

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

January 13 AND 15, 2017

JUKKA-PEKKA SARAESTE, CONDUCTOR

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN      Symphony No. 7 in A major, Opus 92  
I.      Poco sostenuto — Vivace  
II.      Allegretto  
III.      Presto  
IV.      Allegro con brio

Intermission

JEAN SIBELIUS                      Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Opus 82  
I.      Tempo molto moderato - Allegro moderato - Presto  
II.      Andante mosso, quasi allegretto  
III.      Allegro molto - Misterioso

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Opus 92 (1811-1812)

Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in Bonn on December 16, 1770 and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. His Seventh Symphony was composed during the years 1811 and 1812, and was premiered on December 8, 1813 at the University of Vienna, with the composer conducting. The Pittsburgh Symphony gave its first performance of the symphony on January 6, 1898 at Carnegie Music Hall, with Frederic Archer conducting. The symphony was last performed on subscription on December 5-7, 2014, with Music Director Manfred Honeck. These performances were released by Reference Recordings on a Grammy nominated album of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies. The score calls for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings. **Performance time: approximately 36 minutes.**

In the autumn of 1813, Johann Nepomuk Mälzel, the inventor of the metronome, approached Beethoven with the proposal that the two organize a concert to benefit the soldiers wounded at the recent Battle of Hanau — with, perhaps, two or three repetitions of the concert to benefit themselves. Beethoven was eager to have his as-yet-unheard A major Symphony of the preceding year performed, and thought the financial reward worth the trouble, so he agreed. The concert consisted of this "Entirely New Symphony" by Beethoven, marches by Dussek and Pleyel performed on a "Mechanical Trumpeter" fabricated by Mälzel, and an orchestral arrangement of *Wellington's Victory*, a piece Beethoven had concocted the previous summer for yet another of Mälzel's musical machines, the clangorous "Panharmonicon." The evening was such a success that Beethoven's first biographer, Anton Schindler, reported, "All persons, however they had previously dissented from his music, now agreed to award him his laurels."

The orchestra for that important occasion included some of the most distinguished musicians and composers of the day: Spohr, Schuppanzigh, Dragonetti, Meyerbeer, Hummel and Salieri all lent their talents. Spohr, who played among the violins, left an account of Beethoven as conductor. "Beethoven had accustomed himself to indicate expression to the orchestra by all manner of singular bodily movements," wrote Spohr. "So often as a *sforzando* [a sudden, strong attack] occurred, he thrust apart his arms, which he had previously crossed upon his breast. At *piano* [soft] he crouched down lower and lower as he desired the degree of softness. If a *crescendo* [gradually louder] then entered, he slowly rose again, and at the entrance of the *forte* [loud] jumped into the air. Sometimes, too, he unconsciously shouted to strengthen the *forte*."

The Seventh Symphony is a magnificent creation in which Beethoven displayed several technical innovations that were to have a profound influence on the music of the 19th century: he expanded the scope of symphonic structure through the use of more distant tonal areas; he brought an unprecedented richness and range to the orchestral palette; and he gave a new awareness of rhythm as the vitalizing force in music. It is particularly the last of these characteristics that most immediately affects the listener, and to which commentators have consistently turned to explain the vibrant power of the work. Perhaps the most famous such observation about the Seventh Symphony is that of Richard Wagner, who called the work "the apotheosis of the Dance in its highest aspect ... the loftiest deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal world of tone." Couching his observation in less highfalutin language, John N. Burk believed that its rhythm gave this work a feeling of immense grandeur incommensurate with its relatively short forty-minute length. "Beethoven," Burk explained, "seems to have built up this impression by willfully driving a single rhythmic figure through each movement, until the music attains (particularly in the body of the first movement and in the Finale) a swift propulsion, an effect of cumulative growth which is akin to extraordinary size."

A slow introduction, almost a movement in itself, opens the Symphony. This initial section employs two themes: the first, majestic and unadorned, is passed down through the winds while being punctuated by long, rising scales in the strings; the second is a graceful melody for oboe. The transition to the main

part of the first movement is accomplished by the superbly controlled reiteration of a single pitch. This device not only connects the introduction with the exposition but also establishes the dactylic rhythm that dominates the movement.

The *Allegretto* scored such a success at its premiere that it was immediately encored, a phenomenon virtually unprecedented for a slow movement. Indeed, this music was so popular that it was used to replace the brief slow movement of the Eighth Symphony at several performances during Beethoven's lifetime. In form, the movement is a series of variations on the heartbeat rhythm of its opening measures. In spirit, however, it is more closely allied to the austere chaconne of the Baroque era than to the light, figural variations of Classicism.

The third movement, a study in contrasts of sonority and dynamics, is built on the formal model of the scherzo, but expanded to include a repetition of the horn-dominated Trio (Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo – Trio – Scherzo).

In the sonata-form finale, Beethoven not only produced music of virtually unmatched rhythmic energy (“a triumph of Bacchic fury,” in the words of Sir Donald Tovey), but did it in such a manner as to exceed the climaxes of the earlier movements and make it the goal toward which they had all been aimed. So intoxicating is this music that some of Beethoven's contemporaries were sure he had composed it in a drunken frenzy. An encounter with the Seventh Symphony is a heady experience. Klaus G. Roy, the distinguished musicologist and program annotator for The Cleveland Orchestra, wrote, “Many a listener has come away from a hearing of this Symphony in a state of being punch-drunk. Yet it is an intoxication without a hangover, a dope-like exhilaration without decadence.” To which the composer's own words may be added. “I am Bacchus incarnate,” boasted Beethoven, “appointed to give humanity wine to drown its sorrow.... He who divines the secret of my music is delivered from the misery that haunts the world.”

## JEAN SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Opus 82 (1915; revised in 1916, 1918 and 1919)

Jean Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland on December 8, 1865 and died in Järvenpää, Finland on September 20, 1957. The piece was composed in 1915 on a commission from the Finnish government for a concert to honor the composers fiftieth birthday. It was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra on December 8, 1915, with the composer conducting. Sibelius was not completely pleased with the piece, revising it in 1916, 1918, and for the final time in 1919. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the symphony on February 10, 1937 at Syria Mosque, led by Antonio Modarelli, and it was most recently performed on October 26, 2014 with Yan Pascal Tortelier. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings. **Performance time: approximately 38 minutes.**

For the three years after he issued his brooding Fourth Symphony in 1911, Sibelius was largely concerned with writing program music: *The Dryad*, *Scènes historiques*, *The Bard*, *The Océanides*, *Rakastava*. He even considered composing a ballet titled *King Fjalar* at that time, but rejected the idea: “I cannot become a prolific writer. It would mean killing all my reputation and my art. I have made my name in the world by straightforward means. I must go on in the same way. Perhaps I am too much of a hypochondriac, but I cannot waste on a few ballet steps a motif that would be excellently suited to symphonic composition.” As early as 1912, he envisioned a successor to the Fourth Symphony, but did not have any concrete ideas for the work until shortly before he left for a visit to the United States in May 1914 to conduct some of his compositions at the Norfolk (Connecticut) Music Festival. (*The Océanides* was commissioned for the occasion.) He returned to Finland in July; war erupted on the Continent the next month. In September, he described his mood over the terrifying political events as emotionally “in a deep dale,” but added, “I already begin to see dimly the mountain I shall certainly ascend.... God opens the door for a moment and His orchestra plays the Fifth Symphony.” He could not begin work on the piece immediately, however. One of his main sources of income — performance royalties from his

German publisher, Breitkopf und Härtel — was severely diminished because of the war-time turmoil, and he was forced to churn out a stream of songs and piano miniatures and to undertake tours to Gothenburg, Oslo and Bergen to pay the household bills.

Early in 1915, Sibelius learned that a national celebration was planned for his fiftieth birthday (December 8th), and that the government was commissioning from him a new symphony for the festive concert in Helsinki. He withdrew into the isolation of his country home at Järvenpää, thirty miles north of Helsinki (today a lovely museum dedicated to the composer), to devote himself to the gestating work, and admitted to his diary, "I love this life so infinitely, and feel that it must stamp everything that I compose." He had to rush to finish the work for the concert in December, even making changes in the parts during the final rehearsal, but the Symphony was presented as the centerpiece of the tribute to the man the program described as "Finland's greatest son." Sibelius' birthday was a veritable national holiday, and he was lionized with speeches, telegrams, banquets, greetings and gifts; the Fifth Symphony met with great acclaim. The concert, which also included *The Océanides* and the two Violin Serenades, was given three additional times during the following weeks.

Though the Fifth Symphony pleased its first audience, it did not completely please its composer. Sibelius regarded it as one of his most important scores, and expended enormous effort on polishing the work during the four years after its premiere. He first returned to the piece in 1916 with "a view to [its] still greater concentration in form and content." This version, intended for a Stockholm performance in 1917 that was cancelled because of the deteriorating political situation, was first presented under Sibelius' direction in Helsinki on December 14, 1916. Sibelius again took up the score in 1918, despite the miserable times spread throughout the country by the civil war that erupted in Finland in the wake of the Russian Revolution: the composer's isolated home was broken into twice by combatants searching for weapons (Sibelius played piano during the episode to calm his family); his brother, a physician, was killed in the hostilities. Convinced by friends to move to the relative safety of Helsinki, Sibelius continued the Symphony's revision, noting on May 20, 1918, "[It is] in a new form, practically composed anew; I work at it daily." (The Sixth and Seventh Symphonies were first mooted that same year.) The Symphony No. 5 achieved its definitive form the following year, and was first heard in that version on November 24, 1919 in Helsinki; Sibelius conducted.

While working on the final revision of the Fifth Symphony, Sibelius wrote that the ending was "triumphal," a description that seemed to invite programmatic interpretations of the score. When asked to be more specific, however, he said, "I do not wish to give a reasoned exposition of the essence of the Symphony. I have expressed my opinion in my works. I should like, however, to emphasize a point that I consider essential: the directly symphonic [i.e., abstract] is the compelling vein that goes through the whole. This in contrast to its being a depiction." For the London premiere in 1921, he asked that a note appear in the printed program stating, "The composer desires his work to be regarded as absolute music, having no direct poetic basis." Though no specific story or program can be reconciled with the Fifth Symphony, it is impossible to deny the life-giving, heroic optimism with which it ends, especially when compared with the introspective Symphony No. 4, so it is understandable that some critics and listeners heard here an affirmation of the human spirit at a time when the First World War was threatening the very foundations of Western culture. Time has not diminished the work's overwhelming emotional impact.

Theorists have long debated whether Sibelius' Fifth Symphony is in three or four movements; even the composer himself left contradictory evidence on the matter. The contention centers on the first two sections, a broad essay in leisurely tempo and a spirited scherzo, played without pause and related thematically. The opening portion is in a sort of truncated sonata form, though it is of less interest to discern its structural divisions than to follow the long arches of musical tension and release that Sibelius built through manipulation of the fragmentary, germinal theme presented at the beginning by the horns. The scherzo grows seamlessly from the music of the first section. At first dance-like and even playful, it accumulates dynamic energy as it unfolds, ending with a whirling torrent of sound. The following *Andante*, formally a theme and variations, is predominantly tranquil in mood, though punctuated by several piquant jabs of dissonance. "There are frequent moments in the music of Sibelius," wrote Charles O'Connell of the Symphony's finale, "when one hears almost inevitably the beat and whir of wings invisible, and this strange and characteristic effect almost always presages something magnificently portentous. We have it here." The second theme is a bell-tone motive led by the horns that serves as background to the woodwinds' long melodic lines. The whirring theme returns, after which the bell motive is treated in ostinato fashion, repeated over and over, building toward a climax until it seems about to burst from its own excitement — which it does. The forward motion abruptly stops, and the Symphony ends with six stentorian chords, separated by silence, proclaimed by the full orchestra.

