

# notes

March 14/15

**CARMINA BURANA**

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda

**30 SECOND NOTES:** Ludwig van Beethoven's fondness for a certain rough fun and practical jokes found expression in his *Symphony No. 8*, composed when he was 42. Beethoven himself called it "unbuttoned," and the eminent English musicologist Sir George Grove believed that "he will be found here in his most natural and characteristic personality." Richard Wagner, though not known for his tenderness, was devoted to his family, and he composed the *Siegfried Idyll* as a surprise birthday gift for his wife, Cosima. *Carmina Burana* is Carl Orff's musical fresco of a Medieval world of youth, joy, love ... and fate. 🎵



## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

**Born December 16, 1770  
in Bonn;  
died March 26, 1827 in  
Vienna.**

### SYMPHONY NO. 8 IN F MAJOR, OP. 93

- First performed on February 27, 1814 in Vienna, conducted by the composer.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on March 13, 1960 with Frank Noyes conducting. Seven subsequent performances occurred, most recently on May 1 & 2, 2004 with Joseph Giunta conducting.  
(Duration: ca. 28 minutes)

In early October 1812, the *Linzer Musikzeitung* carried the following announcement: "We have had the long-wished-for pleasure of having in our metropolis for several days the Orpheus and greatest musical poet of our time...." This "Orpheus" was Ludwig van Beethoven, and he had descended on Linz as the last stop in a

summer spent taking the waters at Karlsbad, Franzensbrunn and Töplitz in an attempt to relieve various physical ailments. His interest in Linz, however, extended beyond the mineral baths into the private life of his younger brother, Johann. It seems that Johann had acquired a housekeeper, one Therese Obermeyer, and that her duties extended to, as the composer's biographer Thayer put it, "something more." Perhaps as much from jealousy as from moral indignation, the bachelor Beethoven did not approve of either the situation or this particular female (he later dubbed her "Queen of the Night"), and he took it upon himself, Thayer continued, "to meddle in the private concerns of his brother, which he had no more right to do than any stranger." He stirred up a terrific row over this matter, and, after taking his concern to the local authorities, actually was awarded a decision to have Therese thrown out of town. Johann had had about enough by this time, and the upshot of all of Ludwig's intrusions was that his younger brother married the housekeeper after all.

Beethoven had been installed in an

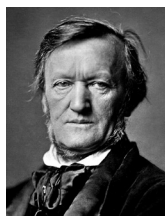
attractive room in Johann's house overlooking the Danube and the surrounding countryside upon his arrival, and he worked on the *Eighth Symphony* throughout all this unnecessary domestic kerfuffle. Not the slightest hint of the turmoil crept into the music, however. It is actually the most humorous and “unbuttoned,” in the composer's own description, of all his symphonies. At that time in his life (he was 42), Beethoven was immensely fond of a certain rough fun and practical jokes, and Sir George Grove believed that “the *Eighth Symphony*, perhaps more than any other of the nine, is a portrait of the author in his daily life, in his habit as he lived; the more it is studied and heard, the more will he be found there in his most natural and characteristic personality.” Certainly this work presents a different view of Beethoven than do its immediate neighbors, and it is this very contrast that helps to bring the man and his creations more fully into focus.

The compact sonata form of the opening movement begins without preamble. The opening theme (F major), dance-like if a bit heavy-footed, appears immediately in vigorous triple meter. The second theme, built on short sequentially rising figures, enters in the surprising tonality of D major, but quickly rights itself into the expected key of C major. The closing group consists of a strong two-beat figure alternating with a swaying, legato line for the woodwinds. The development is concerned with a quick, octave-skip motive and a rather stormy treatment of the main theme. This central section ends with one of the longest passages of sustained *fortissimo* in the entire Classical literature to herald the recapitulation with a great wave of sound. The long coda comes close to being a second development section in its mood and thematic manipulation.

The second movement is a sonatina — a sonata form without a development section —

based on a ticking theme in the woodwinds (actually an imitation of the metronome recently invented by Beethoven's friend Johann Nepomuk Mälzel) and an impeccable music-box melody presented by the violins. The third movement abandons the scherzo of Beethoven's other symphonies and returns to the archaic dance form of the minuet; its central trio features horns and clarinets over an arpeggiated accompaniment in the cellos. The length of the finale almost equals that of the preceding three movements combined, and it carries significant importance in the work's total structure because of the diminutive size of the internal movements. In mood it is joyous, almost boisterous; in form, it is sonata-allegro, with enough repetitions of the main theme thrown in to bring it close to a rondo. The extensive coda actually occupies more time than the development and maintains the Symphony's bustling energy and high spirits to the end.

**The score calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, timpani, and the usual strings consisting of first violins, second violins, violas, violoncellos and double basses.**



## **RICHARD WAGNER**

**Born May 22, 1813 in Leipzig;  
died February 13, 1883 in Venice.**

### **SIEGFRIED IDYLL**

- First performed on Christmas Day 1870 at Tribschen, the Wagner home near Lucerne, conducted by the composer.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on October 12, 1974 with Yuri Krasnapolsky

conducting. Three subsequent performances occurred; most recently, on December 10 & 11, 1994 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

(Duration: ca. 19 minutes)

It was Cosima, Wagner's wife, who started the family tradition of celebrating birthdays with a bit of *Hausmusik* when she had her husband awakened on his birthday in 1869 (May 22nd) by a musician blasting Siegfried's horn call outside his bedroom door at dawn. The following year Cosima assembled a military band of 55 players in the grounds of Tribschen, their house near Lucerne, to serenade her husband with his own *Huldigungsmarsch* ("Homage March"). To return the kindness, Wagner wrote a chamber orchestra piece during November 1870 as a surprise for Cosima's birthday, celebrated since her childhood on Christmas, a day after the actual date. He gave the score to the young Hans Richter, who was to be the first music director of Wagner's Bayreuth Festival, who copied out the parts, traveled to Zurich to engage musicians, and arranged rehearsals for December 11th and 21st in that city. (Cosima was a bit unsettled by her husband's unexplained absences on those dates, but kept her peace.) The musicians arrived at Lucerne early on Christmas Eve, when Wagner held a final rehearsal in the Hôtel du Lac. The next morning, a Sunday, the small band of fifteen musicians — four violins, two violas (one played by Richter, who also handled the few trumpet measures in the last pages), cello, bass, flute, oboe, bassoon and pairs of clarinets and horns — tuned in the kitchen, quietly set up their music stands on the narrow staircase leading to Cosima's bedroom, with Wagner on the top landing, and began their music at exactly 7:30.

"I can give you no idea, my children, about that day, nor about my feelings," Cosima wrote in the diary she left for her family. "As I awoke, my ear caught a sound, which swelled fuller and

fuller; no longer could I imagine myself to be dreaming: music was sounding, and such music! When it died away, Richard came into my room with the children and offered me the score of the symphonic birthday poem. I was in tears, but so were all the rest of the household." The new piece was played twice again that day, separated by a performance of Beethoven's *Sextet*. The "Tribschen Idyll" remained strictly a family affair until the financial distress caused by Wagner's extravagant life style forced him to give it a public performance, at Meiningen on March 10, 1877, and sell the score for publication a year later, when it was titled *Siegfried Idyll*. "My secret treasure has become everybody's property," Cosima lamented.

Wagner incorporated into this orchestral lullaby the German children's song *Schlaf, mein Kind* ("Sleep, My Child"), some newly composed strains and two motives from the opera *Siegfried*, to which he was applying the finishing touches at the end of 1870.

**The score calls for flute, oboe, two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, trumpet and the usual strings.**



## CARL ORFF

**Born July 10, 1895 in Munich;  
died March 29, 1982 in Munich.**

## CARMINA BURANA

- First performed on December 8, 1937 at the Frankfurt Opera House, conducted by Bertil Wetzelsberger.
- First performed by the Des Moines Symphony on May 18, 1969 with Robert Gutter conducting. Two subsequent performances occurred, most

recently on April 13 & 14, 2013 with Joseph Giunta conducting.

(Duration: ca. 60 minutes)

About thirty miles south of Munich in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps is the abbey of Benediktbeuren. In 1803, a 13th-century codex was discovered among its holdings that contains some 200 secular poems which give a vivid, earthy portrait of medieval life. Many of these poems — attacking the defects of the Church, satirizing contemporary manners and morals, criticizing the omnipotence of money, and praising the sensual joys of food, drink and physical love — were written by an amorphous band known as “Goliards.” These wandering scholars and ecclesiastics, who were often esteemed teachers and recipients of courtly patronage, filled their worldly verses with images of self-indulgence that were probably as much literary convention as biographical fact. The language they used was a heady mixture of Latin, old German and old French. Some paleographic musical notation appended to a few of the poems indicates that they were sung, but it is today so obscure as to be indecipherable. This manuscript was published in 1847 by Johann Andreas Schmeller under the title *Carmina Burana* (“Songs of Beuren”), “*carmina*” being the plural of the Latin word for song, “*carmen*.”

Carl Orff encountered these lusty lyrics for the first time in the 1930s. He was immediately struck by their theatrical potential and chose 24 poems from the *Carmina Burana* as the basis for a new work. Since the 13th-century music for them was unknown, all of their settings are original with him. Orff’s *Carmina Burana* is disposed in three large sections with prologue and epilogue. The three principal divisions — *Primo Vere* (“Springtime”), *In Taberna* (“In the Tavern”) and *Cour d’Amours* (“Court of Love”) —

— sing the libidinous songs of youth, joy and love. However, the prologue and epilogue (using the same verses and music) that frame these pleasurable accounts warn against unbridled enjoyment. “The wheel of fortune turns; dishonored I fall from grace and another is raised on high,” caution the words of *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi* (“Fortune, Empress of the World”), the chorus that stands like pillars of eternal verity at the entrance and exit of this Medieval world. They are the ancient poet’s reminder that mortality is the human lot, that the turning of the same Wheel of Fortune that brings sensual pleasure may also grind that joy to dust. It is this bald juxtaposition of antitheses — the most rustic human pleasures with the sternest of cosmic admonitions — coupled with Orff’s elemental musical idiom that gives *Carmina Burana* its dynamic theatricality.

The work opens with the chorus *Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*, depicting the terrible revolution of the Wheel of Fate through a powerful repeated rhythmic figure that grows inexorably to a stunning climax. After a brief morality tale (*Fortune plango vulnere* — “*I lament the wounds that fortune deals*”), the *Springtime* section begins. Its songs and dances are filled with the sylvan brightness and optimistic expectancy appropriate to the annual rebirth of the earth and the spirit. The next section, *In Taberna* (“*In the Tavern*”), is given over wholly to the men’s voices. Along with a hearty drinking song are heard two satirical stories: *Olim lacus colueram* (“*Once in lakes I made my home*”) — one of the most fiendishly difficult pieces in the tenor repertory — and *Ego sum abbas Cucaniensis* (“*I am the abbot of Cucany*”). The third division, *Cour d’Amours* (“*Court of Love*”), leaves far behind the rowdy revels of the tavern to enter a refined world of sensual pleasure. The music is limpid, gentle and enticing, and marks the first appearance of

the soprano soloist. The lovers' urgent entreaties grow in ardor, with insistent encouragement from the chorus, until submission is won in the most rapturous moment in the score, *Dulcissime* ("Sweetest Boy"). The grand paeon to the loving couple (*Blanzifor et Helena*) is cut short by the intervention of imperious fate, as the opening chorus (*Fortuna*), like the turning of the great wheel, comes around once again to close this mighty work.

**The score calls for two piccolos, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, glockenspiel, xylophone, chimes, tambourine, triangle, castanets, ratchet, sleigh bells, tam-tam, celesta, two pianos and the usual strings.**