Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2014-2015

May 8, 9 and 10, 2015

WARD STARE, CONDUCTOR

Disney's FANTASIA — Live in Concert

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN — Excerpts from Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Opus 67 §
- I. Allegro con brio

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN — Excerpts from Symphony No. 6 in F major, Opus 68, "Pastoral" *
- III. Merry Assembly of Country Folk: Allegro
- IV. Thunderstorm: Allegro
- V. Shepherd's Song: Happy, Grateful Feelings after the Storm: Allegretto

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY — Excerpts from *The Nutcracker* *
- I. Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies
- II. Chinese Dance
- III. Dance of the Reed Flutes
- IV. Arabian Dance
- V. Waltz of the Flowers

— INTERMISSION —

PAUL DUKAS — *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* *

AMILCARE PONCHIELLI — "Dance of the Hours" from *La Gioconda* *

CLAUDE DEBUSSY — *Clair de lune* (deleted from 1940 *Fantasia*)

EDWARD ELGAR — Military March from *Pomp and Circumstance*, Opus. 39 §

IGOR STRAVINSKY — Excerpts from *The Firebird* §
- I. Introduction and Dance of the Firebird
- II. Dance of the Princesses
- III. Infernal Dance of King Kastchei
- IV. Berceuse
- V. Finale

* *Fantasia 1940*
§ *Fantasia 2000*

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

DISNEY'S FANTASIA — LIVE IN CONCERT

Walt Disney, one of Hollywood's greatest innovators, began his career in Kansas City, where he set up the "Laugh-O-Gram" studio to make short animated films. He produced several silent cartoons on fairy tale themes before making *Alice's Wonderland* in 1923, which integrated live-action footage with animation (and featured the 22-year-old Disney in the opening scenes). Laugh-O-Gram went under the following year, so Walt followed his older brother, Roy, a banker, to Los Angeles, where they established the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio to carry on the *Alice* series. They produced more than fifty *Alice* silent shorts over the next four years before introducing the character of Mickey Mouse in 1928 in the seven-minute *Steamboat Willie*, the first cartoon with synchronized sound. Mickey was a smash hit. A Mickey Mouse Club was formed in theaters, the character began appearing in comic strips across the country, a steady series of Mickey cartoons was released, and the Disney Empire was born. In 1929, Disney initiated the "Silly Symphonies" animated series, featuring a changing cast of human and anthropomorphic characters, and three years later began producing them in Technicolor. The studio's success encouraged him to produce the first feature-length animated film — *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released in 1937 and within two years it had become the highest-grossing film to that time. Disney used the profits to build a new 51-acre studio in Burbank (still the company's headquarters) and to finance the feature-length *Pinocchio*, which was the first animated film to win an Oscar (for its music).

By 1936, Mickey's popularity had begun to fade, so Disney decided to feature him in an elaborate animated short set to Paul Dukas' orchestral tone poem *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, an idea of integrating classical music and cartoons he had tried with some of the early Silly Symphonies. At a chance meeting at Chasen's restaurant in Hollywood with Leopold Stokowski, Disney pitched the idea that that long-time Music Director of the Philadelphia Orchestra should conduct the soundtrack for *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Stokowski was so excited by the concept that he offered to conduct for free. By the time the recording took place with 85 of Hollywood's finest musicians on a soundstage in Culver City on January 9, 1938, production costs had soared, but Disney "saw this trouble in the form of an opportunity. This was the birth of a new concept, a group of separate numbers put together in a single presentation. It turned out to be a concert — something novel and of high quality."

Disney, with Stokowski's enthusiastic encouragement, decided to turn the musical short into a feature film as a series of classical pieces set to carefully animated sequences — "sheer fantasy unfolds ... action controlled by a musical pattern has great charm in the realm of unreality," Disney said — each introduced by music critic Deems Taylor, commentator for the radio broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic. Taylor and Stokowski headed a group choosing the music for the film (Disney claimed only limited knowledge of classical music), which selected Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D minor*, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony, Ponchielli's *Dance of the Hours*, Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*.

Fantasia would have both abstract (*Toccata and Fugue*) and representational animation (dinosaurs in *The Rite of Spring*, dancing hippos in *Dance of the Hours*); Disney considering using an experimental 3D process for the *Toccata and Fugue* and releasing the scent of incense during the Impressionistic religious procession of Schubert's *Ave Maria*, but abandoned both ideas. He did not, however, compromise on *Fantasia*'s music. He engaged Stokowski's Philadelphia Orchestra to record all the remaining segments and had the studio's engineers work with the RCA Corporation to develop a surround sound system that would make "audiences feel as though they were standing at the podium with Stokowski." They called the process, which used 33 microphones recorded on eight machines, "Fantasound." Special sound systems would be installed in the theaters chosen to show the film, and one segment of *Fantasia* would give a visual and spoken explanation of how it worked. Recording began at Philadelphia's Academy of Music in April 1939 and went on intermittently for seven weeks.

Because of *Fantasia*'s unusual concept and the need for installing new and expensive sound equipment to show it, the film was initially booked into only thirteen theaters, where it would be shown twice daily to a reserved-seat audience greeted by staff hired and trained by the Disney studio. The official opening was on November 13, 1940 at the Broadway Theatre in New York, where it ran for 49 consecutive weeks. *Fantasia* had a similar success in other cities, but America's entry into World War II in December 1941 and the original sound-system requirements forced the studio to re-process the

soundtrack into standard mono and cut the film's two-hour length to allow for general distribution. Critical reaction was exceptional: Bosley Crowther, film critic of *The New York Times*, wrote, "motion-picture history was made last night ... simply terrific"; the web site Rotten Tomatoes, which aggregates film reviews, concluded, "Disney's *Fantasia*, a landmark in animation and a huge influence on the medium of music video, is a relentlessly inventive blend of the classics with phantasmagorical images."

In the 1990s, Roy E. Disney, the nephew of Walt, developed a sequel to *Fantasia* with a new set of classical masterworks performed by James Levine and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; the film was titled *Fantasia 2000* when it premiered at New York's Carnegie Hall on December 17, 1999. ***Disney's FANTASIA — Live in Concert*** presents sequences from both of these extraordinary cinematic achievements.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda