

Program Notes

by A. Robert Johnson

Octet in F, Op. 166, D. 803 Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)
for clarinet, horn, bassoon, 2 violins, viola, 'cello and
contrabass

The *Octet* was written in February 1824, on commission for Ferdinand, Count Troyer, a clarinetist belonging to the circle of musical friends of Archduke Rudolph of Austria. He specified that it be modeled on Beethoven's *Septet* of 1800, for the same instruments (except for the *Septet's* use of only one violin). The *Septet* had become immediately popular, to the point of Beethoven saying he wished "it had been burnt," as it seemed to define the public taste of the time to the exclusion of his far more profound utterances. The *Octet* too was immediately popular, but not for long. Upon Schubert's death four years later his entire oeuvre was shelved until publishing began by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1894.

The form employed here was developed much earlier by Haydn and consummated by Mozart – that of the "divertimento" or social music. Haydn probably first encountered the idea from one of the Bach sons, Christian. In 1759 Haydn composed a *Divertimento* in E-flat, Hob.II;21, for strings with two horns, a work of about 20 minutes' duration. By the time Mozart composed *Divertimento No. 10*, in F, K. 247 (1776), for two violins, viola, cello/bass and two horns the genre was becoming compelling to its patrons. Two capital works of the strings/two horns orchestration preceding Beethoven's *Septet* are Mozart's *Divertimento No. 15* in B-flat, K. 287 (1777), and *Divertimento No. 17* in D, K. 334 (1778). (You can confirm the beauties of all four for yourself very easily via the NY Philomusica Records catalogue, to which this performance of Schubert's *Octet* will be immediately added.) One footnote regarding the form

and the relative length of pieces written in it: Haydn's were short, 10 to 20 minutes, usually five movements; Mozart varied his, but became expansive – up to 50 minutes, and ~~by Robert Johnson~~ playing around with the form, as in his *Serenade in D*, Op. 8, for string trio, came up with about 35 minutes. Schubert's *Octet*, using the same seven movements, brings it to its longest span – nearly 60 minutes. It is his penchant for long melodic lines that decides the length, not the form. Most listeners are happy about this particular gift, perhaps reflecting a desire for a bit more leisure in the pace of life. Could it be the rhythm of people's hearts just as the machine age was dawning?

Artist Biographies

Joseph Rabbai, *clarinet*, was Principal Clarinet in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra for 23 years until his retirement in 2003. Since 1971 he was the Principal Clarinet of the Mozart Festival Orchestra and of the New York City Opera before his tenure began at the Met. He was a founding member of NY Philomusica, performing on many of its recordings and the first recording by an American ensemble of Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, now available in its catalogue.

A. Robert Johnson, *horn*, is founder and artistic director of NY Philomusica. He played for seven years, beginning in 1962, in the NY Philharmonic. He played in the Broadway show field while freelancing and maintaining his primary interest since its founding in 1971, the NY Philomusica.

John Miller, *bassoon*, has a long history with New York Philomusica. Even though employed in other cities, mostly in the Minnesota Orchestra as Principal Bassoon, he has traveled to New York to record and perform with us on many occasions, beginning as far back as 1979. He is heard

playing on the Mozart opera arrangements of Johann Nepomuk Wendt in the two-CD set of *Serenades* offered on the NY Philomusica Records label. His trip this time is being partially underwritten by The Fox Bassoon Company, maker of the instrument he favors and plays on this program.

Katharina Grossman, *violin*, moved to New York in 2001 from her native Germany. She was a member of the European Union Youth Orchestra and has, since arriving in the U.S., been playing with the Orchestra of St. Luke`s, the St. Luke`s Chamber Ensemble, Sonyc, N.Y. Collegium, Concert Royal and The Rebel Baroque Orchestra.

Adela Peña, *violin*, is returning for the first time after long association with the Eroica Trio, with whom she recorded on EMI Classics and performed internationally. She performs as well with Orpheus and has played a prominent role in several recordings on our label.

Junah Chung, *viola*, has held the post of Assistant Principal Viola of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, performed with the Minnesota Orchestra, Nieuw Sinfonietta of Amsterdam and the Jupiter Symphony. He returns to our stage after an absence of two seasons.

Gerald K. Appleman, *'cello*, was principal in The Cleveland Orchestra before joining the NY Philharmonic as Assistant Principal from which he resigned in 2005 after 32 years. He was a founding member of NY Philomusica and is on several of the Mozart divertimento recordings as well as CD #19, the live recording of our October 5, 2006 program.

Gail Kruvand, *contrabass*, joined NY Philomusica in the mid-seventies. She is Assistant Principal Bass in the NY City Opera Orchestra.

Our next two programs tie together the music you will have heard on the first concerts, centering on the brilliance of contemporaries of every era, including our own. We survey

influences from Couperin through Bartók and on to Berkeley, as in Michael Berkeley, our current Featured Composer. He is the gentleman whose music most intrigued our audiences beginning in 2000 when we first programmed him. He won over a very large number of people in a wide ranging exposure of excellent composers who were being held up for comparison, not just against each other`s work, but against that of the established masters on our programs. The performers are every bit as brilliant, including our friend Andrew Clark on horn and Katrina Russell, bassoon, visiting us again from the United Kingdom. We`ll have some recent publicity about them on our Website soon: www.nyphilomusica.org For a fillip to those among you who think I am entirely too opinionated about the music of others, I am offering you a piece for two pianos composed by me! Good luck to us all.