

HARRISBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, November 17, 2018 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, November 18, 2018 at 3:00 p.m.

Notes on the Program by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Overture to *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868)

“Napoleon is dead; but a new conqueror has already shown himself to the world; and from Moscow to Naples, from London to Vienna, from Paris to Calcutta, his name is constantly on every tongue.” So begins Stendhal’s *Life of Rossini*, completed in 1823, two years after the Napoleonic demise. Rossini’s conquest of the musical world began a decade earlier, when, in 1813 in Venice, at the age of 21, he unveiled the opera seria *Tancredi* in February and the opera buffa *L’Italiana in Algeri* three months later. So popular was *Tancredi* that a Venetian court edict strictly forbade the humming, whistling or singing of its hit tune (*Di tanti palpiti*) in any of the city’s legal chambers. A similar success followed *L’Italiana in Algeri*, which was produced, Stendhal reported, in five Italian cities within months of its premiere. “No composer in the first half of the 19th century,” wrote Philip Gossett in the *New Grove Dictionary*, “enjoyed the measure of prestige, wealth, popular acclaim or artistic influence that belonged to Rossini. His contemporaries recognized him as the greatest Italian composer of his time.” In his two whirlwind decades as a full-time composer, Rossini completed some 35 operas – almost every one a resounding success.

L’Italiana in Algeri and *Tancredi* of 1813 were Rossini’s first full-length operas, his talent having been previously confined to such one-act farces as *La Scala di Seta* and *Il Signor Bruschino*. His fabled compositional celerity is exemplified by *L’Italiana*: a report in the Venetian press after the opera’s premiere held that he devoted all of 27 days to preparing the score. (The composer himself, however, told a German correspondent that he had polished it off in a mere eighteen.) The zany plot of the opera presents Isabella, an Italian lady of respectable lineage, who sails to Algeria to rescue her lover, a captive of the Bey of Algeria. Isabella bedevils the Bey with her machinations, including one to persuade him to join the *Pappatacci*, a secret society dedicated to absolute luxury and complete indifference to the activities of spouses or lovers. Rossini calculated that this silly story would prove irresistible to the opera lovers of Venice. He was right. Amid Stendhal’s lavish praise for *L’Italiana*, he noted that “never has a public enjoyed a spectacle more harmonious with its character, and, of all the operas that ever existed, this is the one destined to please the Venetians most.”

The Overture reflects the opera’s vivacity and high spirits. It begins with a slow introduction incorporating a languid melody sung by the solo oboe above a background of pizzicato strings. The main body of the Overture commences with a lively tune strutted out by the woodwinds and punctuated by chords from the full orchestra. The oboe gives the lyrical second theme before one of Rossini’s characteristic *crescendi* is unleashed to close the exposition. Rather than working up any more serious feelings in a development section, the music plunges directly into the recapitulation of the opening themes, using the *crescendo* to build to the brilliant closing pages.

Le Tombeau de Couperin (1917, orchestrated 1920)
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Ravel was tormented by the First World War. He was accepted into the armed forces despite his small stature and delicate health, but his physical constitution was not robust enough to withstand the rigors of combat and he was quickly discharged for medical reasons. Soon after he arrived home, his beloved mother lapsed into her final illness, and the shock of her death nearly prostrated him. His own failed health, his mental anguish over the War, and the loss of his mother kept him from doing much creative work during World War I. *Le Tombeau de Couperin* is his only important work of those difficult years.

The inspiration for *Le Tombeau* came from two obsessions that filled Ravel's mind in 1917 – the sorrow caused by World War I and the need to retain the sanity represented by the tradition of French culture. In the piano suite that was the first version of *Le Tombeau*, each of the movements was dedicated to one of six friends of the composer who had fallen on the battlefield, a musical memorial to his countrymen and, perhaps, to his late mother as well. (He orchestrated four of them in 1920.) In a similar way, composers of the French Baroque age, François Couperin (1668-1733) among them, paid tribute in music to recently deceased colleagues. Such a piece was called a “*tombeau*,” literally a “tomb,” and Ravel intended such an association here. Beside just a way of eulogizing his comrades, however, the association with Couperin also represented for Ravel the continuity of the logic and refinement of French civilization. It was in this great Gallic tradition that Ravel sought intellectual and emotional shelter from crushing contemporary events. The title of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, therefore, has a triple meaning: it is a memorial to family and close friends; it is a revival of some aspects of the musical style of the French Baroque; and, probably most significant for Ravel, it is a continuation of the venerable tradition of French culture and thought in a time of despair and nihilism.

Despite its heavy burden of associations, *Le Tombeau de Couperin* displays little of Ravel's distraught mental state, especially in its effervescent orchestral version. Rather than a roiling, emotional document, *Le Tombeau* is a vision of the refined and elegant world of Versailles shimmering in retrospect through the medium of the dance, its most characteristic social manifestation. The succulently atmospheric orchestration and rich harmony clearly mark the modern origin of the work, but its buoyant rhythms and crystalline structure show the influence of the music of Couperin's age. “This suite is a garland of musical flowers,” wrote Donald N. Ferguson, “grown from 17th-century seed in a 20th-century hothouse.”

The gossamer *Prélude* contains some dazzling passages for the woodwinds led by the oboe. The *Forlane* is based on a dance of Italian origin popular among the Venetian gondoliers before it crossed the Alps into France. The *Menuet* is the most durable of all Baroque dances. The *Rigaudon* is a vigorous duple-meter dance that originated in Provence.

Piano Concerto No. 2 (WORLD PREMIERE) Christopher Theofanidis (b. 1967)

Christopher Theofanidis, one of America's most prominent composers, was born in Dallas on December 18, 1967, and studied at the University of Houston (B.M.), Eastman School of Music (M.M.) and Yale University (M.A. and D.M.A.). He has served on the faculty of the Yale University School of Music since September 2008; his previous teaching appointments include the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, Juilliard School, University of Houston, American Festival of the Arts and Texas Piano Institute. In summer 2014, he joined the faculties the Aspen Music Festival, Atlantic Center for the Arts and HighSCORE Festival in Italy. Theofanidis has held residencies with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, California Symphony and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and has also served as a delegate to the United States–Japan Foundation's Leadership Program. His numerous awards include the Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim Fellowship, Barlow Prize, Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Beams Prize of Columbia University, Fulbright Fellowship for study in France, six ASCAP Morton Gould Prizes, and a 2007 Grammy nomination for *The Here and Now* for chorus and orchestra, based on the poetry of Rumi. In October 2003, his *Rainbow Body* won the First Prize of £25,000 in the Masterprize Competition, a London-based, British-American partnership of EMI, the London Symphony Orchestra, *Gramophone* magazine, Classic FM and National Public Radio whose winner is chosen jointly by the public and a panel of experts; *Rainbow Body* has subsequently become one of the most frequently

performed pieces by a living composer. Among Theofanidis' commissions are compositions for the 25th anniversary of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., 700th anniversary of the Grimalkin Empire in Monaco, opening of Bass Hall in Fort Worth, 100th anniversary of the Oregon Symphony, and *Heart of a Soldier* for the San Francisco Opera in observance of the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

The composer wrote of his Piano Concerto No. 2, commissioned by Harrisburg Symphony, "Each of the three movements has a starting point in a poem by Rumi [the venerable 13th-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet, scholar, theologian and mystic], whose work has long been a passion of mine. I have written many pieces based on his writings. These three poems come from Coleman Barks' marvelous translations.

"The first movement was inspired by a poem called *The Night Air*, in which Rumi notes: ... *there's a window open between us, mixing the night air of our beings ... a way between voice and presence where information flows*. When I think of those moments in which I have been closest to the open state Rumi describes here, they mostly occur in the middle of the night and outside in nature, where time and my mind seem to be still and I am open. The first movement starts with this sentiment of openness expressed musically. The three-note figure that represents it is also the DNA of the entire work – all three movements share this starting melodic shape, though they take on very different characters. In the first movement, that melodic kernel is always lyrical and expansive, and sometimes even sounds as if it is played into the night air by a giant mandolin (in a repeated note, strummed manner) by the solo piano. There is a feeling of open space.

"One of the great things about Rumi is that, as philosophical as his work is, it is also filled with surprises, strange turns of phrase, and even at times slapstick comedy to make his greater points, pairing the seemingly positive and negative. One of the many figures in his work who represents this characteristic appears in his poem *Red Shirt: Has anybody seen the boy who used to come here? Round-faced troublemaker, quick to find a joke, slow to be serious*. For Rumi, this is a positive thing. So important is humor in perception (and humor is, in the end, a kind of letting-go), that he then adds: *I'd gladly spend years getting word of him, even third or fourth-hand*. This movement alternates between a good-natured chorale (based on the three-note motive set out in the first movement) and fits of laughter represented in the solo piano by spurts of cluster chords, with sharp musical punch-lines. This is the most virtuosic of the Concerto's movements, and requires a great deal of agility from the soloist ... as well as a wry wit and good sense of timing.

"The third movement was inspired by *The Fragile Vial: The body is a device to calculate the astronomy of the spirit. Look through that astrolabe and become oceanic*. I tried to have the music in this movement alternate between a single, more fragile line (still based on that opening melodic shape from the first movement, but inverted – one lone melody being whistled in a canyon, so to speak) with that same material presented in more grand and surging ways that use enormous harmonic underpinnings and broader expanses. Both of these representations are, to my mind, in line with the scope of the poem.

"I am grateful to Jeffrey Biegel for leading the charge in making this piece a reality, and I'm honored to be back in Harrisburg, where I have been so many times over the years to visit my mother's side of the family, based in Camp Hill and Lemoyne."

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 (1804-1808) Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Surprisingly, for this Symphony that serves as the *locus classicus* of orchestral music, little is known about its creation. There are vague hints that it may have been occasioned by an aborted love affair with either Therese von Brunswick or Giuletta Guicciardi. The theory has been advanced that it was influenced by a surge of patriotism fueled by an Austrian loss to the Napoleonic juggernaut. Even the famous remark attributed to Beethoven about the opening motive representing "Fate knocking at the door" is probably apocryphal, an invention of either Anton Schindler or Ferdinand Ries, two young men, close to the composer in his last years, who later published their often-untrustworthy reminiscences of him.

It is known that the time of the creation of the Fifth Symphony was one of intense activity for Beethoven. The four years during which the work was composed also saw the completion of a rich variety

of other works: Piano Sonatas, Op. 53, 54 and 57; Fourth Piano Concerto; Fourth and Sixth Symphonies; Violin Concerto; the first two versions of *Fidelio*; Rasumovsky Quartets, Op. 59; Coriolan Overture; Mass in C major, Op. 86; and Cello Sonata No. 3, Op. 69. As was his practice with almost all of his important works, Beethoven revised and rewrote the Fifth Symphony for years.

Beethoven's remarks about this Symphony are vague and elusive rather than concrete. The compositional problems he set for himself were abstract, musico-emotional ones that were little affected by external experiences, and not accessible to translation into mere words. In one of his few comments about the Symphony, he noted that, after the creation of the theme, "begins in my head the working-out in breadth, height, and depth. Since I am aware of what I want, the fundamental idea never leaves me. It mounts, it grows. I see before my mind the picture in its whole extent, as if in a single grasp." By "picture" Beethoven meant not a visible painting, but rather an overview of the total structure of the Symphony, from its tiniest fragmentary component to the grand sweep of its total structure.

So completely did composition occupy Beethoven's thoughts that he sometimes ignored the necessities of daily life. Concern with his appearance, eating habits, cleanliness, even his conversation, all gave way before his composing. There are many reports of his trooping the streets and woods of Vienna humming, singing, bellowing, penning a scrap of melody, and being, in general, oblivious to the people or places around him. (One suspects that his professed love of Nature grew in part from his need to find a solitary workplace free from distractions and the prying interest of his fellow Viennese.) This titanic struggle with musical tones produced such mighty monuments as the Fifth Symphony. With it, and with the Third Symphony completed only four years earlier, Beethoven launched music and art into the world of Romanticism.

In the history of music, Beethoven stands, Janus-faced, as the great colossus between two ages and two philosophies. The formal perfection of the preceding Classical period finds its greatest fulfillment in his works, which at the same time contain the taproot of the cathartic emotional experience from which grew the art of the 19th century. Beethoven himself evaluated his position as a creator in the following way: "Music is the mediator between intellectual and sensuous life ... the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend." The Fifth Symphony is indeed such a "mediator." Its message of victory through struggle, which so deeply touches both the heart and the mind, is achieved by a near-perfect balance of musical technique and passionate sentiment unsurpassed in the history of music. This Symphony was the work that won for Beethoven an international renown. Despite a few early misunderstandings due undoubtedly to its unprecedented concentration of energy, it caught on very quickly, and was soon recognized in Europe, England and America as a pathbreaking achievement. Its popularity has never waned.

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, more than any work in the musical repertory, is the archetypal example of the technique and content of the form. Its overall structure is not one of four independent essays linked simply by tonality and style, as in the typical 18th-century example, but is rather a carefully devised whole in which each of the movements serves to carry the work inexorably toward its end. The progression from minor to major, from dark to light, from conflict to resolution is at the very heart of the "meaning" of this Symphony. The triumphant, victorious nature of the final movement as the logical outcome of all that preceded it established a model for the symphonies of the Romantic era. The psychological progression toward the finale — the relentless movement toward a life-affirming close — is one of the most important technical and emotional legacies Beethoven left to his successors. Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Mahler — their symphonies are indebted to this one (and to the Ninth Symphony, as well) for the concept of how such a creation could be structured, and in what manner it should engage the listener.

The opening gesture is the most famous beginning in all of classical music. It establishes the stormy temper of the *Allegro* by presenting the germinal cell from which the entire movement grows. Though it is possible to trace this memorable four-note motive through most of the measures of the movement, the esteemed English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey pointed out that the power of the music is not contained in this fragment, but rather in the "long sentences" that Beethoven built from it. The key to appreciating Beethoven's formal structures lies in being aware of the way in which the music moves constantly from one point of arrival to the next, from one sentence to the next. It is in the careful weighting of successive

climaxes through harmonic, rhythmic and instrumental resources that Beethoven created the enormous energy and seeming inevitability of this monumental movement. The gentler second theme derives from the opening motive, and gives only a brief respite in the headlong rush that hurtles through the movement. It provides the necessary contrast while doing nothing to impede the music's flow. The development section is a paragon of cohesion, logic and concision. The recapitulation roars forth after a series of breathless chords that pass from woodwinds to strings and back. The stark hammer-blows of the closing chords bring the movement to its powerful end.

The form of the second movement is a set of variations on two contrasting themes. The first theme, presented by violas and cellos, is sweet and lyrical in nature; the second, heard in horns and trumpets, is heroic. The ensuing variations on the themes alternate to produce a movement by turns gentle and majestic.

The following *Scherzo* returns the tempestuous character of the opening movement, as the four-note motto from the first movement is heard again in a brazen setting led by the horns. The *fughetta*, the "little fugue," of the central trio is initiated by the cellos and basses. The *Scherzo* returns with the mysterious tread of the plucked strings, after which the music wanes until little more than a heartbeat from the timpani remains. Then begins another accumulation of intensity, first gradually, then more quickly, as a link to the finale, which arrives with a glorious proclamation, like brilliant sun bursting through ominous clouds.

The finale, set in the triumphant key of C major, is jubilant and martial. (Robert Schumann saw here the influence of Étienne-Nicolas Méhul, one of the prominent composers of the French Revolution.) The sonata form proceeds apace. At the apex of the development, however, the mysterious end of the *Scherzo* is invoked to serve as the link to the return of the main theme in the recapitulation. It also recalls and compresses the emotional journey of the entire Symphony. The closing pages repeat the cadence chords extensively to discharge the enormous accumulated energy of the work.

Concerning the effect of the "struggle to victory" that is symbolized by the structure of the Fifth Symphony, a quote that Beethoven scribbled in a notebook of the Archduke Rudolf, one of his aristocratic piano and composition students, is pertinent. The composer wrote, "Many assert that every minor [tonality] piece must end in the minor. *Nego!* On the contrary, I find that ... the major [tonality] has a glorious effect. Joy follows sorrow, sunshine – rain. It affects me as if I were looking up to the silvery glistening of the evening star."