

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2015-2016 Mellon Grand Classics Season

January 15, 16 and 17, 2016

CHRISTOPH KÖNIG, CONDUCTOR
TIM FAIN, VIOLIN

OTTORINO RESPIGHI *Belfagor*, Overture for Orchestra

PHILIP GLASS Concerto No. 2 for Violin, Strings and Synthesizer,
"The American Four Seasons"
 Prologue (violin solo)
 Movement I
 Song No. 1 (violin solo)
 Movement II
 Song No. 2 (violin solo)
 Movement III
 Song No. 3 (violin solo)
 Movement IV
 Mr. Fain

Intermission

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 6 in F major, Opus 68, "Pastoral"
 I. The Awakening of Cheerful Feelings at the Arrival
 in the Country: Allegro ma non troppo
 II. Scene at the Brook: Andante molto mosso
 III. Merry Gathering of the Peasants: Allegro —
 IV. Storm: Allegro —
 V. Shepherd's Song: Joyful, Thankful Feelings
 after the Storm: Allegretto

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

Born 9 July 1879 in Bologna; died 18 April 1936 in Rome

Belfagor, Overture for Orchestra (1921-1922, 1924)

PREMIERE OF OPERA: Milan, 26 April 1923; La Scala; Antonio Guarnieri, conductor

PREMIERE OF OVERTURE: New York City, 7 March 1926; Carnegie Hall; New York Philharmonic; Otto Klemperer, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 11 January 1957; Syria Mosque; Fernando Previtali, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 12 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, piccolo clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings

There is no overture “to” *Belfagor*, Respighi’s sixth opera, which begins with peaceful music setting the nighttime scene in a seaside village that shows a sailor (Baldo) and his fiancée (Candida) just before his ship sails at dawn to fight pirates on the high seas. Respighi arranged the “Overture for Orchestra” *Belfagor* in 1924, a year after the opera had been premiered to a lukewarm reception at La Scala, in order to make some of the opera’s musical highlights available in concert form.

The devil, it seems — *Belfagor* in Respighi’s opera — has always been part of human affairs. “The serpent” turns up immediately after the people in the book of Genesis and some similarly sinister figure plays a seminal role in most ancient cultures. The source for Respighi’s operatic devil was Machiavelli’s *La Favola di Belfagor Arcidiavolo* (ca. 1520), a tale set in motion upon the following premise: “Countless souls of those miserable mortals who die without God’s grace were going to Hell, and all, or the majority of them, claimed that nothing other than having taken a wife had brought them to such unhappiness.” The archdevil *Belfagor* decides to test this contention for himself by taking on human form and finding his own spouse. He accomplishes both, but ends up with such a shrewish mate that he gratefully returns to Hell. The plot has wound through several wide variants in literature and on stage over the years, including a “romantic comic opera” with music by Alfred Christiansen produced at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1889 and the comedy *Belfagor, Arcidivoleria* (1919) by the Italian playwright Ercole Luigi Morselli (1882-1921). The libretto for Respighi’s *Belfagor* was based on Morselli’s play by Claudio Guastalla (1880-1948), who wrote the books for five of his operas as well as the scenario for the ballet *Belkis, Regina di Saba* (“*Belkis, Queen of Sheba*”).

In Respighi’s “lyric comedy,” *Belfagor* appears in a small coastal village just as Baldo sails off to war after bidding farewell to his fiancée, Candida, who is “pure, loving and faithful,” according to the libretto. The devil presents himself to the girl’s father as young, handsome, splendidly dressed and rich, and arranges with him for her hand in marriage in return for wealth, notwithstanding her engagement to Baldo. She reluctantly goes through with the wedding, but intentionally omits a crucial word from the marriage vows. When it proves impossible to ring the church bells after the ceremony, she believes that the marriage has not received divine validation. Her father, however, now rich, does not and he forces her to live with her husband. Candida, still loyal to her fiancé, refuses to consummate the marriage and acts the shrew toward *Belfagor*, but he falls in love with her anyway. When Baldo returns, *Belfagor*, now anxious to remain with Candida, tries to convince him that she has been unfaithful to him. His suspicions aroused, Baldo confronts her about the accusation and she asserts her innocence. When he begs her for some sign of proof, Candida prays to the Madonna and the church bells toll out across the village of their own accord.

The opening section of the concert overture Respighi culled from *Belfagor* depicts the title character with an angular, strident, propulsive theme. After a considerable working-out of this idea, the overture turns gentle with the lyrical music for the nighttime love scene of Baldo and Candida, which leads to a cock’s crow from the oboe and the evocation of sunrise that accompanies *Belfagor*’s early-morning transformation from devil to nobleman. *Belfagor*’s theme returns, as does the love music, before the work closes with the brilliant strains that bring down the curtain on Act I.

PHILIP GLASS

Born 31 January 1937 in Baltimore

Concerto No. 2 for Violin, Strings and Synthesizer, "The American Four Seasons" (2009)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Toronto, 9 December 2009; Toronto Symphony Orchestra; Peter Oundjian, conductor; Robert McDuffie, soloist

THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 42 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: strings and synthesizer

"You know there is a maverick tradition in American music that is very strong. It's in Ives, Ruggles, Cage, Partch, Moondog, all of these weird guys. That's my tradition." Thus Philip Glass traced his artistic lineage in an interview with composer Robert Ashley. Glass, born in Baltimore on January 31, 1937, began his musical career in a conventional enough manner: study at the University of Chicago and Juilliard; a summer at the Aspen Music Festival with Milhaud; lessons with Nadia Boulanger in France on a Fulbright scholarship; many compositions, several of them published, in a neoclassical style indebted to Copland and Hindemith. In 1965, however, Glass worked with the Indian sitarist Ravi Shankar in Paris on the score for the film *Chappaqua*, and that exposure to non-Western music was the turning-point in forming his mature style. He began writing what is commonly known as "Minimalist" music (though Glass loathes the term; Debussy likewise insisted that he was not an "Impressionist"), which is based on the repetition of slowly changing common chords in steady rhythms, often overlaid with a lyrical melody in long, arching phrases. Glass' works (and those of his sometime fellow Minimalist travelers, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, John Adams and several other of America's most important composers), stand in stark contrast to the fragmented, ametric, harshly dissonant post-Schoenberg music that had been the dominant style for the 25 years after the Second World War. Minimalist music is meant, quite simply, to sound beautiful and to be immediately accessible to all listeners. Indeed, Glass represents the epitome of the modern "cross-over" artist, whose music appeals equally to classical, rock and jazz audiences. Philip Glass' reputation as one of America's most successful and widely known composers has been recognized with election to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters, an Oscar nomination for his score for the film *Notes on a Scandal*, and the 2010 Opera Honors Award from the NEA.

Glass' Violin Concerto No. 2, subtitled "The American Four Seasons," was composed in 2009 for Robert McDuffie on a commission from the Toronto Symphony, London Philharmonic, Aspen Music Festival and School, Krannert Center at the University of Illinois, and Carlsen Center at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. Of it, the composer wrote, "The Violin Concerto No. 2, composed in the summer and autumn of 2009, was preceded by several years of occasional exchanges between Bobby McDuffie and myself. He was interested in music that would serve as a companion piece to the Vivaldi *Four Seasons* concertos. I agreed to the idea of a four-movement work but at the outset was not sure how that correspondence would work in practice — between the Vivaldi concertos and my own music. However, Bobby encouraged me to start with my composition and we would see in due time how it would relate to the very well-known original.

"When the music was completed, I sent it to Bobby, who seemed to have quickly seen how the movements related to the *Seasons*. Of course, Bobby's interpretation, though similar to mine, proved also to be somewhat different. This struck me as an opportunity, then, for the listener to make his/her own interpretation. Therefore, there will be no instructions for the audience, no clues as to where Spring, Summer, Winter and Fall might appear in the new Concerto — an interesting, though not worrisome, problem for the listener. After all, if Bobby and I are not in complete agreement, an independent interpretation can be tolerated and even welcomed. (The mathematical possibilities, or permutations, of the puzzle are in the order of 2^4 .)

"Apart from that, I would only add that, instead of the usual cadenza, I provided a number of solo pieces — thinking that they could be played together as separate concert music when they were extracted from the whole work. They appear in the Concerto as a 'prelude' to the first movement and three 'songs' that precede each of the following three movements."

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born 16 December 1770, Bonn; died 26 March 1827, Vienna

Symphony No. 6 in F major, Opus 68, "Pastoral" (1807-1808)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Vienna, 22 December 1808; Theater-an-der-Wien; Ludwig van Beethoven, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 9 April 1896; Carnegie Music Hall; Frederic Archer, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 44 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo, pairs of horns, trumpets and trombones, timpani and strings

Beethoven gave each of the five movements of the "Pastoral" Symphony a title describing its general character. The first movement, filled with verdant sweetness and effusive good humor, is headed *The Awakening of Cheerful Feelings at the Arrival in the Country*. The violins present a simple theme that pauses briefly after only four measures, as though the composer were alighting from a coach and taking a deep breath of the fragrant country air before beginning his brisk walk along a shaded path. The melody grows more vigorous before it quiets to lead almost imperceptibly to the second theme, a descending motive played by violins over a rustling string accompaniment. Again, the spirits swell and then relax before the main theme returns to occupy most of the development. To conclude the first movement, the recapitulation returns the themes of the exposition in more richly orchestrated settings. It is worth noting that the textural figuration Beethoven supplied for this movement, and for most of this Symphony, contributes an aura of relaxed yet constant motion to the music. Indeed, the "background" throughout this Symphony is of unflinching interest and is as important as the themes in defining the sylvan character of the music. There is a fascination in listening to these inner voices, of perceiving the multiple planes of the texture, an experience comparable in the visual world to discerning the play of light and shade in the layers of foliage of a great tree or spying a darting fish beneath the shimmering surface of a rushing stream. There is even one extended section in the finale (noted below) where Beethoven dispensed with the "melody" completely and continued with only the "accompaniment."

The second movement, *Scene at the Brook*, continues the mood and undulant figuration of the preceding movement. The music of this movement is almost entirely without chromatic harmony, and exudes an air of tranquility amid pleasing activity. The form is a sonata-allegro whose opening theme starts with a fragmentary idea in the first violins above a rich accompaniment. The second theme begins with a descending motion, like that of the first movement, but then turns back upward to form an inverted arch. A full development section utilizing the main theme follows. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes with enriched orchestration, and leads to a most remarkable coda. In the closing pages of this movement, the rustling accompaniment ceases while all Nature seems to hold its breath to listen to the songs of three birds — the nightingale, the dove and the cuckoo. Twice this tiny avian concert is performed before the movement comes quietly to its close. When later Romantic composers sought stylistic and formal models for their works it was to Beethoven that they turned, and when program music was the subject, this coda was their object.

Beethoven titled the scherzo *Merry Gathering of the Peasants*, and filled the music with a rustic bumptiousness and simple humor that recall a hearty if somewhat ungainly country dance. The trio shifts to duple meter for a stomping dance before the scherzo returns. The festivity is halted in mid-step by the distant thunder of a *Storm*, portrayed by the rumblings of the low strings. Beethoven built a convincing storm scene here through the tempestuous use of the tonal and timbral resources of the orchestra that stands in bold contrast to the surrounding movements of this Symphony. As the storm passes away over the horizon, the silvery voice of the flute leads directly into the finale, *Shepherd's Song: Joyful, Thankful Feelings after the Storm*. The clarinet and then the horn sing the unpretentious melody of the shepherd, which returns, rondo-fashion, to support the form of the movement. It is at the expected third hearing of this theme that the melody is deleted, leaving only the luxuriant accompaniment to furnish the background for imagining the rustic tune. The mood of well-being and contentment continues to the end of this wonderful work.