

## HARRISBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, March 16, 2019 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 17, 2019 at 3:00 p.m.

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Serenade for Strings in C major, Op. 48 (1879-1880)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Versatility is one of the qualities of a master creator. Brahms simultaneously composed the very different *Academic Festival* and *Tragic Overtures*; Beethoven wrote the stormy Fifth and the pastoral Sixth Symphonies at the same time; Ravel worked on the jazzy Concerto in G and the dramatic Left Hand Concerto together — and Tchaikovsky created contemporaneously one of the orchestral repertory's noisiest and one of its most warmly intimate pieces.

In 1879, Tchaikovsky's publisher, Peter Jurgenson, requested that his client devise some festive strains of celebratory nature to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the coronation of Czar Alexander II. The project was too important for Tchaikovsky to refuse, so he set to work composing a programmatic overture based on some popular themes that would depict one of Mother Russia's proudest moments — the defeat of Napoleon at Moscow. "The overture will be very noisy," Tchaikovsky warned his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, in a letter dated October 22, 1880. "I wrote it without much warmth or enthusiasm; therefore it has no great artistic value." He called the piece, simply, *Overture, 1812*. As though some psychic compensatory apparatus had switched on while he was writing *1812*, Tchaikovsky simultaneously created a delightful work on an intimate scale for string orchestra, a score of geniality and grace and nearly Mozartian sensitivity — the *Serenade for Strings*. "The *Serenade*," Tchaikovsky continued in his letter to Mme. von Meck, "I wrote from an inward impulse; I felt it deeply and venture to hope that this work is not without artistic qualities."

The *Serenade* was one of Tchaikovsky's favorites among his own creations. "I am violently in love with this work, and can't wait for it to be played," he wrote to Jurgenson soon after the score was finished in October 1880. He also revealed to Jurgenson that he conceived the work as a symphony, then thought that the sketches might be appropriate for a string quartet, or perhaps an orchestral suite, but was finally "inspired" (Tchaikovsky's word) to use them for this *Serenade*. Late in 1880 Nicholas Rubinstein, director of the Moscow Conservatory, gathered together a student orchestra and read through the piece at a private rehearsal. Tchaikovsky appreciated the gesture (all the more since Rubinstein was mortally ill and not well enough to stand to conduct — he had to be seated throughout the session), but he still looked forward to a carefully prepared, professional performance of the *Serenade*. In the meantime, Tchaikovsky advised Mme. von Meck further about the nature of the new work, which she had heard only on the piano. (That summer she hired an 18-year-old Paris Conservatory student to partner her in four-hand keyboard pieces and to tutor her children in piano. She asked him also to make a four-hand transcription of some excerpts from *Swan Lake*. He did, and they became the young musician's first published scores. His name was Claude Debussy.) "I wish," Tchaikovsky wrote, "that you could hear my *Serenade* properly performed. It loses so much played at the piano, and I think that the middle movements — played by the violins — would win your sympathy. As regards the first and last movements, they are merely a play of sounds, and do not touch the heart. The first movement is my homage to Mozart; it is intended to be an imitation of his style, and I should be delighted if I thought I had in any way approached my model. Do not laugh, dear lady, at my zeal in standing up for my latest creation. Perhaps my paternal feelings are so warm because it is the youngest child of my fancy." Tchaikovsky's wish for a public performance was fulfilled on October 30, 1881, when Eduard Nápravník presented the work to an appreciative audience in

St. Petersburg, which responded by demanding an immediate encore of the *Waltz* movement. A similar success followed the Moscow premiere on January 28, 1882. Tchaikovsky toured to Hamburg, Prague, Paris and London with the *Serenade* in 1887-1888, and took it along on his 1891 visit to the United States, where he presented it at concerts in Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Tchaikovsky titled the first movement *Pezzo* ['piece'] *in forma di Sonatina*, "sonatina" being a sonata form without a development section. A sonorous introduction in slow tempo prefaces the main part of the movement. The principal theme is a lilting strain that sets the sweetly lyrical style obtaining throughout most of the work. The complementary subject is a skittering melody in rapid rhythms. A recall of the introduction rounds out the opening movement. The following movement is one of Tchaikovsky's best-known and most admired waltzes. The *Elégie* touches on the deepest emotions elicited by the *Serenade*. The finale, *Théma russe*, begins with a slow prologue based on a Volga River work song that appeared in a collection of folk music by Mili Balakirev. The ensuing *Allegro con spirito* uses another Russian folk song, this one a street ditty from the Kolomna district, near Moscow. The slow introduction from the first movement returns before a final, Cossackian flourish brings the *Serenade* to a rousing close.

### Oboe Concerto in D major (1945) Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Strauss largely withdrew from public life after 1935 to his villa at Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the Bavarian Alps. He lived there throughout the War, spared the physical ravages of the conflict but deeply wounded by the loss of many friends and the bombing of Dresden, Munich and Vienna. In October 1945, under the threat of being called before the Denazification Board, he moved to Switzerland, where he lived for the next four years. He and his wife, Pauline, stayed in various hotels in several towns and cities (her shrewish tantrums and complaints led to frequent management requests for them to seek lodgings elsewhere) before settling into the Palace Hotel in Montreux. Strauss was cleared by the Board in June 1948, but chose to stay in Switzerland for medical treatment that winter, returning to Garmisch in May 1949, just four months before his death. Though increasingly feeble during his Swiss sojourn, his mind was clear, and he continued to compose.

"Wrist exercises" said Strauss of his instrumental pieces of the post-World War II years — the Concerto for Oboe, a little *Allegretto* for Violin and Piano, and the *Duet-Concertino* for Clarinet, Bassoon, Strings and Harp, his last instrumental work. "They are workshop labors intended to prevent my right wrist, freed from conducting, from going to sleep prematurely ... craftsmanlike study materials for our worthy instrumentalists." Strauss undertook the Oboe Concerto in September 1945, shortly before he left Garmisch for Switzerland, at the request of John de Lancie, a young performer stationed with the American occupation troops in Bavaria. De Lancie, who was one of several American musicians the venerable composer welcomed to his lovely villa in Garmisch, returned home to become principal oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra and, later, director of the renowned Curtis Institute in that city. When Strauss and Pauline left for Switzerland in October, he took along his sketches for the new Concerto, and finished the score at the village of Baden-ben-Zürich soon after he arrived. The piece was premiered by the Zürich Tonhalle Orchestra and oboist Marcel Saillet on February 26, 1946; Volkmar Andreae conducted. Shortly before the score was published in 1948, Strauss revised and extended the coda of the finale.

In his fine volume on the composer's life and works, Ernst Krause noted the characteristics of Strauss' late instrumental works: "They consist of a relaxed, transparent structure with a great reduction of the instrumental apparatus, which is used with great finesse. The themes, which in their strongly stylized character are sometimes of no great 'weight,' are of a slender and graceful lightness which is almost Mozartian. They stand out from a straightforward harmonic background and engage in virtuosic arabesques. Real symphonic development is excluded in favor of a naively joyous interplay of themes. All metaphysical and mystical elements which could point to a tragic relationship with events in the world around are banished.... Fierce ardor has given way to gentle warmth, the storms of springtime to autumnal mellowness. Passion has been turned into clarity, the prevailing shade being that of evening...."

At the same time, Strauss gave new expression to his love for various wind instruments, whose particular tonal atmosphere he had been able to capture in a masterly manner throughout his whole career."

Krause noted of the Oboe Concerto that it creates "an Arcadian atmosphere of shimmering transparency" and that it exhibits "a masterly command of form, and a predominance of spiritual elements over those of strong animation." The shade of Strauss' dearest composer, Mozart, hovers so constantly near this ingratiating composition that Michael Kennedy called it "an essay in rococo chromaticism." The Concerto's three movements are played without pause, as though Strauss was loath to halt the flow of sweet lyricism that constantly unwinds from the oboe's opening phrases. The first movement follows the traditional sonata-allegro pattern, though here the form's structural junctures are smoothly elided rather than sharply demarcated. The *Andante* is a three-part song: a wistful aria for oboe surrounds a more animated middle section, incorporating the main theme of the previous movement. A mellow cadenza for the soloist leads without pause to the Finale, an animated rondo-like chapter with several subsidiary episodes, some of which recall motives from the opening movement. This lovely Concerto is brought to an end by gossamer fillips and charming filigree.

### Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543 (1788) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

The city of Prague fell in love with Mozart in January 1787. His *Figaro* met with a resounding success when he conducted it there on January 17th, and so great was the acclaim that was awarded his Symphony in D major (K. 504) when it was heard only two days later that it has since borne the name of the Bohemian capital. He returned to Vienna in early February with a signed contract to provide Prague with a new opera for its next season. The opera was *Don Giovanni*, and Mozart returned to Prague on October 1st to oversee its production. Again, he triumphed. He was invited to take up residence in Prague, and he must have been tempted to abandon Vienna, where his career seemed stymied and the bill-collectors harassed him incessantly, but, after six weeks away, he returned to the Imperial city for at least two pressing reasons. Personally, his wife, Constanze, was due to deliver their fourth child in December, and she wished to be close to her family for the birth. (A girl, Theresa, was born on December 27th.) Professionally, the venerable Christoph Willibald Gluck was reported near death, and Mozart, who had been lobbying to obtain a position at the Habsburg court such as Gluck held, wanted to be at hand when the job, as seemed imminent, came open.

Mozart arrived back in Vienna on November 15th, one day after Gluck died. Three weeks later, he was named Court Chamber Music Composer by Emperor Joseph II, though he was disappointed with both the salary and the duties. He was to receive only 800 florins a year, less than half the 2,000 florins that Gluck had earned, and rather than requiring him to compose operas, a form in which he had proven his eminence and to which he longed to fully devote himself, the contract specified he would write only dances for the Imperial balls. Still, the income from the court position, the generous amount he had been paid for *Don Giovanni* and his fees for various free-lance jobs should have been enough to adequately support his family. However, his desire to put up a good front in public with elegant clothes, expensive entertaining and even loans to needy (or conniving) musicians, largely to prove to the world that he could handle his affairs after the death of his father the preceding year, drained his resources.

He pinned his hopes for the amelioration of his financial debacle on the introduction of *Don Giovanni* to Vienna. This production took place on May 7, 1788, but the piece was received coolly. "The opera is divine, finer perhaps than *Figaro*," allowed the Emperor, "but it is not the meat for my Viennese." Within a month began the pathetic series of dunning letters to his well-to-do fellow Mason Michael Puchberg requesting loans. To his credit, Puchberg responded faithfully, though he was certainly a shrewd enough businessman to realize that repayment was unlikely. Only two weeks after the first letter, Mozart was back asking for more money to settle his overdue rent. "My landlord was so pressing that I was obliged to pay him on the spot (in order to avoid any unpleasantness), which caused me great embarrassment," he confided to his benefactor. On June 17th, his bill settled, he moved out of his apartment in Vienna to cheaper lodgings in the suburb of Währing. "I have worked more during the ten days that I have lived

here than in the two months in my former apartment," he explained to Puchberg on June 27th. "If dismal thoughts did not so often intrude (which I strive forcibly to dismiss), I should be very well off here, for I live agreeably, comfortably and, above all, cheaply."

Despite the disappointments inflicted upon him by the fickle tastes of the Viennese, his precarious pecuniary position, and an alarming decline in his health and that of his wife, Mozart was still working miracles in his music. On June 26th, just a week after he had settled in Währing, he finished the E-flat Symphony (K. 543), the first of the incomparable trilogy that he produced within two months during that unsettling summer of 1788. It is unknown how long he had been working on, or even considering, these pieces, since not a single sketch for them is known to exist. The reason that he wrote the E-flat, G minor and C major ("Jupiter") Symphonies has never come to light. If they were composed on some flight of pure inspiration, with no upcoming performance or publication in prospect, they would be unique in that respect in his entire output. At a time when he was desperate for money, it seems unlikely that he would have spent precious hours on one, much less three, *jeux d'esprit*. The only mention he made of them was in the catalog of his works, where he noted the completion date of each one. They are referred to nowhere in his correspondence, which had declined sharply in volume after the death of his father a year earlier. One explanation is that they might have been written for a series of concerts he planned originally for June and July, but which was several times postponed for lack of subscribers and eventually cancelled completely. (For the rest of his life, he was unable to muster enough support among the Viennese to present a concert of his own in that city.) A second possibility is that the three symphonies were written on speculation to be published as a set. Haydn had enjoyed excellent success with such a venture in Paris only two years before, and Mozart may have been encouraged to try his luck in a similar venture. A third consideration might have been the trip Mozart was trying to arrange at that time to London, a town where a composer could make more money than on the Continent. Should the tour materialize, he reasoned, these symphonies would make a fine introduction to the British public. None of these three situations came about, however, and the genesis of Mozart's last three symphonies will probably always remain a mystery.

In refutation of the long-held theory that Mozart never heard his Symphonies Nos. 39, 40 and 41, it now seems likely that he used them for several occasions. In 1789 he undertook a German tour hoping to secure patronage or, perhaps, a permanent post. The program listings for the concerts in Dresden on April 14th and in Leipzig on May 12th mention a "grand new symphony" by Mozart, but do not give specifics. Somewhat more than a year later, on October 15, 1790, he was in Frankfurt to give a concert as part of the festivities surrounding the coronation of Leopold II. He hoped (vainly) to reap some benefit from the assembled nobles by presenting "a grand symphony" and a piano concerto (No. 26 in D, K. 537, "Coronation"). On April 16 and 17, 1791, the Vienna Tonkünstler Society, a charitable organization of professional musicians, played "a new great symphony by Herr Mozart." For each of these occasions, Mozart would have offered his most impressive, most recent works in the form, and would almost certainly have chosen one or more of the 1788 symphonies. The first documented performance took place in Hamburg in March 1792. "Some admitted they would never have been able to think or imagine they would hear something like this performed so splendidly in Hamburg," wrote one eyewitness.

"A veritable triumph of euphony" (Otto Jahn); "the most limpid and lyrical music in existence" (Eric Blom); "the most purely joyous utterance in musical literature" (Donald N. Ferguson) — thus have these learned commentators characterized Mozart's sumptuous E-flat Symphony. The work opens with a large introduction bearing a surprising emotional weight. The remainder of the movement, however, uses its sonata-allegro form as the basis of a lovely extended song rather than as an intense drama. The halcyon mood carries into the second movement, a sonatina in form (sonata-allegro without development section) and a sunbeam in spirit. The *Minuet*, with its sweet *Trio* led by the woodwinds, is a vivacious dance of grace, elegance and, at the swift *Allegretto* tempo indicated, a certain prescient Romantic vigor. The finale combines Haydn's wit and verve with Mozart's suavity of style and harmonic felicity.