

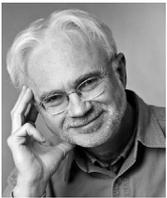
notes

April 18/19

ROMAN RETURNS: DVOŘÁK *CELLO CONCERTO*

by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

30 SECOND NOTES: Politics, history and art are entwined in John Adams' 1985 opera *Nixon in China*, which includes a foxtrot performed by Chairman and Madam Mao Zedong. Dvořák was inspired to compose his *Cello Concerto* after hearing the performance of a similar work by Victor Herbert (*the* Victor Herbert of operetta fame) at a New York Philharmonic concert in March 1894, during his three-year residency in America. The program closes with Sibelius' *Symphony No. 2*, which is one of his most ardently nationalistic works and which also helped to establish his international reputation. 🎵



JOHN ADAMS

Born February 15, 1947
in Worcester,
Massachusetts

***THE CHAIRMAN DANCES* (FOXTROT FOR ORCHESTRA) (1986)**

- First performed on January 31, 1986 by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra with Lukas Foss conducting.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on October 14, 1989 with Joseph Giunta conducting in his concert debut as Music Director & Conductor of the Des Moines Symphony.
(Duration: c. 12 minutes)

John Adams is one of today's most acclaimed composers. Audiences have responded enthusiastically to his music, and he enjoys a success not seen by an American composer since the zenith of Aaron Copland's career: a recent survey of major orchestras conducted by

the League of American Orchestras found John Adams to be the most frequently performed living American composer. He received the Pulitzer Prize for *On the Transmigration of Souls*, written for the New York Philharmonic in commemoration of the first anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks and was also recognized by New York's Lincoln Center with a two-month retrospective of his work titled "John Adams: An American Master," the most extensive festival devoted to a living composer ever mounted at Lincoln Center. From 2003 to 2007, Adams held the Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall, and he has been granted honorary doctorates by The Juilliard School and Cambridge, Harvard, Yale and Northwestern universities.

The Chairman Dances (Foxtrot for Orchestra), written in 1985 on joint commission from the American Composers Orchestra and the National Endowment for the Arts, is a by-product of Adams' opera *Nixon in China*, premiered in Houston in October 1987. The opera, explained Michael Steinberg in his liner

notes for the recording of *The Chairman Dances* on Nonesuch Records, is “neither comic nor strictly historical though it contains elements of both. It is set in three days of President Nixon’s visit to Beijing in February 1972, one act for each day. The single scene of the third act takes place in the Great Hall of the People, where there is yet another exhausting banquet, this one hosted by the Americans.”

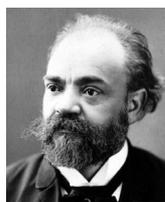
The preface to the score gives the following description of *The Chairman Dances*: “Madame Mao, alias Jiang Ching, has gatecrashed the Presidential banquet. She is seen standing first where she is most in the way of the waiters. After a few minutes, she brings out a box of paper lanterns and hangs them around the hall, then strips down to a cheongsam, skin-tight from neck to ankle, and slit up to the hip. She signals the orchestra to play and begins to dance herself. Mao is becoming excited. He steps down from his portrait on the wall and they begin to foxtrot together. They are back in Yenan, the night is warm, they are dancing to the gramophone ...

“Act Three, in which both reminiscing couples, the Nixons and the Maos, find themselves contrasting the vitality and optimism of youth with their present condition of age and power, is full of shadows; Jiang Ching’s and Mao’s foxtrot in the opera is therefore more melancholy than the orchestral *The Chairman Dances*. This is, uninhibitedly, a cabaret number, an entertainment and a funny piece; as the Chairman and the former actress turned Deputy Head of the Cultural Revolution make their long trip back through time they turn into Fred and Ginger. The chugging music we first hear is associated with Mao; the seductive swaying-hips melody — *La Valse* translated across immense distances — is Jiang Ching’s. You might imagine the piano part at the end being played by Richard Nixon.”

The score calls for two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, tuba, timpani, bell tree, castanets, claves, crotales, cymbals (crash, hi-hat, suspended and suspended sizzle), pedal bass drum, snare drum, glockenspiel, sandpaper blocks, tambourine, triangle, vibraphone, wood blocks, xylophone, piano, harp and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.

Joseph Giunta’s suggested recording:

San Francisco Symphony; Edo de Waart, conducting — Elektra/Nonesuch.



**ANTONÍN
DVOŘÁK**

**Born September 8, 1841
in Nelahozeves, Bohemia;
died May 1, 1904 in
Prague**

CELLO CONCERTO IN B MINOR, OP. 104 (1896)

- First performed on March 19, 1896 by the Philharmonic Society of London and soloist Leo Stern, with the composer conducting.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on January 11, 1959 with Leonard Rose as soloist and Frank Noyes conducting. Subsequent performances occurred in 1967, 1974, 1980 and most recently on September 27, 2004 with Yo-Yo Ma as soloist and Joseph Giunta conducting. (*Duration: c. 38 minutes*)

During the three years that Dvořák was teaching and composing in New York City, he was subject to the same emotions as most other travelers away from home for a long time: invigoration and homesickness. America served to stir his creative

energies, and during his stay from 1892 to 1895 he composed some of his greatest scores: the “*New World*” *Symphony*, the *Op. 96 Quartet* (“*American*”) and the *Cello Concerto*. He was keenly aware of the new musical experiences to be discovered in the land far from his beloved Bohemia when he wrote, “The musician must prick up his ears for music. When he walks he should listen to every whistling boy, every street singer or organ grinder. I myself am often so fascinated by these people that I can scarcely tear myself away.” But he missed his home and, while he was composing the *Cello Concerto*, looked eagerly forward to returning. He opened his heart in a letter to a friend in Prague: “Now I am finishing the finale of the *Cello Concerto*. If I could work as free from cares as at Vysoká [site of his country home], it would have been finished long ago. Oh, if only I were in Vysoká again!”

The *Concerto*'s opening movement is in sonata form, with both themes presented by the orchestra before the entry of the soloist. The first theme is heard immediately in the clarinets. “One of the most beautiful melodies ever composed for the horn” is how the esteemed English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey described the second subject. Otakar Sourek, the composer's biographer, described the second movement as a “hymn of deepest spirituality and amazing beauty.” It is in three-part (A–B–A) form. The *Finale* is a rondo of dance-like nature. Following the second reprise of the theme, a slow section recalls both the first theme of the opening movement and a melody from the *Adagio*.

The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in pairs plus piccolo, three horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle and the usual strings.

Joseph Giunta's suggested recordings:
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Jiri Belohlavek,

conducting; Alisa Weilerstein, cello — Decca.
Berlin Philharmonic; Herbert von Karajan,
conducting; Mstislav Rostropovich, cello —
Deutsche Grammophon.



JEAN SIBELIUS

**Born December 8, 1865 in
Hämeenlinna, Finland;
died September 20, 1957
in Järveenvää, Finland**

SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR, OP. 43 (1902)

- First performed by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra on March 8, 1902, with the composer conducting.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on May 8, 1949 with Frank Noyes conducting. Subsequent performances occurred in 1969, 1984 and most recently on December 9 & 10, 1989 with Leif Bjaland conducting.
(Duration: c. 46 minutes)

At the turn of the 20th century, two pressing concerns were foremost in the thoughts of Jean Sibelius — his country and his compositions. His homeland, Finland, was experiencing a surge of nationalistic pride that called for independence and recognition after eight centuries of domination by Sweden and Russia. In the 1890s, when Sibelius was still in his twenties, he was drawn into a group called “The Symposium,” a coterie of young Helsinki intellectuals who championed the cause of Finnish nationalism. The group's interest in native legends, music, art and language incited in the young composer a deep feeling for his homeland that blossomed in such early works as *En Saga*, *Kullervo*, *Karelia and Finlandia*. The ardent patriotism of those stirring musical testaments earned Sibelius a hero's reputation among his countrymen.

In 1900, the conductor Robert Kajanus led the Helsinki Philharmonic through Europe to the Paris Exhibition on a tour whose purpose was less artistic recognition than a bid for international sympathy for Finnish political autonomy. As Sibelius' music figured prominently in the tour repertory, he was asked to join the entourage as assistant to Kajanus. The tour was a success: for the orchestra and its conductor, for Finland, and especially for Sibelius, whose works it brought to a wider audience than ever before.

Through a financial subscription raised by Axel Carpelan, Sibelius was able to spend the early months of 1901 in Italy away from the rigors of the Scandinavian winter. So inspired was he by the culture, history and beauty of the sunny south (as had been Goethe and Brahms) that he envisioned a work based on *Dante's Divine Comedy*. However, a *Second Symphony* to follow the *First* of 1899 was gestating, and the Dante work was eventually abandoned. Sibelius was well launched on the new *Symphony* by the time he left for home. He made two important stops before returning to Finland. The first was at Prague, where he met Dvořák and was impressed with the famous musician's humility and friendliness. The second stop was at the June Music Festival in Heidelberg, where the enthusiastic reception given to his compositions enhanced the budding European reputation that he had achieved during the Helsinki Philharmonic tour of the preceding year. Still flush with the success of this 1901 tour when he arrived home, he decided he was secure enough financially to devote himself full-time to composition. So successful was the premiere of the work on March 8, 1902 in Helsinki that it had to be repeated at three successive concerts in a short time to satisfy the clamor for further performances.

The *Second Symphony* opens with an introduction in which the strings present a chordal motive that courses through and unifies much of the first movement. A bright, folk-like strain for the woodwinds and a hymnal response from the horns constitute the opening theme. The second theme exhibits one of Sibelius' most characteristic constructions — a long-held note that intensifies to a quick rhythmic flourish. This theme and a complementary one of angular leaps and unsettled tonality close the exposition and figure prominently in the ensuing development. A stentorian brass chorale closes this section and leads to the recapitulation, a compressed restatement of the earlier themes. The second movement, *Tempo Andante*, though closely related to sonatina form (sonata without development), is best heard as a series of dramatic paragraphs whose strengths lie not just in their individual qualities but also in their powerful juxtapositions. The *Vivacissimo* third movement is a three-part form whose lyrical, unhurried central trio, built on a repeated note theme, provides a strong contrast to the mercurial surrounding scherzo. The slow music of the trio returns as a bridge to the sonata-form closing *Finale*, which has a grand sweep and uplifting spirituality that make it one of the last unadulterated flowerings of the great Romantic tradition.

The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and the usual strings.

Joseph Giunta's suggested recordings:

Boston Symphony Orchestra; Colin Davis, conducting — Philips. Philharmonia Orchestra; Herbert von Karajan, conducting — EMI. Philadelphia Orchestra; Eugene Ormandy, conducting — Sony.