

Program Notes

Musica Ignota

Ingrid Stozel (1971)

PROGRAM NOTE: The famous Rhineland mystic, nun, healer and composer, Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) hardly needs an introduction. Recent popular and scholarly discoveries of her music as well as correspondences and writings on natural healing have made her famous to the public at large. Her extraordinary achievements, all the more astonishing considering the burden of being a woman in a medieval monastic world, have made her something of an international cult figure. My composition *Musica Ignota* draws inspiration from Hildegard's music as well as her lesser-known invented language system entitled *Lingua Ignota* (Latin for "unknown language"). To write in this imaginary language, she used an alphabet of 23 letters and created a glossary of over 1000 beautiful, unknown words, presumably intended as a universal language for mystical purposes. The opening to the glossary in the *Wiesbaden Riesencodex* disarmingly states that *Lingua Ignota* is "an unknown language brought forward by the simple human being Hildegard (*Ignota lingua per simplicem hominem Hildegardem prolata*)." Having grown up in the Rhineland myself, I have long been fascinated by Hildegard von Bingen and it is my hope that the "unknown music" brought forth in my composition *Musica Ignota*, serves to honor her life and work. The orchestral version of "*Musica Ignota*" was commissioned by the Topeka Symphony Orchestra - Kyle Wiley Pickett, Music Director and Conductor.

Konzertstück for Bassoon and Orchestra in F major Franz Adolf Berwald (1796 - 1868)

Swedish composer Franz Berwald is often remembered as a visionary ahead of his time. Though he was not recognized during his lifetime, his music combines Classical structure with early Romantic expressiveness and a distinctly individual voice. A trained violinist and respected orthopedic surgeon, Berwald's diverse career mirrored the unconventional path his music would follow, full of wit, originality, and bold character. The *Konzertstück*

for Bassoon and Orchestra, composed in 1827, is a rare gem in the bassoon repertoire. Unlike traditional concertos, the one-movement structure unfolds in contrasting sections that blend lyrical passages with brilliant technical demands. The bassoon sings with an operatic warmth in its melodic lines, then turns agile and spirited with rapid articulation and dynamic leaps. Berwald explores the instrument's full expressive range, from lyrical sweetness to comic virtuosity, all framed within vibrant orchestration that supports without overshadowing. The work remains a delightful showcase for the bassoon's versatility and Berwald's imaginative voice.

Violin Concerto No. 4 in D Major, K. 218 – I. Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Composed in 1775 during his tenure at the Salzburg court, Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4 reflects the elegance and poise of the Classical style, combined with the charm and wit characteristic of his early works. Though written when he was just 19, the concerto displays remarkable sophistication and balance between the soloist and the orchestra. The Allegro movement opens with a dignified orchestral introduction, presenting themes that the solo violin later reinterprets with grace and expressive nuance. The writing is conversational, with playful exchanges between the soloist and the ensemble. Lyrical passages are contrasted with rapid arpeggios, light staccato figures, and delicate ornamentation, all demanding refined articulation and stylistic sensitivity. Mozart's use of elegant phrasing and unexpected harmonic shifts gives this movement a subtle drama beneath its polished surface.

Scheherazade, Op. 35 (1888)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

There are few orchestral works as vividly imaginative—and downright cinematic—as *Scheherazade*. Composed in 1888 by the Russian master orchestrator Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, this dazzling suite is inspired by the *One Thousand and One Nights*, the legendary collection of Middle Eastern folk tales. But don't expect a straightforward

retelling of Aladdin or Sinbad. Rimsky-Korsakov wasn't aiming for literal storytelling—this is storytelling through sound, full of color, drama, and mystery.

The piece begins with a dark, foreboding theme in the low brass, representing the stern Sultan who has vowed to marry and execute a new bride each day—until he meets Scheherazade. Her theme, introduced by a solo violin, is delicate, winding, and impossibly alluring. It weaves in and out of the entire work, binding the four movements together like the stories she spins to survive.

Each movement unfolds like a chapter from her endless tales—epic sea voyages, romantic escapades, heroic battles—all painted with brilliant orchestral textures. Rimsky-Korsakov, who once served as a naval officer, channels the rhythm of the waves, the shimmer of exotic lands, and the pulse of suspense with astonishing clarity. You don't just hear *Scheherazade*; you see it, feel it.

The final movement brings the story full circle, ending not with bombast, but with a soft return to the solo violin's voice. Scheherazade has won the Sultan's heart—not with force, but with imagination, intellect, and music. In many ways, this is Rimsky-Korsakov's love letter to the power of storytelling itself.