

# program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

## **Sinfonietta No. 1 in B-flat major, “A Memoria de Mozart” (1916)**

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS ■ 1887-1959

Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil's greatest composer, had little formal training. He learned the cello from his father and earned a living as a young man playing with popular bands, from which he derived much of his musical background. From his earliest years, Villa-Lobos was enthralled with the indigenous songs and dances of his native land, and he made several trips into the Brazilian interior to study the local music and ceremonies. Beginning with his earliest works, around 1910, his music shows the influence of the melodies, rhythms and sonorities he discovered. Villa-Lobos began to compose prolifically, and, though often ridiculed for his daring new style by other Brazilian musicians, he attracted the attention of the pianist Artur Schnabel, who helped him receive a Brazilian government grant in 1923 that enabled him to spend several years in Paris, where his international reputation was established. Upon his permanent return to Rio de Janeiro in 1930, Villa-Lobos became an important figure in public musical education, urging the cultivation of Brazilian songs and dances in the schools. He made his first visit to the United States in 1944, and spent the remaining years of his life traveling in America and Europe to conduct and promote his own works and those of other Brazilian composers. Villa-Lobos summarized his creative philosophy in an interview with *New York Times* critic

Olin Downes by saying that he did not think of music as “culture, or education, or even as a device for quieting the nerves, but as something more potent, mystical and profound in its effect. Music has the power to communicate, to heal, to ennoble, when it is made part of man's life and consciousness.”

Villa-Lobos claimed that his Sinfonietta No. 1 was written “A Memoria de Mozart” and that he based it on two unspecified themes from that master's music — one, he said, “delicate and subtle suggests the European aristocratic elegance of the 18th century”; the other, “violent, deep and mysterious presents the characteristics of German genius.” He went on to say that the intent of the work was to “describe the conflict between culture, represented by the scholastic prejudices and rules, and the temperament of the free, spontaneous artist, independent of any theory.” Little of this philosophizing comes across in the music, however, which is buoyant and melodious and almost untouched by the Brazilian influences that Villa-Lobos was then absorbing into his compositions. With its largely diatonic melodic and harmonic idiom, its regular rhythms and its facile expression, the Sinfonietta's tribute to Mozart is in gesture rather than in emotional content. The first movement is based on two thematic ideas: a sprightly motive of repeated notes and fast scale fragments, and a long, lyrical melody initiated by the oboes. The *Andante* is framed at beginning and end by a somber chorale, with the center of the movement taking as its

themes a flowing, steadily paced melody and a wistful, arching strain, both presented by the flute. The finale opens with another serious chorale, this one for brass, but it increasingly refers to the motive of repeated notes and fast scale fragments that opened the Sinfonietta before closing with a spirited coda based on both of the first movement's themes.

## **Fantasia for Saxophone, Three Horns and Strings (1948)**

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS

When Villa-Lobos was in Paris in the 1920s, he met and performed several concerts with Marcel Mule, the pioneering French saxophonist who helped establish a place and a repertory for his instrument in the classical realm. Villa-Lobos was encouraged by that encounter to include saxophone in several of his works, and in 1948 he composed a Fantasia for the instrument accompanied by three horns and strings that he dedicated to Mule. Mule, however, was unable to interest any conductors in doing the work and never performed it, so the privilege of the premiere went to Villa-Lobos' friend Waldemar Szilman, the Polish-born Brazilian saxophonist who played that instrument in several dance bands in town as well as clarinet in the Orquestra Sinfônica Brasileira; they introduced the Fantasia at the Auditorium of the Ministry of Education and Culture in Rio de Janeiro on November 17, 1951. (Waldemar's cousin Władysław Szpilman was the subject of Roman Polanski's 2002 Oscar-winning film *The Pianist*.) The Fantasia's opening *Animé* takes two complementary themes as its thematic materials, one a darting, disjunct strain with a jazzy swing quality, the other a subtle tango, which coexist amiably throughout the movement,

often embellished with wide-ranging arabesques. The solo viola introduces the subject of the second movement, which the soloist expands into a languid nocturne that hints of the exotic Brazilian rain forests Villa-Lobos evoked in many of his works. The determinedly energetic, three-part finale uses a circling, mixed-meter melody in its outer sections and a smoothed-out variant of that same theme in its central episode.

## **Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55, "Eroica" (1803-1804)**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN ■ 1770-1827

The "Eroica" ("Heroic") is a work that changed the course of music history. There was much sentiment at the turn of the 19th century that the expressive and technical possibilities of the symphonic genre had been exhausted by Haydn, Mozart, C.P.E. Bach and their contemporaries. It was Beethoven, and specifically this majestic Symphony, that threw wide the gates on the unprecedented artistic vistas that were to be explored for the rest of the century. For the first time, with this music, the master composer was recognized as an individual responding to a higher calling. After Beethoven, the composer became regarded as a visionary — a special being lifted above mundane experience — who could guide benighted listeners to loftier planes of existence through his valued gifts. The modern conception of an artist — what he is, his place in society, what he can do for those who experience his work — stems from Beethoven. Romanticism began with the "Eroica."

The Symphony's first movement, by far the largest sonata design composed to that time, opens with a brief summons of two mighty chords. At least four themat-

ic ideas are presented in the exposition, and one of the wonders of the Symphony is the way in which Beethoven made these melodies succeed each other in a seemingly inevitable manner, as though this music could have been composed in no other way. The development section is a massive essay progressing through many moods which are all united by an almost titanic sense of struggle. It is in this central portion of the movement and in the lengthy coda that Beethoven broke through the boundaries of the 18th-century symphony to create a work not only longer in duration but also more profound in meaning.

The beginning of the second movement — *Marcia funebre* (“*Funeral March*”) — with its plaintive, simple themes intoned over a mock drum-roll in the basses, is the touchstone for the expression of tragedy in instrumental music. A development-like section, full of remarkable contrapuntal complexities, is followed by a return of the simple opening threnody.

The third movement is a lusty scherzo; the central section is a rousing trio for horns. The finale is a large set of variations on two themes, one of which (the first one heard) forms the bass line to the other. The second theme, introduced by the oboe, also appears in the finale of Beethoven’s ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Contradanse No. 7 and Variations and Fugue, Op. 35. The variations accumulate energy, and, just as it seems the movement is whirling toward its final climax, the music comes to a full stop before launching into an *Andante* section that explores first the tender and then the majestic possibilities of the themes. A brilliant *Presto* led by the horns concludes this epochal work.

# ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

OCTOBER 15 AND 16, 2016  
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

**DIANE M. WITTRY** MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Sinfonietta No. 1 in B-flat major, HEITOR VILLAS-LOBOS  
“A Memoria de Mozart”  
Allegro giusto  
Andante non troppo  
Andantino — Molto allegro

Fantasia for Saxophone, Three Horns HEITOR VILLAS-LOBOS  
and Strings  
Animé  
Lent —  
Très animé  
Saxophone Soloist: Branford Marsalis

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
Op. 55, “Eroica”  
Allegro con brio  
Marcia funèbre: Adagio assai  
Scherzo: Allegro vivace  
Finale: Allegro molto