



Colonel Jason K. Fettig, Director

MARINE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Sunday, January 28, 2018 at 2:00 P.M.
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center
Northern Virginia Community College
Alexandria Campus
Major Michelle A. Rakers, conducting

Grieg's Piano Concerto and his Leipzig Influence

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Ruy Blas Overture, Opus 95

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16

Allegro molto moderato

Adagio

Allegro moderato molto e marcato

SSgt Christopher Schmitt, soloist

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Opus 120

Ziemlich langsam; Lebhaft

Romanze: Ziemlich langsam

Scherzo: Lebhaft

Langsam; Lebhaft

The U.S. Marine Band will perform Sunday, February 4 at 2:00 P.M. in the Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center at Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus. The program will include works by Bernstein, Williams, and Flaherty.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Ruy Blas Overture, Opus 95

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

Considered by many to be the greatest child prodigy since Mozart, Felix Mendelssohn had already composed some of his most well-known works before age eighteen. Born in Hamburg, Germany, he was the son of the successful banker Abraham Mendelssohn and the grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. His sister Fanny was also a talented pianist and composer, but since it was frowned upon for a woman to pursue a career in music, she remained an amateur musician and published some of her early music under her brother's name.

Mendelssohn began taking piano lessons from his mother at age six before studying with French piano teacher Marie Bigot. His most influential teacher was Carl Friedrich Zelter, with whom he began his studies in 1817. Zelter introduced him to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who became a dear friend and tremendous influence on his composing. Mendelssohn's early compositional successes included the Octet for strings, written in 1825, and the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, composed in 1826. Also deeply influenced by the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Mendelssohn was largely responsible for the revival of Bach's music after it had fallen into near obscurity. When he was only twenty, Mendelssohn arranged and conducted a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in Berlin, the first performance of this work since Bach's death in 1750. Mendelssohn was appointed conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1835 and eventually founded the Leipzig Conservatory. He suffered from poor health toward the end of his life and died in 1847 after a series of strokes.

Ruy Blas is a romantic tragedy by playwright Victor Hugo about an ordinary young man who rises to great political power and later sacrifices himself to save the queen's life. The Leipzig Theatrical Pension Fund commissioned Mendelssohn to write an overture and a song for an 1839 performance of Hugo's play in Germany. Mendelssohn wrote the song, but did not bother with the overture. The Leipzig Fund thanked him for the song and expressed regret that he had not managed to produce the overture. Mendelssohn apparently took this as a challenge and finished an overture in three days. According to W. A. Chislett, he "succeeded admirably in depicting in music the mixture of chicanery, burning ambition, and love, which are the principal ingredients of Hugo's drama."

Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

A leading Scandinavian composer of his generation, Edvard Grieg began his musical education rather modestly with piano lessons from his mother. When he was fifteen years old, the Norwegian violinist Ole Bull visited the Grieg family and heard Edvard play. Impressed with the young Grieg's talent, Bull convinced his parents to send him to the Leipzig Conservatory. He studied at the conservatory from 1858 to 1862, and his final piano teacher there, Ernst Ferdinand Wenzel, was a close friend of both Mendelssohn and Schumann and fostered in Grieg a tremendous appreciation for the music of Schumann in particular. While Grieg ultimately did not speak fondly of his experience at the conservatory, there is little doubt that his experiences in the cultural center of Leipzig and his exposure to public concerts at the Gewandhaus concert hall played a role in his musical development. In fact, it was there that he saw Clara Schumann's performance of her husband's Piano Concerto, an occasion that he referred to for many years as a deeply affecting musical experience. Grieg was denied a government stipend to return to the Leipzig Conservatory in 1863, so he continued his training in Copenhagen under the tutelage of Niels Gade, who incidentally was also a friend of Mendelssohn and Schumann and continued to instill in Grieg an appreciation for those German traditions. Grieg eventually returned to his homeland where, through his friendship with Bull, he developed an interest in Norwegian folk music. Another influential colleague was the composer Rikard Nordraak, who inspired Grieg to find his nationalistic voice and to develop a distinctively Norwegian style, influenced by Norwegian melody. Grieg stated, "From Nordraak I learned for the first time what the Norwegian folk song was, and learned to know my own nature."

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the composition Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor (1868), with the première occurring in Copenhagen the following year. The piece is often compared to Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto as it is in the same key, has a similar dramatic opening, and is comparable in overall style. Grieg's Norwegian voice can be heard in the very opening statement of the piece: the figure of a descending minor second followed by a descending major third is typical of folk music in Norway. Furthermore, the third movement's theme is influenced by the Norwegian *halling* dance. The concerto was immediately popular and launched Grieg into the international spotlight. It remains a staple in the piano repertoire.

Staff Sergeant Christopher Schmitt, piano soloist

Piano player Christopher Schmitt of Fairfax Station, Virginia, joined "The President's Own" United States Marine Band in August 2013. Staff Sgt. Schmitt began his musical training on the piano at age five and graduated from the Seton School in Manassas, Virginia, in 2004. He attended the New England Conservatory (NEC) in Boston before transferring to The Juilliard School in New York where he earned a bachelor's degree in performance in 2009 and a master's degree in performance in 2011. He is currently working on a doctorate in performance from Juilliard as well. His teachers included Marjorie Lee of Virginia, the late Patricia Zander of NEC, and Julian Martin of Juilliard. Prior to joining the band, Staff Sgt. Schmitt taught privately and gave master classes in New York and in the Northern Virginia area.

Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Opus 120

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

A defining moment in Robert Schumann's life was hearing the young prodigy Clara Wieck playing the piano, which led him to seek out Clara's father, Friederich Wieck, for piano lessons. Although Friederich had believed that Schumann would become the greatest pianist in all of Europe, a hand injury forced him into composition instead. In addition to composing, Schumann established himself as a leading writer on music through his co-founding of the publication *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Journal of Music*), a music journal that continues today.

By the time Clara turned fifteen, she and Schumann had begun an affair against her father's wishes. After much feuding, including a legal battle between the two parties that was ultimately won by the couple, they were able to marry in 1840. Under these happier circumstances the composer began what has been referred to as his "Symphony Year." With some urging from his new wife to delve into the symphonic form, Schumann wrote two symphonies in 1841, his Symphony No. 1 in B-flat (*Spring*), and the first version of what later became his Symphony No. 4 in D minor (*Clara Symphony*). The latter was premièred that same year under the direction of the composer, but it was said to have been a disaster due to limited rehearsal time, musicians unable to adjust to Schumann's writing style, and his less-than-stellar conducting technique. Schumann shelved the piece and did not return to it for another ten years. However, after extensive revisions in 1851, the second version of the Symphony No. 4 was performed in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1853, to glowing reception. The main differences between the two versions were primarily in the orchestration, the 1851 version having a thicker texture with more voices doubled among the winds and strings.

The revised symphony would be Schumann's last. Not long after completing the revision he attempted suicide by jumping into the Rhine river. However, he was pulled out of the river by fishermen and later committed himself to a sanatorium, afraid that he might hurt his wife. He remained at that institution near Bonn until his death in 1856. After Schumann's death, Johannes Brahms published the 1841 version of the symphony in 1890, against Clara's wishes, believing the original version to be the better of the two. However, the 1851 version was endorsed by her and is more frequently performed to this day.