The Dvořák Serenade for Strings always makes me think of the freshness of spring time, with feelings of optimism and amiable associations. The key of E major helps to convey the buoyancy and energy I sense so strongly in this delightful work.

ERIC MCCRACKEN, NCS VIOLIN

Daphnis and Chloé is a work that flutists study and practice for years, always trying different nuances. It’s full of amazing colors and emotions, building up to, of course, THE BIG FLUTE SOLO!

ANNE WHALEY LANEY, NCS PRINCIPAL FLUTE

Serenade for Strings in E Major, Op. 22

ANTONÍN DVORÁK

BORN September 8, 1841, near Prague; died May 1, 1904, in Prague
PREMIERE Composed 1875; first performance December 10, 1876, in Prague, Adolf Čech conducting

OVERVIEW
Given his current stature as one of the foremost composers of the 19th century, Antonín Dvořák was something of a late bloomer, although not for want of musical talent and industry. Dvořák’s father was a butcher, and had expected his son to go into the family trade. Only after his uncle had agreed to finance the boy’s musical education was he able to follow his passion for music. Although trained as a church organist, Dvořák took his first job as principal viola in Prague’s new Provincial Theatre Orchestra. During this time, he practiced composition, producing songs, symphonies, and entire operas, but without recognition — much less appreciation — until he was in his 30s.

Already influenced by the nationalist Bohemian style of Bedřich Smetana, Dvořák met and became a disciple of Brahms in 1875. Vienna’s famous curmudgeon music critic, Eduard Hanslick, also encouraged the not-so-young composer and gave him prominent billing in his reviews. In the same year, Brahms and Hanslick also supported him when he entered and won the competition for the Austrian State Prize in music for young, poor, and talented musicians (Dvořák won the competition twice more). The committee report stated that “…the applicant, who has never yet been able to acquire a piano of his own, deserves a grant to ease his strained circumstances and free him from anxiety in his creative work.” Brahms and Hanslick also urged Dvořák to move to Vienna, but his love for his native Bohemia kept him in Prague.

Dvořák sensed condescension in the support and encouragement of the Austrian musical establishment and was resentful at being forced by economic necessity to accept government stipends. He nevertheless responded to this encouragement with a creative outpouring that included, in the course of a few months, the Symphony No. 5, the Piano Trio Op. 21, the Piano Quartet Op. 23, the Moravian
Duets Op. 20, and the Serenade for Strings. Like Smetana, Dvořák freely incorporated folk elements into his music, utilizing characteristic peasant rhythms and melodic motives although seldom actually quoting entire folk melodies.

The 19th-century serenade, true to its 18th-century origins, is less intense than a formal symphony, but this one sits on the fence between the two genres. Three of the five movements are expanded A–B–A structures, including the first, which one would have expected to be in sonata-allegro form. Nevertheless, the serenade does contain elements characteristic of more formal symphonic practices of the period: a slow movement that contrasts with the other four; a scherzo middle movement that, despite its title, does not completely conform to the scherzo/trio symphonic form. The finale, a combined rondo and sonata-allegro form, quotes the main theme of the opening movement, a unifying device common in many more weighty symphonies and chamber works of the period.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Strings*

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**Daphnis and Chloé**

**MAURICE RAVEL**

BORN March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, France; died December 28, 1937, in Paris

PREMIERE Composed 1909-1912; first performance June 8, 1912, at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, as part of the Ballets Russes, Pierre Monteux conducting

**OVERVIEW**

In the annals of classical composers, Maurice Ravel was in a lucky minority. Born into a cultured middle-class family, he is one of the few composers whose parents encouraged his professional musical ambitions from the start. From the age of seven, Ravel’s father provided him with the best private musical instruction; at 12, he went on to the preparatory school for the Paris Conservatory, graduating into the regular course of study at 14. In a surprisingly single-minded manner, the youthful Ravel marched to his own drummer as he developed his musical language. He could not — or would not — conform to the rigorous, and by then dated, traditions of the Conservatoire and was repeatedly beaten out for any of the composition prizes by composers who have remained almost completely unknown.

Ravel was always fascinated by the new and exotic in music, as well as by avant-garde developments in literature and painting. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising that throughout his career, while his older contemporary Debussy had abandoned tonality and other turn-of-the-century composers were stretching its harmonic boundaries, Ravel remained a conservative with regard to tonality, the linchpin of Western classical music. His conservatism, however, never prevented him from employing new, varied, and “unconventional” harmonic coloring over the fundamental tonal structure of his works.

In 1909, Paris was taken by storm by the performances of the Ballets Russes, under its innovative impresario Sergey Diaghilev. In the years before the “Great War,” Diaghilev had utilized the talents of the most progressive artists in all fields, including such luminaries as the multi-faceted Jean Cocteau, Pablo
Picasso, Claude Debussy, Eric Satie, and the rising young Russian musical star, Igor Stravinsky. Diaghilev commissioned Ravel to set to music a ballet whose scenario was the work of choreographer Michael Fokine. Based on a late Hellenistic pastoral tale by the Greek poet Longus, *Daphnis and Chloé* is a relatively simple love story in three scenes.

In the first scene, the lovers, Daphnis and Chloé, are each beset by petty jealousies during a festival in honor of the nymphs, devotees of the god Pan. Before the lovers can reconcile, they are attacked by a band of pirates who abduct Chloé. Daphnis finds her sandal and, together with the nymphs, invokes the aid of Pan. In scene two, Chloé is made to dance for the pirates when suddenly Pan appears and frightens them away. The final scene sees the reconciliation of the lovers as they reenact the story of Pan and the nymph Syrinx, who was transformed into a set of reed pipes. A dance of general rejoicing ends the ballet.

Fokine had envisioned his choreography without the distinct formal numbers of traditional ballet. Ravel obliged by creating a seamless symphonic poem that the traditionally trained dancers found difficult to follow. The work took him two years to complete, punctuated by periods of procrastination. Despite the fact that the roles of Daphnis and Chloé were danced by the world famous stars Anna Pavlova and Vaclav Nijinsky, the audience didn’t take to this new kind of ballet (Incidentally, this was the same audience that rioted the following year over Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.)

*Daphnis and Chloé* is a magnificent orchestral showpiece written for an ensemble enhanced by chorus (which is treated as part of the instrumental ensemble, but which is sometimes omitted in performance), along with expanded woodwind and percussion sections. It employs few themes, the most important of which is the one representing the lovers, heard throughout the work. Ravel’s ballet is an atmospheric work employing highly varied and subtle orchestral colors through different combinations of instruments.

**INSTRUMENTATION**

*Two piccolos, three flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, celeste, strings*