Italy Elgar considered writing a symphony, as the world was awaiting his first symphony. Instead, the impressions of the stay brought about the concert overture "In the South"– his longest orchestral work to date.

Ideas for the composition were taken from prior sketches as well as new ideas from the surrounding Italian scene. The robust opening idea comes original sketches called "The Moods of Dan"- a triumphant bull dog made famous in the Enigma Variations, XI. Here it is refashioned into a "Joy of living (wine and macaroni)" theme and provides an explosion of color and energy. Elgar described this opening as: "the exhilarating out-of-doors feeling arising from the gloriously beautiful surroundings – streams, flowers, hills; the distant snow mountains in one direction & the blue Mediterranean in the other."

The subtitle *Alassio* refers to the town in northern Italy where the Elgars stayed. The nearby town of Moglio offered further compositional ideas. Elgar, forever one to enjoy a good play on words or twist of the tongue, found amusement in repeating the town's name. A reoccurring "Mo-gli-o, Mo-gli-o" pulse can be heard within the work.

During a section of unusual tone-color and harmonies, there are impressions of ancient Roman bridges and hints of clashing swords and the stomping of Roman feet. It is as if the ruins come to life with their history and we are tossed into a flash-back vision of these earlier times.

A short, beautiful section pairs the harp with a solo viola in what is often referred to as a moonlit serenade. Elgar remarks on this: "the shepherd singing softly his Canto-*popolare* & the peace & the sunshine once more take the chief place in the picture."

The work is surprising cheery, robust, and full of sunshine, considering the dark moments Elgar was experiencing, and the horribly cold and rainy weather they endured during their visit. The writing is for a top-notch orchestra, one having complete finesse and romantic vigor. The NSO invites you to listen and enjoy the imaginative sketches and bold sensations of Elgar's Italy - "In the South."

Kim Diehnelt
Born 1963, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Pogolla (2011)

The title *Pogolla* names a fictitious character who offers hints of irreverence and absurdity. Originally scored as a trio for oboe, viola, and cello, this chamber orchestra version brings added colors and textures to the punchy gestures and majestic stance. The over-all effect of the work is one of humor, interrupted only briefly by earnest thoughtfulness.

As is typical for works of Diehnelt, but unusual for contemporary music, the piece has modern-modal tendencies and makes use of the open-string pitches of the stringed instruments. This creates an exuberance of sound as the instruments can therefore fully resonate. The players

jostle together in quirky jabs and shifting pulse, intended to provoke smiles, if not laughter, from the listener.

The slower and restrained mid-section inserts a moment of sober contemplation where the concepts of melody and harmony as we assume them today are blurred. The music builds out of many voices - where no one has the melody, no one has the harmony, yet together the ensemble combines to create a continuous flux of melodic-harmony (or harmonic-melody). The result is one of shifting colors, textures, and a majestic flow of intensity.

The piece then quickly shifts gears and returns to wit and glibness. It draws to a spunky finish, offering a clear signal from the composer that we needn't always take ourselves too seriously.

Intermission

Antonin Dvořák
Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Bohemia. Died May 1, 1904, Prague, Bohemia

Symphony No. 8, Op. 88, G major (1889)
- Allegro con brio
- Adagio
- Allegretto grazioso – Molto vivace
- Allegro ma non troppo

The symphony was written quite quickly by Dvořák in 1889, and perhaps shows the composer taking a strong stance toward individualizing himself as a Bohemian composer rather than a Germanic one, as the music publishers tried to image him as. A Bohemian background would have implied, at this time, a less-than polished sophistication. With this symphony, however, Dvořák presents elements clearly of a folk and pastoral nature, and does so in a manner which by no means diminishes the quality and sophistication of the work.

The opening movement begins with an expressive high cello line supported in rich colors by the clarinet, bassoon, and horns. A Bohemian "sound" - a distinct coloring and texture often using combinations of the cello, horn and clarinet voices appears throughout the symphony. Dvořák also adds a brief appearance, unusual for music at this time, of the English Horn near the end of the first movement. Its color and dusky hues offer a sense of remembrance and looking back. The use of these instruments is perhaps the special Dvořák flavor which creates the frequent sense of being close to nature and a slight feel of melancholy.

Personally, when hearing this work I've always pictured a scene of sitting on a pier along a lake enclosed by a tall forest. On a fading summer's eve, a grandfatherly relative is telling stories of his life, some tales fill with nostalgic, some glow with joy and sunshine, and some are obviously spun with sly exaggeration.

The second movement especially, seems to evoke a conversation, one that begins with a young person asking the grandfather "What was it like…?" First the elder relative just repeats the question to himself: What was it like? What was it like? Then after gathering the threads of distant memory, he enfolds a spectacular adventure filled with joy, bravery, and sadness; laughter bursts out here and there, a bird call interrupts; eventually the vision fades.

The third movement opens with a graceful waltz of Viennese flavor which alternates with a more rustic dance version of the waltz pulse. The movement closes by tossing away both in favor of launching into a straight forward march-like tune.

Just as the tales spun by the elderly relative become more and more vivid and beg for questions and more information, the grandfather stops, claps his hands and says “Enough! Time for bed.” With that an energetic fanfare from the orchestra snaps us back to reality, a call to quickly return home for the night, taking with us a mind and ear full of vibrant impressions.