Luciano Berio
Born October 24, 1925, Oneglia, Italy.
Died May 27, 2003, Rome, Italy.

Quatre dédicaces:
Fanfara
Entrata
Festum
Encore

Berio composed these four pieces at different times and for different occasions. Fanfara was written in 1982 and first performed that year by the Orchestra della RAI di Roma; Entrata was composed in 1980 on a commission from the San Francisco Symphony and is dedicated to Edo de Waart; Festum, from 1989, was commissioned by the Dallas Symphony for the opening of Myerson Symphony Center; Encore, composed in 1978 and revised in 1981, was written for the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra on the occasion of its sixtieth anniversary. The orchestra for the four pieces consists of four flutes and two piccolos, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, alto and tenor saxophones, two bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, five trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, celesta, organ, and strings. Performance time for the four pieces is approximately twelve minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra gave its first performances of Berio’s Fanfara, Entrata, Festum, and Encore on January 31 and February 1 and 2, 2008.

We are just beginning to take stock of Luciano Berio’s large, multifaceted catalog of work. His obituaries identified him, above all, as the composer of Sinfonia, a spectacular, wildly influential work for voices and orchestra that is one of the genuine classics of twentieth-century music. The Chicago Symphony, which has performed Sinfonia several times over the years, commissioned Berio to compose a new work for the Orchestra’s centennial: Continuo was introduced here under Daniel Barenboim in January 1993. It was Berio’s homage to Chicago’s architectural heritage—and it also was influenced by the “airy yet solid constructions of Renzo Piano,” the visionary Italian architect who was known here by reputation only at the time, but whose Modern Wing for the Art Institute is now under construction just a block from Orchestra Hall.

Oddly, despite the vast size of Berio’s output—and a career that lasted more than fifty years—he wrote very little purely orchestral music. A few of those works, such as SOLO for trombone and orchestra, which was given its United States premiere by the Chicago Symphony in 2002 (with Christian Lindberg as soloist), are large and important pieces. But others, especially several smaller compositions written for specific occasions, are almost completely unknown.

Several years ago, Paul Roberts, who had been Berio’s assistant since 1989, was asked by the publishing house of Universal Editions to go through Berio’s extensive catalog with the composer to see if there were any works he wanted to withdraw. As they discussed the list, Roberts began to uncover scores he didn’t know, such as Fanfara and Entrata, which Berio wanted to keep in his catalog even though they were never played. As Roberts continued to uncover other small works that had fallen through the cracks, he began to think of grouping several of them together as a collection that Berio himself never envisioned. That was the seed of Quatre dédicaces, the umbrella title that Pierre Boulez has given the four miniatures performed together at these concerts.

As Roberts began to know Berio’s output intimately, he came to see these overlooked pieces as an integral part of Berio’s extended family of compositions. Fanfara duplicates music in Un re in ascolto,
Berio’s 1984 opera, which was given its American premiere at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1996. Roberts noticed that the way Berio subdivides the strings in Encore is similar to his method in Rendering, his “reconstruction” of Schubert’s unfinished Tenth Symphony that the Chicago Symphony played in 1995. While working on the engraving of the full score of La vera storia, an opera from 1982 and one of Berio’s central works, Roberts recognized both Encore and Entrata embedded in the music. When Berio showed Roberts the score of Compass, he realized that both Festum and Encore were inserted into that piece.

After Berio’s death, Roberts picked four short orchestral works, all composed between the late 1970s and late 1980s, that could be performed together and grouped in such a way as to maximize their contrast and variety. These four pieces are small in size only. As with all of Berio’s works, they are filled with big ideas, and they are boldly conceived and imaginatively scored—fully developed, little-known snapshots by a major pioneer.

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.