

Tafelmusik

Forces of Nature

An Earth Day Celebration

by **Julia Wedman**

As a city dweller, and general indoors-y person, I find it is difficult to connect with nature on a daily basis. Fortunately, as a member of Tafelmusik, I get to travel all over the world, and sometimes we run smack into nature. Capital N-A-T-U-R-E. Whether it is the Rocky Mountains in Banff, the seal-littered beaches of La Jolla, California, or the lush green forests in southern Germany, the beauty of our world jolts my senses into action and I feel like I can breathe for the first time in ages. All of a sudden I am invigorated and renewed, and my eyes almost hurt from the sensory overload.

There are people in this world who have a sixth sense for seeing what the rest of us mere mortals don't – people who spot a fawn hiding in the trees, who can capture the beauty of light falling on a building in a particular way with a photograph or painting, who can transform twelve notes into a sunrise. Whenever I am around people who notice things, I always feel inspired to look at my world more closely, to look at the light shining through the clouds, to listen for birdsong, and to remember that my world isn't just concrete, cars and computers. In this programme, I tried to find music and images that connect me to my own personal experiences with the earth, and remind me to “take notice.” Each piece on the programme recreates a strong characterization or emotional response that I have had to this world. I invite you to celebrate Earth Day 2010 with us, and reconnect with the beauty, the fun, the tenderness, and the balance between the strength and vulnerability of this amazing planet.

“The father of the symphony,” **Joseph Haydn**, wrote 106 symphonies. “**Le Matin**,” “**Le Midi**” and “**Le Soir**,” written in 1761, are among his first experiments in the genre, and are the first symphonies Haydn wrote for his patron, Prince Paul Anton Esterházy. It was the Prince himself who gave Haydn the idea to use the times of day as a springboard for his creativity. For these pieces Haydn uses a concerto-grosso style, with solo parts taken by different instruments in the orchestra, allowing him to show off the talents of his new 15-member orchestra, as well as his own compositional skills. The Esterházy Palace was one of

the grandest in Europe, with over 200 guest rooms, an art gallery, a theatre, and eventually an opera house. There was an immense garden in the style of Versailles surrounding the palace, with artificial waterfalls, ponds, grottos and beautiful trees. The partnership between Haydn and the Esterházy family is one of the great stories of artistic patronage, enabling Haydn's musical talents to flourish. At Esterházy he composed both instrumental and vocal music, conducted, played violin and harpsichord, trained the singers for the opera, took care of the musical instruments, was the librarian, and organized the musicians in his orchestra – a job that included settling disputes, and interceding on the musicians' behalf when they got in trouble with the Prince!

Jean-Philippe Rameau's operas provide a wealth of incredibly beautiful, innovative and descriptive music. *Les Indes galantes* (1735) was Rameau's first full-scale *opéra-ballet*: the four acts are titled "The Generous Turk," "The Incas of Peru" (complete with an erupting volcano scene), "The Flowers," and "The Savages of North America."

The Passepied from *Platée* (1745) is Rameau's portrait of frogs in a marsh. *Platée* was his first comic opera, written about an ugly yet vain water nymph who believes that Jupiter (the king of the Gods) is in love with her. It was composed for the wedding of King Louis XV's son to the Infanta Maria Theresa of Spain, who apparently was no great beauty herself. The opera features appearances by frogs (Platée even enters in Act III riding in a frog-drawn chariot!), donkeys, owls, cuckoos and other birds, and is littered with ingenious and entertaining instrumental and vocal effects.

Les Boréades (the descendents of Boreas, the god of the North Wind, 1763) is Rameau's final opera – he fell ill and died during the rehearsal period, and the performances were cancelled. This *tragédie-lyrique* features a hunting scene, a calm countryside, a violent storm, and many musical expressions of wind. Polymnia makes an appearance in Act IV. She was the muse of sacred hymns and eloquence and was believed to have invented the lyre. She is also known as the muse of geometry, meditation and agriculture, and is often portrayed by artists in a meditative, thoughtful posture.

Giovanni Battista Buonamente worked in Mantua as well as in Vienna and Assisi as a composer, violinist, choirmaster and singer. He was among the earliest composers to expand the violin's capabilities and introduce the "new violin style" north of the Alps. The **Sonata "sopra la cavaletto zoppo"** (the limping horse) is a variation sonata, a form that reached its peak of popularity in the 1630's. Like those of his contemporaries Salamone Rossi and Biagio Marini, Buonamente's variation sonatas are often based on well-known tunes and give the composer a chance to explore the new virtuosity of the violin.

Georg Philipp Telemann was one of the most prolific composers of all time, extremely famous in his own lifetime – even more renowned than his contemporary Johann Sebastian Bach. His most important posts were in Hamburg, Germany, as Cantor of the Johanneum Lateinschule, Musical Director of the city’s five main churches, and Director of the Opera.

“Ebbe und Fluth” (Ebb and Flow) is part of the *Wassermusik* orchestral suite composed by Telemann in 1723 for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Hamburg Admiralty. The movements describe the sea, or are named after marine mythological figures like Thetis, Neptune and the Naiads.

The *Alster Overture* was inspired by the activity on the banks of the Alster River, which runs through Hamburg, Germany. To this day the Alster River is famous for its swans, which have been taken care of by the city since the 17th century, much like the swans in Stratford, Ontario. Each winter the Alster swans are taken to an ice-free pond, and then returned to the river in the spring when the ice melts. Telemann, like Haydn after him, was a master at translating wit and humour into music – a particularly hilarious example is his depiction of “concertizing frogs and crows.”

Francesco Geminiani was born in Lucca, Italy and was a composer, virtuoso violinist and theorist who eventually settled in England. He was once fired from leading an orchestra in Naples because he had such a free sense of timing that none of the orchestra could follow his *tempo rubato*, resulting in confusion and uproar. Tartini called him “*il furibondo*” (the wild or furious one). *The Enchanted Forest* was commissioned from Geminiani by the architect and theatre director Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni, one of the most fascinating figures in late baroque French theatre. This staged pantomime, which premiered in Paris at the Tuileries in 1754, was full of the spectacular visual effects for which Servandoni was famous. The excerpt from Act I shows Geminiani’s lyrical style of writing, his creative orchestration, and his ability to change the character of the music very quickly.

The Italian violinist and composer **Antonio Vivaldi** wrote over 400 concertos for various instruments, most featuring the violin. His three-movement ritornello form became the template that all composers followed, even into the 20th century. His most well-known concertos are from *Il cimento dell’armonia e dell’inventione*, op. 8 (1725), a set of 12 violin concertos beginning with “The Four Seasons.” “**La tempesta di mare**” (Storm at sea) is the fifth in this collection, and although it is not as strictly programmatic as the “Seasons” (poetry does not accompany the music), it is written in the same highly descriptive, evocative manner.

Jan Dismas Zelenka was Czech but spent the majority of his career as a musician working in

Dresden. He was originally hired as a violone player in the court orchestra and eventually became a composer as well. Most of his compositional output was sacred vocal music, but he also wrote six **trio sonatas** which are characteristically original, with quirky rhythms and chromaticism, and display his mastery of counterpoint. The contrapuntal quality of the music inspired me to choose it to represent the urban environment – in this highly complex writing each part is independent of the others, and yet when intertwined, complement each other to create a complete machine-like structure.

For many people, including myself, the composer to turn to in moments of deepest despair is **Johann Sebastian Bach**. Somehow he understands sorrow in a way that isn't melodramatic or sentimental, but connects with us to the core of our souls. Bach wrote more **sarabandes** than any other dance type, including them in suites for solo flute, violin, cello, harpsichord and lute. The sarabande is one of the slowest and most expressive dances of the baroque era, described by the 17th-century English writer James Talbot as “a soft passionate movement ... apt to move the Passions and to disturb the tranquility of the Mind.” The five suites for solo cello were written while Bach was employed at the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. It was here that he wrote music of extreme instrumental virtuosity, including the solo sonatas for violin and the *Brandenburg Concertos*. Although his position at Cöthen was supported by the music-loving Prince, his tenure was tinged with sadness. In July of 1720, he returned from a trip to Carlsbad with the Prince to hear the shocking news that his first wife, Maria Barbara, had died.

“**All in a garden green**” is a song from the English publisher **John Playford**'s collection of songs called the *English Dancing Master*. Published in 1651, it is the largest single source of ballad airs. Many composers have been inspired by this tune, including the Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, who wrote a wonderful set of keyboard variations on the same tune under the title “Onder een linde groen” (Under the linden tree), and John Jenkins, who wrote a fantasia for viols.

Luigi Boccherini was one of the few virtuoso cellists who was also a successful composer. Born in Lucca, Italy, he concertized throughout Europe, and was employed as a composer, most importantly by the Spanish royal family. He was a prolific composer of chamber music, writing over 300 works for string quintet, quartet or other groupings. The **Notturmo** for two violins was composed in 1761 when he was only 18, thought to be written for concerts with his quartet of young Italian virtuosos: Manfredini, Nardini, Cambini and Boccherini himself. There were often solos and duos on the quartet's concerts, and the marking “La buona notte” over the violin parts signifies the last piece of the evening.