

notes

May 13/14

SEASON FINALE: AMERICAN GOTHIC AND BOLERO

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

30 SECOND NOTES: The Des Moines Symphony's 2016-2017 Masterworks season closes with a brilliant display of orchestral color. Paul Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis*, which includes one of the repertory's most stirring marches, is based on themes by the eminent early-19th-century composer Carl Maria von Weber. Maurice Ravel transformed a traditional Spanish dance type into a scintillating orchestral showpiece with *Boléro*. Cedar Rapids native and three-time Grammy Award-winner Michael Daugherty rooted his *American Gothic* in the art of celebrated Iowa painter Grant Wood; and the Des Moines Symphony has commissioned new cinematography to accompany this musical evocation of the renowned artist's life and work. Rounding off the concert is Camille Saint-Saëns' melodic *Cello Concerto No. 1*.



PAUL HINDEMITH

**Born November 16, 1895
in Hanau, near Frankfurt;
died December 28, 1963
in Frankfurt.**

SYMPHONIC METAMORPHOSIS ON THEMES OF CARL MARIA VON WEBER (1944)

- First performed on January 24, 1944 by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Artur Rodzinski.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on February 23, 1969 with Robert Gutter conducting. Subsequently performed in 1977 and most recently on May 9 & 10, 1992 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

(Duration: ca. 18 minutes)

Hindemith first explored the idea of using Weber's themes in 1940, when he was planning a ballet in collaboration with the legendary choreographer

Leonide Massine. Hindemith sketched out some ideas based on Weber's music, but Massine found them "too personal," and the composer himself had misgivings about the project when he found out that Salvador Dali would be designing the production. Dali, it seems, had been responsible for a staging for Massine of the *Bacchanale* from Wagner's *Tannhäuser* filled with "a series of weird hallucinatory images" that Hindemith felt were "quite simply stupid." By mutual consent, composer and choreographer abandoned the plan. Practical musician that he was, however, Hindemith did not let the work done on the ballet come to nothing. Perhaps prodded by his publisher, B. Schott, who was looking for a composition that would appeal to the prevailing American taste for colorful orchestral showpieces, he again took up the sketches in 1943 and gave them final form as the *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes of Carl Maria von Weber*.

The first movement is based on the fourth

of Weber's *Huit pièces for Piano Duet, Op. 60*. Vigorous and straightforward, the music preserves the Gypsy spirit of the original, marked "All' Ongarese."

The second *Metamorphosis* is a scherzo using a melody from the overture Weber contributed to the incidental music for Schiller's play *Turandot*. Just as Schiller's drama was an adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's 18th-century play (which was also the source for operas by Puccini and Busoni), so Weber borrowed his theme from an earlier source, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1767 *Dictionnaire de musique*. Rousseau in turn got it from a noted Sinologist, Father Jean Baptiste Duhalde, who brought it back as a souvenir of his travels in China. In Hindemith's *Metamorphosis*, the melody is first given simply in moderate tempo by the woodwinds. There follows a series of variations that gradually build in intensity until the entire orchestra is summoned to provide a brilliant climax. The movement's central section is an orchestral greeting card in which all the instrumental choirs are introduced with consummate contrapuntal mastery. First the brasses come to call, and then the woodwinds. Shimmering percussion instruments arrive, and soon all of the orchestra takes up the *Turandot* theme again for the closing variations. Last to be heard are the tinkles and taps of the percussion, which spread an atmospheric Oriental tonal mist over the closing pages of the movement.

The haunting theme of the third movement, an arrangement of a gentle *siciliano* from Weber's *Six Pièces for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 10, No. 2*, is first sung by clarinet. The central section is marked by a simple, lyrical strain from cellos and clarinets played against an undulating accompaniment. The opening theme returns, decorated with elaborate arabesques in the flute. The vibrant closing movement, derived from *No. 7* of Weber's *Huit pièces, Op. 60*, is one of the most stirring marches in the orchestral repertoire.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, tam-tam, tom-tom, woodblock, snare drum, field drum, bass drum, glockenspiel, chimes, and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.



MICHAEL DAUGHERTY

Born April 28, 1954 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

AMERICAN GOTHIC FOR ORCHESTRA (2013)

- First performed on May 4, 2013 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa by Orchestra Iowa, conducted by Timothy Hankewich.
- These concerts mark the first performances of this piece by the Des Moines Symphony and the premiere of the accompanying cinematography by Bocce Ball Studios which was commissioned by the Des Moines Symphony.

(Duration: ca. 22 minutes)

Michael Daugherty, Professor of Composition at the University of Michigan since 1991, earned his Baccalaureate at North Texas State University and his Master's Degree from the Manhattan School of Music, and spent the following year on a Fulbright Fellowship studying at IRCAM in Paris. From 1980 to 1982, he continued his professional training at Yale while collaborating with jazz arranger Gil Evans in New York; he received his Doctorate from Yale in 1984. György Ligeti invited Daugherty to study with him in Hamburg, Germany from 1982 to 1984, during

which time Daugherty developed his distinctive compositional language, which fuses elements of jazz, rock, popular and contemporary music with the techniques of traditional classical idioms. Daugherty has received honors from the NEA, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, BMI, Tanglewood and ASCAP, two awards from the Friedheim Competition at Kennedy Center, and three Grammy Awards.

Daugherty wrote that *American Gothic*, commissioned by Orchestra Iowa and premiered on May 4, 2013 in Cedar Rapids under the direction of Timothy Hankewich, “is a contemporary musical reflection on the creative world of Iowa artist Grant Wood (1891-1942). Composed in memory of my father, Willis Daugherty (1929-2011), the music also reflects on the years I grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

“I first became aware of Grant Wood when I was a ten-year-old boy enrolled in art classes at the old Cedar Rapids Public Library (now the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art). My father was a fan of Grant Wood’s regionalist art. He was a tour guide at the Grant Wood Studio, and he displayed reproductions of *American Gothic* (1930) along with *Stone City* (1930) at his home.

“In 2012, I returned to Cedar Rapids to revisit the small towns of eastern Iowa. I drove along the back roads and farms where my father grew up, and where Grant Wood found inspiration for the people and places captured in his art. All the while, I was collecting musical ideas and mental images to create an emotional framework for my *American Gothic*.

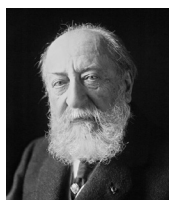
“**I. On a Roll.** The first movement features a rollicking melody with colorful orchestration, suggesting the vivid colors and dynamic curves of Grant Wood’s paintings of rural Iowa. Just as Grant Wood simplified elements of the Iowa landscape into a precisely placed compositional design, I have created an abstract musical pattern. Like the modernist geometric patterns

imposed on rolling hills in Wood’s *Young Corn* (1931) and *Spring Turning* (1936), the music rolls along in a continuously ascending and descending melody that moves from one instrument to the other, from tuba to string *pizzicato*. The percussion crackles like the sound of the corn growing in row after row on a hot summer day.

“**II. Winter Dreams.** The second movement is inspired by the bleak winter scenes of rural Iowa depicted in Grant Wood’s black and white lithographs of the 1930s, such as *January* and *February*. The violins play a haunting melody in harmonics and the cellos respond with a melancholy countermelody, evoking a cold winter wind whistling down the valley. The title of this movement harkens back to the poet Jay Sigmund (1885-1937). As a close friend of Grant Wood, Sigmund was instrumental in persuading Wood to turn his attention from France back to Iowa for artistic inspiration. In a poem entitled *Grant Wood*, Sigmund describes how “*time found a new son/dreaming on the plain.*”

“**III. Pitchfork.** The title of the third movement refers to the pitchfork gripped by the dour farmer who stands alongside his spinster daughter in Grant Wood’s painting *American Gothic*. Many have speculated on the hidden meanings of this American masterpiece: is it an homage to the farmers of Iowa? a social satire? a political critique? a private joke? For me, this iconic painting reveals the ambiguities of American culture and Grant Wood’s dry wit. After all, the painter was a founding member of the infamous Grant Wood Garlic Club in Cedar Rapids and a practical joker, like my father. For this movement, I composed playful, toe-tapping music. A quirky melody played by the woodwinds is punctuated by spiky chords in the brass section and bluegrass riffs in the string section. Like the gothic window in the background of Grant Wood’s painting, this movement is a window into my contemporary musical vision of *American Gothic*.”

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, piccolo snare drum, suspended cymbal, chimes, sleigh bells, triangle, tambourine, washboard, vibraslap, anvil, 4 wood blocks, maraca, castanets, vibraphone, marimba, crash cymbals, glockenspiel, xylophone, finger cymbals, mark tree, crotales, bell tree, 4 glass bottles, slapstick, bass drum, harp, piano and the usual strings.



CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

**Born October 9, 1835 in Paris;
died December 16, 1921 in Algiers.**

CELLO CONCERTO NO. 1 IN A MINOR, OP. 33 (1873)

- First performed on January 19, 1873 at the Paris Conservatoire, with Auguste Tolbecque as soloist.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on October 20, 1968 with Robert Gutter conducting and Zara Nelsova as soloist. Subsequently performed in 1976 and most recently on January 23 & 24, 1988 with Joseph Giunta conducting and Nathaniel Rosen as soloist.

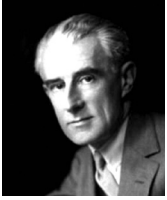
(Duration: ca. 19 minutes)

Much of the history of 19th-century music could be written in the terms of Beethoven's influence. Beside exploding the emotional and expressive boundaries of earlier music, Beethoven also bequeathed the composers who followed a whole arsenal of technical weapons with which to do battle against those devilishly recalcitrant

musical notes: rich harmonies, complex textures, expanded instrumental resources, vibrant rhythmic constructions. Not the least of his compositional legacies was the process of total musical structure. His symphonies were created as great single spans of tightly integrated music rather than as four separate movements, as had been the models he inherited. He accomplished this structural unity in two ways. One was by connecting movements directly together, as in the closing two movements of the *Fifth Symphony* and the last three of the *Sixth*. The other was by recalling themes from earlier movements during the unfolding of the piece.

Most of the important Romantic composers followed the lead of Beethoven in finding such integrated structures for at least some of their large, symphonic works. Saint-Saëns' *Third Symphony*, *Fourth Piano Concerto*, *First Violin Concerto* and this *A Minor Cello Concerto* all exhibit carefully integrated formal structures. The *Cello Concerto* is in a single movement. It begins with an impetuous theme in rushing triplets for the soloist that recurs throughout the piece; the cello presents a contrasting, lyrical second subject. The vibrant motion of the opening theme soon returns and encourages the entire ensemble to join in a developmental discussion. The lyrical theme is heard again, this time as a transition to the *Concerto's* central portion, a slow movement with the spirit of a delicate minuet. This mood is broken by a resumption of the rushing triplet theme acting as a link to the *Concerto's* last large division. After a brief pause, the finale-like section begins with the cellist's introduction of a gently syncopated theme. The music builds on this theme, and adds another in the cello's sonorous, low register. One final time, the rushing triplet theme returns, to mark the beginning of the coda and launch the *Concerto* on its invigorating dash to the end.

The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and the usual strings.



MAURICE RAVEL

**Born March 7, 1875 in
Ciboure, France;
died December 28, 1937
in Paris.**

BOLÉRO (1928)

- First performed on November 20, 1928 at the Paris Opéra, conducted by Walter Straram.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on April 10 & 11, 1976 with Yuri Krasnapolsky conducting. Five subsequent performances occurred, most recently on December 31, 2014 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

(Duration: ca. 16 minutes)

Ravel originated what he once called his “*danse lascive*” at the suggestion of Ida Rubinstein, the famed ballerina who also inspired works from Debussy, Honegger and Stravinsky. Rubinstein’s balletic interpretation of *Boléro*, set in a rustic Spanish tavern, portrayed a voluptuous dancer whose stomps and whirls atop a table incite the men in the bar to mounting fervor. With growing

intensity, they join in her dance until, in a brilliant *coup de théâtre*, knives are drawn and violence flares on stage at the moment near the end where the music modulates, breathtakingly, from the key of C to the key of E. Ravel wrote, “*Boléro* consists wholly of ‘orchestral tissue without music’ — one long, very gradual crescendo. There are no contrasts, there is practically no invention except the plan and the manner of execution. The themes are altogether impersonal ... folktones of the usual Spanish-Arabian kind, and (whatever may have been said to the contrary) the orchestral writing is simple and straightforward throughout, without the slightest attempt at virtuosity.” This “simple” piece has become one of the best known works in all the symphonic repertoire, used by many other artists in a variety of mediums. To play it effectively requires a virtuoso orchestra and dynamic musical leadership.

The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, oboe d’amore (alto oboe), English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three saxophones, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, tam-tam, snare drum, bass drum, celesta, harp and the usual strings.