

Montgomery Philharmonic 2017 - 18 Our 12th Season : Old Friends ... New Friends

Concert 1, Sunday, October 29, 2017 : Old Friends ... New Friends

Dvořák | Berwald | Elgar

About Franz Berwald –

Franz Adolf Berwald dipped his toe into composition from time to time throughout his life and was known as a cantankerous fellow. Other professions that interested him were orthopedic surgery, bioengineering, and factories – glass and a sawmill. These diverse interests, combined with his personality, resulted in his not being well known or appreciated as a composer during his lifetime.

Berwald was born into a musical family with four generations of musicians. His father, a violinist with the Royal Opera Orchestra of Sweden, taught him to play the violin at an early age, and Berwald appeared in concerts in his early teens. During the summer, Berwald traveled with his family to Finland and Russia. On these holiday trips, he started to compose. At age 22, he began to publish easy piano pieces in the *Musikalisk journal*, later renamed *Journal de musique*. In 1821, his brother, August, premiered his *Violin Concerto*. It was not well received and Berwald was humiliated when some people in the audience burst out laughing during the slow movement.

When his father passed away in 1825, leaving his family in dire financial circumstances, Berwald moved to Berlin to study composition on scholarship. He stayed in Berlin after finishing his studies because he had some family there who could take care of him. It was during this time that he stopped composing. Berwald also studied medicine, and in 1835 he started an orthopedic and physiotherapy clinic in Berlin. His biomedical advances were revolutionary and some of the devices that he developed were still in use decades after his death.

In 1841, Berwald moved to Vienna and restarted his composition career. It was in Vienna that he married Mathilde Scherer. His compositions began to receive more favorable reviews in the Viennese press and while in Vienna, he wrote the four symphonies that survive today. From correspondence, we know that he wrote other symphonies, but those composed before 1820 have been lost or destroyed. Of these four symphonies, *Symphony No. 1*, “*Sérieuse*,” was the only symphony that was performed during his lifetime. Ten years after Berwald’s death, in 1914, his *Symphony No. 4 in E-flat major*, “*Naïve*,” was premiered. *Symphony No. 2 in D major*, “*Capricieuse*,” was premiered in 1914 and *Symphony No. 3*, “*Singulière*,” was premiered in 1905.

Berwald moved to Sweden in 1842, only to find out that his music was still not widely accepted. These failed performances persuaded him to travel to Paris. While in Paris, there were no performances of his music, so he moved back to Vienna. Once again, he found an appreciative audience for his opera *A Swedish Country Betrothal*.

It has often been said that Franz Berwald’s music was ahead of its time and that he had great imagination and originality. His ideas were unconventional for the time and didn’t follow the norms for forms. Finally, when Berwald was in his sixties, his opera *Estrella di Soria* was performed and earlier instrumental works began to appear in print. He was accepted into the Swedish Academy and made a professor of composition in 1867. Sadly, Berwald died of pneumonia the following year.

- **Born:** July 23, 1796, Stockholm, Sweden
- **Died:** April 3, 1868, Stockholm, Sweden
- **Nationality:** Swedish
- **Compositions:** 4 Symphonies, 5 Symphonies Concertante, 7 tone poems, 15 chamber works, 6 stage works (mostly operetta), 6 vocal works, 1 work for band
- **Father:** violinist in the Royal Opera Orchestra
- **Spouse:** Mathilde Scherer

Symphony No. 3 (1845) – “Singulière” – Franz Berwald (1796–1868)

The *Symphony No. 3* consists of three movements – Allegro fuocoso in C major, Adagio – Scherzo (Allegro assai) – Adagio in G major, and Finale: Presto in C minor, ending in C major. It is interesting to note that the work was not premiered until 37 years after the death of Franz Berwald.

One of the most unusual aspects of this symphony is the form. There are only three movements and the traditional scherzo is embedded in the second movement sandwiched in between two beautiful adagio sections. This scherzo is kicked off by a rather surprising bang from the timpani as if to wake up the audience like Haydn had done with the *Surprise Symphony*.

In the first movement, themes used throughout the symphony are short motifs and these short motifs are clearly laid out to create the undulating pulse of the first movement of the symphony. He passes this undulating theme from the strings to the woodwinds to build the theme only to give the line back to strings for another pas at the opening theme, but this time really building so that the brass section can enter with an unusual rhythm and then taking the triplet rhythm from the string to make it their own. Again, Berwald gives a theme to the strings in a quiet fashion, but this time the entire orchestra takes up a repeated not rhythmic pattern and then the original them and secondary themes come back ending with the powerful repeated not rhythmic theme in a strong accelerando. It sounds like the movement could end there, but here is where Berwald’s originality takes over and he develops the triplet theme and the flitting woodwind theme and builds it once again bringing in the bras with powerful chords. He recapitulates the movement with opening material, but once again, the movement sounds as if it about to finish, but then he quiets everything down almost to a halt, even with a grand pause, but he’s not finished yet. He needs to state the opening thing just one more time, but with a twist, this theme is played loudly by all in the orchestra.

The final movement is a powerful and dramatic movement in C minor. This was opposite of what composers did with finale movements at the time. For example, Beethoven wrote his *Symphony No. 3* in C minor, but ended the piece triumphantly with a C major final movement. Berwald has the orchestra play for a long time in C minor with great drama and strength. Again, like the first movement the woodwinds play occasional two, three, and four note flitting passages that embellish the musical line and add color to the fast moving movement. Finally, in the last minute of the movement, Berwald moves from C minor to C major, but it is not complete as he continues to move between C minor and C major until a last blast from the brass in C major and the C major scales in the woodwinds and strings.

Instrumentation – 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

<https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=8883> – Franz Berwald grave marker

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Berwald#/media/File:Franz_Berwald_Berlin_ubt.JPG – Marker of where Franz Berwald lived in Berlin.


1. Berwald: Sinfonie No. 4 (naïve), Sinfonie singulière (No. 3) - Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4 - Esa-Pekka Salonen, Radiosymfonikerna & Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra
2. Berwald: Overtures, Concertos & Symphonies - Royal Philharmonic Orchestra & Ulf Björlin
3. Berwald: Symphonies Nos. 1-4 - Sïxten Ehrling, Malmö Symphony Orchestra & Christian Davidsson

1. Berwald: 4 Symphonies
2. Schubert: Symphony No.4 "Tragic" / Berwald: Symphonies Nos.3 "Singulière" & 4
3. Franz Berwald

YouTube.com Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uuBn8aK4oOk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adVqpCKNz20&t=40s>