COMMENTS

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
Born March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Thuringia.
Died July 28, 1750, Leipzig.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG
Born September 13, 1874, Vienna.
Died July 13, 1951, Brentwood, California.

Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 552, St. Anne’s
(Arranged for orchestra by Arnold Schoenberg)

The score calls for pairs of flutes, piccolos, oboes, English horns, clarinets, E-flat clarinets, bass clarinets, bassoons, and contrabassoons; four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, triangle, xylophone, glockenspiel, celesta, harp, and strings. The work lasts approximately sixteen minutes.

The first Chicago Symphony performance was given under the composer’s baton on February 8 and 9, 1934. It was also played under Erich Leinsdorf on May 30, 31, and June 2, 1985.

ALBAN BERG was the first to draw the parallel between his teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, and Johann Sebastian Bach—two great composers who, through nothing less than genius, overcame their difficult fate of living at a time of enormous artistic transition. Perhaps Schoenberg took solace in the knowledge that history finally accorded Bach a wide audience, even though for many years his music was listened to very little.

By 1930, the year of Berg’s essay “Credo,” Schoenberg recognized how few musicians understood that his own radical musical language was bound and dictated by a tradition that extended back to Bach. The following year, in an unpublished essay, Schoenberg insisted that his “teachers were primarily Bach and Mozart, and secondarily Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner.” Berg believed the connection so strong he dared to work music by Bach into the ending of his own Violin Concerto—the work that follows on this program—as if to prove their compatibility.

Mozart, one of the masters of the very style that rendered Bach obsolete, was perhaps the first great composer to remember Bach’s music and to arrange it to suit his own purposes—and his own time. In the nineteenth century, particularly after Mendelssohn sparked renewed interest, many composers arranged Bach’s music. Liszt and Brahms rewrote Bach for the piano, bringing the music alive for audiences who would have been unmoved by a claim of authentic performance. The early twentieth century tended to work in the other direction, translating keyboard music for modern symphony orchestra. (Leopold Stokowski’s version of the organ Toccata and Fugue in D minor for Disney’s Fantasia was the best known.) The effect, in either century, was the same: Bach’s music reached a wider audience, though in an arrangement that told us more about the arranger than about Bach.

Schoenberg, like Bach in fact, was an expert and practiced arranger of other composers’ music. Early in his career he made his living scoring some 6,000 pages of operettas; later, as an established composer, he orchestrated songs by Beethoven and Schubert. In 1922 he made full orchestral arrangements of two choral preludes by Bach. Six years later—the same year he wrote the landmark Variations for Orchestra—he turned to the great Prelude and Fugue in

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E-flat major, the one known as St. Anne's after the subject of its fugue. Bach designed this monumental prelude and fugue to frame a liturgical sequence of chorale preludes he published in 1739 as part 3 of his Clavierübung. The fugue is based on the hymn tune known as St. Anne's (and often associated with the words "O God our help in ages past"). It is in three sec-

tions, the second and third adding yet new material in combination with the theme. Schoenberg's orchestration was done between May and October 1928. It honors the notes of Bach's manuscript, and assigns them, with brilliant imagination and a surpassing concern for clarity, to an enormous orchestra that Bach can not have imagined. No doubt Schoenberg took pleasure in seeing his and Bach's names on the same page, separated by no more than a hyphen. (He once thanked Robert Craft, who programmed both composers, for putting him "in the neighborhood of Bach.")

When Schoenberg conducted the Chicago Symphony in February 1934, he closed the concert with this Prelude and Fugue. He also led his Five Pieces for Orchestra and Verklärte Nacht. Though the Five Pieces provoked the kind of troubled response Schoenberg was accustomed to by 1934, the Bach was hailed by the Chicago press as a "masterpiece of transcription," and Schoenberg himself was warmly applauded by audience and orchestra members alike, and given an enthusiastic fanfare by the musicians he directed.

ALBAN BERG
Born February 9, 1885, Vienna.
Died December 24, 1935, Vienna.

Violin Concerto
First performed April 19, 1936, Barcelona. The orchestra consists of two flutes and two piccolos, two oboes and English horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, alto saxophone, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, tenor and bass trombone, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, snare drum, tam-tam, gong, triangle, and strings. The work lasts approximately twenty-five minutes.

The first Chicago Symphony performance was given February 9, 1939, under the baton of Frederick Stock; the soloist was Louis Krasner, who commissioned the concerto and gave the world premiere performance. It has since been played by Arthur Grumiaux (under Rafael Kubelik and Irwin Hoffman), Christian Ferras (Jean Martinon), Yehudi Menuhin (Sixten Ehrling), Leonid Kogan (Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt), Samuel Magad (Sir Georg Solti), Gidon Kremer (Varujan Kojian), Kyung Wha Chung (Solti), Pinchas Zukerman (Claudio Abbado), and Salvatore Accardo (Claudio Abbado), who gave the most recent performance, on May 4, 1985.

ALL WORKS OF MUSIC balance, in vastly different ways, the public and private concerns of the composer. It is often irrelevant, even though tempting, to contemplate how a composer’s private life may have shaped a piece of music. Occasionally composers leave clues, some in broad daylight. Schumann’s works are full of references to his wife Clara and others—their names or initials plainly visible. Elgar depicted his life, including Variations, though he himself has remained somewhat of a British puzzle, the riddle at times tantalizing and the clues often governed by "numbers," or rather children, or to lines in poetry from a special, though secret, infant. We have since learned that the Concerto presents a projected kaleidoscope of private lives. The child was distinguished one. With Alma Mahler, his death—and followings—Oskar Kokoschka—architect Walter Gropius, 1916, Berg wrote to her he had spent the evening at home. He played her his new songs, and, after some of his songs, he had stayed too long. Six weeks later, he was born. Two years later, Gropius, and in 1926, novelist Franz Werfel—Fuchs-Robettin's boyfriend.

In April 1934 Moya was stricken with polio and went to the hospital. Alma was devoted to her; she called her "nobody could see her. She was the most beautiful in every sense. She could do anything.

I have no divine capacity for power to express an Alban Berg had more romantic relationship, in-law, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin's boyfriend.

In January 1935, the violinist named Louis had entered the scene, overwhelmed by a performance in New York and later...