

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2016-2017 Gala Concert

September 17, 2016

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
GIL SHAHAM, VIOLIN

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH	<i>Festive Overture</i> , Opus 96
SERGEI PROKOFIEV	“Masks” from <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> , Opus 64a
CLAUDE DEBUSSY Orch. Arthur Luck	<i>Clair de Lune</i>
FELIX MENDELSSOHN	Scherzo from the Incidental Music to Shakespeare’s <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> , Opus 61
RICHARD STAUSS	“Moonlight Scene” from <i>Capriccio</i> , Opus 85
EDVARD GREIG	“In the Hall of the Mountain King” from <i>Peer Gynt</i>
ARAM KHACHATURIAN	Suite from <i>Masquerade</i> I. Waltz IV. Romance V. Galop
FRITZ KREISLER Orch. Clark McAlister	<i>Praeludium and Allegro</i>
FRITZ KREISLER Orch. André Kostelanetz	<i>Liebesleid</i>
FRITZ KREISLER Orch. André Kostelanetz	<i>Schön Rosmarin</i>
PABLO DE SARASATE	Fantasy on Bizet’s <i>Carmen</i> for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 25 Mr. Shaham

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Festive Overture, Opus 96 (1954)

Among the grand symphonies, concertos, operas and chamber works that Dmitri Shostakovich produced are also many occasional pieces: film scores, tone poems, jingoistic anthems, brief instrumental compositions. Though most of these works are unfamiliar in the West, one — the *Festive Overture* — has been a favorite since it was written in the autumn of 1954. Shostakovich composed it for a concert on November 7, 1954 commemorating the 37th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, but its jubilant nature suggests it may also have been conceived as an outpouring of relief at the death of Joseph Stalin one year earlier. One critic suggested that the *Overture* was “a gay picture of streets and squares packed with a young and happy throng.” As its title suggests, the *Festive Overture* is a brilliant affair, full of fanfare and bursting spirits. It begins with a stentorian proclamation from the brass as preface to the racing main theme of the piece. Contrast is provided by a broad melody initiated by the horns, but the breathless celebration of the music continues to the end.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)

“Masks” from *Romeo and Juliet*, Opus 64a (1935)

When Prokofiev returned to Russia in 1933 after his long sojourn in the West, he had already acquired a reputation as a composer of ballet. His first balletic effort had been the volcanic *Ala and Lolly* written for Diaghilev in Paris in 1914, whose music is better known in its concert form as the *Scythian Suite*. Though Diaghilev did not like the piece and refused to stage it, he remained convinced of Prokofiev’s talent and commissioned *Chout* (“*The Buffoon*”) from him in 1921 and produced it with his Ballet Russe. *Le Pas d’acier* (“*The Steel Step*”) followed in 1927 and *The Prodigal Son* in 1928, the last new ballet Diaghilev produced before his death the following year. *Sur le Borysthène* (“*On the Dnieper*”) was staged, unsuccessfully, by the Paris Opéra in 1932. The last two of these works showed a move away from the spiky musical language of Prokofiev’s earlier years toward a simpler, more lyrical style, and the Kirov Theater in Leningrad took them as evidence in 1934 that he should be commissioned to compose a full-length ballet on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. After difficulties staging the ballet in Russia, *Romeo and Juliet* was premiered in Brno, Czechoslovakia in December 1938 and has since come to be regarded as one of Prokofiev’s most masterful creations. The swaggering/cautious *Masks* depicts the arrival in masks and costumes of Romeo, Mercutio and Benvolio at the ball in the house of their enemy.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Clair de Lune (1890)

During his early years, Debussy turned to the refined style of Couperin and Rameau for inspiration in his instrumental music, and several of his works from that time are modeled on the Baroque dance suite, including the *Suite Bergamasque*. The composition’s title derives from the generic term for the dances of the district of Bergamo, in northern Italy, which found many realizations in the instrumental music of the 17th and 18th centuries. The rustic inhabitants of Bergamo were said to have been the model for the character of Harlequin, the buffoon of the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, which became the most popular theatrical genre in France during the time of Couperin and Rameau. Several of Watteau’s best-known paintings take the *commedia dell’arte* as their subject. The poet Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) evoked the bittersweet, pastel world of Watteau and the *commedia dell’arte* with his atmospheric, evanescent verses, which Debussy began setting as early as 1880. In 1882, he wrapped the words of Verlaine’s *Clair de Lune* (“*Moonlight*”) with music, and made another setting of it a decade later as the third song of his first series of *Fêtes galantes*: “*Your soul is a rare landscape ... With the calm moonlight, sad and lovely,*

that sets the birds in the trees to dreaming, and the fountains to sobbing in ecstasy, the great fountains, svelte among the marbles.” Debussy best captured the nocturnal essence of Verlaine’s poem not in his two vocal settings, however, but in the famous (and musically unrelated) *Clair de Lune* that serves as the third movement of his *Suite Bergamasque*, composed in 1890 and revised for publication in 1905.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Scherzo from the Incidental Music to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Opus 61 (1842)

Mendelssohn was enamored during his teenage years with reading the works of Shakespeare, who, next to the arch-Romantic Jean-Paul, was his favorite writer. Shakespeare’s plays had been appearing in excellent German translations by Ludwig Tieck and August Schlegel (father Abraham Mendelssohn’s brother-in-law) since the turn of the century, and young Felix particularly enjoyed the wondrous fantasy world of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The play inspired the already accomplished budding composer, and in the summer of 1826 he wrote an overture to the play. On November 19th, Felix played the original piano duet version of the score with his sister, Fanny, on one of the family’s frequent Sunday musicales in their Berlin mansion, and a private orchestral performance followed before the end of the year. In February, the work was first played publicly in Stettin. It immediately garnered a success that has never waned.

By 1842, Mendelssohn was the most famous musician in Europe and in demand everywhere. He was director of the superb Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, founder of the Leipzig Conservatory, a regular visitor to England, and Kapellmeister to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in Berlin. For Mendelssohn’s Berlin duties, Friedrich required incidental music for several new productions at the Royal Theater, including Sophocles’ *Oedipus* and *Antigone*, Racine’s *Athalie* and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. This last would, of course, include the celebrated Overture Mendelssohn had written when he was seventeen, exactly half his age in 1842. He composed the twelve additional numbers of the incidental music the following spring, creating a perfect match for the inspiration and style of the Overture. The premiere of the new production in November was a triumph.

The *Scherzo*, the Entr’acte to Act II, is the music that, in the words of Sir George Grove, “brought the fairies into the orchestra and fixed them there.” Its winsome grace and incandescent sonorities defined in large part the idea of delicacy in music.

RICHARD STRAUSS (1864-1949)

“Moonlight” from *Capriccio*, Opus 85 (1939-1941)

In his *New Encyclopedia of the Opera*, David Ewen offered the following précis of *Capriccio*, Richard Strauss’ last operatic venture: “The almost actionless libretto [set in a chateau in late-18th-century France] is little more than a discussion as to which is more significant in opera, the words or the music. Flamand, the musician, becomes the spokesman for the music; Olivier, the poet, for the words. Both are emotionally involved with the Countess Madeleine. When LaRoche, a producer, plans a series of entertainments to celebrate the Countess’ birthday, she suggests that Flamand and Olivier collaborate, using for their material the day’s happenings and themselves as principal characters. When they leave to write their ‘entertainment,’ the Countess (looking in a mirror) asks herself which man she prefers. She comes to the conclusion that both interest her equally. Her conclusion is Strauss’ answer to the problem that opened the opera: in opera, the words and music have equal importance.”

Moonlight opens the opera’s final scene, providing the sumptuous musical background for a crepuscular tableau for the Countess standing on a balcony of her chateau as she ponders the opera’s essential question.

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

“In the Hall of the Mountain King” from *Peer Gynt*, Opus 23 (1874-1875)

The premiere of the revival in Oslo of the fantastical allegory *Peer Gynt* by Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) in February 1876 for which Grieg provided a raft of incidental music was one of the greatest successes of

the composer's life. The event marked the beginning of his international renown and his financial security. Grieg outlined the plot of the play, though it must be noted that the episodes and characters he mentions have a deeper, symbolic significance than is apparent from this brief précis: "Peer Gynt, the only son of poor peasants, is drawn by the poet as a character of morbidly developed fancy and a prey to megalomania. In his youth, he has many wild adventures — comes, for instance, to a peasants' wedding where he carries the bride up to the mountain peaks. There he leaves her so that he may roam about with wild cowherd girls. He then enters the land of the Mountain King, whose daughter falls in love with him and dances for him. But he laughs at the dance and its droll music, whereupon the enraged mountain folk wish to kill him. But he succeeds in escaping and wanders to foreign countries, among others to Morocco, where he appears as a prophet and is greeted by Arab girls. After many wonderful guidings of Fate, he at last returns home as an old man. There the sweetheart of his youth, Solvejg, who has stayed true to him for all these years, meets him, and his weary head at last finds rest in her lap." *In the Hall of the Mountain King* accompanies Peer's terrified escape from the abode of the most fearsome of Norway's trolls.

ARAM KHACHATURIAN (1903-1978)

Suite from *Masquerade* (1941, 1944)

Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov is generally ranked second only to Pushkin among 19th-century Russian writers for the beauty of his language, the passion of his expression, and the commitment to his progressive beliefs. His finest play, *Masquerade*, written in 1834-1835, is a gimlet-eyed critique of the decadent, claustrophobic world of St. Petersburg's contemporary upper-class society. The drama, modeled on Shakespeare's *Othello*, tells of the suspicions of Arbenin, a world-weary aristocrat, that his wife is having an affair, of those doubts being enflamed by a supposedly trusted friend, of Arbenin's murder of her, and of his descent into madness when he learns that she is innocent; there are two crucial ball scenes in the play, the first one in masks. The drama was not published until 1842, a year after Lermontov's death, and not staged publicly until its premiere in Moscow in 1862. Alexander Glazunov wrote extensive incidental music for the innovative Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold's revival of the play in St. Petersburg in 1917, and Moscow's Vakhtangov Theater commissioned Aram Khachaturian, the well-known Armenian composer with a penchant for theater music — his creative catalog includes three ballets, music for eight plays and soundtracks for ten films — to write the score for its production of *Masquerade* in 1941, the centenary of the poet's death. Following the premiere, on June 21, 1941, theater critic Yuri Yuzovsky wrote, "In Khachaturian's music, Lermontov's perturbed muse is shown in an unusual, almost physical presence."

Khachaturian said that the *Waltz* reflects the words of Nina, the heroine, after she had returned home from the ball: "How beautiful the new waltz is! I whirled ever faster, as if intoxicated. A wonderful desire seemed to carry me and my thoughts to the very horizon; something between sorrow and joy gripped my heart." The brooding *Romance* suggests Nina's growing apprehension over her husband's unfounded jealousy. The raucous *Galop* is as much a commentary on the characters trapped in Lermontov's sardonic tragedy as accompaniment for the clowns entertaining during a ball scene.

FRITZ KREISLER (1875-1962)

Three Works for Violin and Orchestra

Praeludium and Allegro (1910)

Liebesleid (1905)

Schön Rosmarin (1905)

Fritz Kreisler — "unanimously considered among his colleagues to be the greatest violinist of the 20th century," wrote critic Harold Schonberg in *The New York Times* on January 30, 1962, the day after Kreisler died — was admitted to the Vienna Conservatory when he was seven, gave his first performance at nine, and won a Gold Medal when he was ten. He then transferred to the Paris Conservatoire, where, at age twelve, he won the school's Gold Medal over forty other competitors, all of whom were at least ten years his senior. In 1888-1889, Kreisler successfully toured the United States but then virtually abandoned music for several years, studying medicine in Vienna and art in Rome and Paris, and serving as an officer in the Austrian army. He again took up the violin in 1896 and failed to win

an audition to become a member of the Vienna Philharmonic, but quickly established himself as a soloist, making his formal re-appearance in Berlin in March 1899. He returned to America in 1900 and gave his London debut in 1901, creating a sensation at every performance. At the outbreak of World War I, Kreisler rejoined his former regiment but he was wounded soon thereafter and discharged from service. In November 1914, he moved to the United States, where he had been appearing regularly for a decade. He gave concerts in America to raise funds for Austrian war relief, but anti-German sentiment ran so high after America's entry into the war that he had to withdraw temporarily from public life. He resumed his concert career in New York in October 1919, then returned to Europe. In 1938, following the annexation of Austria by the Nazis, Kreisler settled in the United States for good; he became an American citizen in 1943. Despite being injured in a traffic accident in 1941, he continued concertizing to immense acclaim through the 1949-1950 season. He died in New York in 1962. In addition to being one of the 20th-century's undisputed masters of the violin, Fritz Kreisler also composed a string quartet, a violin concerto and two operettas (*Apple Blossoms* and *Sissy*), but he is most fondly remembered for his many short compositions and arrangements for violin, including *Liebesleid* ("Love's Sorrow") and *Schön Rosmarin* ("Beautiful Rosemary"), waltzes imbued with the distinctive *Gemütlichkeit* of his native Vienna. Among Kreisler's most delightful musical counterfeits of Baroque music is the *Praeludium and Allegro in the Style of Pugnani* (1731-1798, a Turin-born violinist and composer).

PABLO DE SARASATE (1844-1908)

Fantasy on Bizet's *Carmen* for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 25 (1883)

Pablo Martín Melitón de Sarasate y Navascuez — economized to Pablo de Sarasate when he became a star — occupied, with Nicolò Paganini and Joseph Joachim, the pinnacle of 19th-century fiddledom. The son of a military bandmaster in Pamplona, Spain, he started violin lessons at five, gave his first public performance at eight, and rocketed past the pedagogical prowess of the best local teachers so quickly thereafter that he had to be sent to the Paris Conservatoire for further instruction with Delphin Alard at the age of twelve. So much promise for furthering the cause of Spanish culture did he show that Queen Isabella presented him with a Stradivarius violin (a handsome piece of booty acquired in a recent tiff with Naples), and personally authorized the subsidy of his expenses. Within a year, he won a *premier prix* in violin and solfège at the Conservatoire, acquired another prize, in harmony, in 1859, and then set off on the tours of Europe, Africa, North and South America and the Orient that made him one of the foremost musicians of his time. (His first tour of the United States was in 1870; his last in 1889.) Whereas Paganini was noted for his flamboyant technical wizardry and emotional exuberance, and Joachim for his high-minded intellectualism and deep musical insights, Sarasate was famed for his elegance, precision, apparent ease of execution and, in the words of Eduard Hanslick, the Vienna-based doyen of Europe's music critics, his "stream of beautiful sound." The handful of recordings Sarasate made shortly before his death in Biarritz in 1908, the first commercial discs made by a world-famous violinist, attest to his remarkable skill.

Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* (dedicated to Joseph Hellmesberger, a distinguished violinist remembered as an advocate of Brahms' chamber music and as director of the Vienna Conservatory) borrows some of the best-loved melodies from Bizet's timeless masterpiece: the *Entr'acte* between Acts III and IV; Carmen's *Habanera*; the scene of Carmen, Don José and Zuniga, "Mon officier c'était une querelle"; the *Séguidille* from Act I; and the *Chanson Bohème* from Act II.

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda