

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2016-2017 Mellon Grand Classics Season

May 19 and 21, 2017

DAVID ZINMAN, CONDUCTOR
RANDOLPH, VIOLA
MAXIMILIAN HORNUNG, CELLO

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Opus 90

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Andante
- III. Poco allegretto
- IV. Allegro

Intermission

RICHARD STRAUSS

Don Quixote, Opus 35

Mr. Hornung
Mr. Kelly

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Opus 90 (1882-1883)

Johannes Brahms was born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany, and he died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. His Third Symphony was written over the course of two years from 1882-1883, and was premiered in Vienna on December 2, 1883, at the Musikvereinsaal with the Vienna Philharmonic under the baton of Hans Richter. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed Brahms' Third Symphony on December 8, 1905, at Carnegie Music Hall with led by Emil Paur. Most recently, the Pittsburgh Symphony performed the work on April 14, 2013, at Heinz Hall led by Juanjo Mena. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs plus contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

Performance time: approximately 36 minutes.

Brahms had reached the not inconsiderable age of 43 before he unveiled his First Symphony. The Second Symphony followed within eighteen months, and the musical world was prepared for a steady stream of similar masterworks from his pen. However, it was to be another six years before he undertook his Third Symphony, though he did produce the *Academic Festival* and *Tragic Overtures*, Violin Concerto and Second Piano Concerto during that time. When he did get around to the new symphony, he was nearly fifty, and had just recovered from a spell of feeling that he was "too old" for creative work, even informing his publisher, Simrock, that he would be sending him nothing more. It seems likely — though such matters always remained in the shadows where Brahms was concerned — that his creative juices were stirred anew by a sudden infatuation with "a pretty Rhineland girl." This was Hermine Spiess, a contralto of excellent talent who was 26 when Brahms first met her in January 1883 at the home of friends. (Brahms was fifty.) A cordial, admiring friendship sprang up between the two, but this affair, like every other one in Brahms' life in which a respectable woman was involved, never grew any deeper. He used to declare, perhaps only half in jest, that he lived his life by two principles, "and one of them is never to attempt either an opera or a marriage." Perhaps what he really needed was a muse rather than a wife. At any rate, Brahms spent the summer of 1883 not in his usual haunts among the Austrian hills and lakes, but at the German spa of Wiesbaden, which just happened to be the home of Hermine. Work went well on the new symphony, and it was completed before he returned to Vienna in October.

More than just an attractive girl was on Brahms' mind in 1883, however. He had recently suffered the deaths of several close friends, including his dear teacher, Marxsen, and he was feuding with the violinist Joseph Joachim, who had been a champion of his music for thirty years. Many cross-currents of emotion therefore impinged upon the Third Symphony, though Brahms certainly had no specific program in mind for the work. It has nevertheless been called his "Eroica" (by Hans Richter and Eduard Hanslick), a forest idyll (Clara Schumann), a rendering of the Greek legend of Hero and Leander (Joachim), a depiction of the statue of *Germania* at Rüdesheim (Max Kalbeck), and of a young, heroic Bismarck (Richard Specht). It is all of these, at least to these individuals, but, more importantly, it is really none of these or any other specifically non-musical subject, because this Third Symphony of Brahms is the pinnacle of the pure, abstract symphonic art that stretched back more than a century to Haydn and Mozart. It is a work of such supreme mastery of all the musical elements that it is a distillation of an almost infinite number of emotional states, not one of which can be adequately rendered in words. "When I look at the Third Symphony of Brahms," lamented the English master Sir Edward Elgar, "I feel like a tinker."

When the Third Symphony first appeared, it was generally acclaimed as Brahms' best work in the form, and perhaps the greatest of all his compositions, despite well-organized attempts by the Wagner cabal to disrupt the premiere. Critical opinion has changed little since. This, the shortest of the four symphonies, is the most clear in formal outline, the most subtle in harmonic content, and the most assured in contrapuntal invention. No time is wasted in establishing the conflict that charges the first movement with dynamic energy. The two bold opening chords juxtapose bright F major and a somber chromatic harmony in the opposing moods of light and shadow that course throughout the work. The main theme comes from the strings "like a bolt from Jove," according to Olin Downes, with the opening chords repeated by the woodwinds as its accompaniment. Beautifully directed chromatic harmonies — note the bass line, which always carries the motion to its close- and long-range goals — lead to the

pastoral second theme, sung softly by the clarinet. The development section is brief, but includes elaborations of most of the motives from the exposition. The tonic key of F is re-established, not harmonically but melodically (again the bass leads the way), and the golden chords of the opening proclaim the recapitulation. A long coda based on the main theme reinforces the tonality and discharges much of the music's energy, allowing the movement to close quietly, as do, most unusually, all the movements of this Symphony.

The second and third are the most intimate and personal movements found anywhere in Brahms' orchestral output. A simple, folk-like theme appears in the rich colors of the low woodwinds and low strings to open the second movement. The central section of the movement is a Slavic-sounding plaint intoned by clarinet and bassoon that eventually gives way to the flowing rhythms of the opening and the return of the folk theme supported by a new, rippling string accompaniment. Edward Downes noted about this lovely *Andante* that its "almost Olympian grace and poise recall the spirit if not the letter of Mozart." The romantic third movement replaces the usual scherzo. It is ternary in form, like the preceding movement, and utilizes the warmest tone colors of the orchestra.

The finale begins with a sinuous theme of brooding character. A brief, chant-like processional derived from the Slavic theme of the second movement provides contrast. Further thematic material is introduced (one theme is arch-shaped; the other, more rhythmically vigorous) and well examined. Brahms dispensed here with a true development section, but combined its function with that of the recapitulation as a way of tightening the structure. As the end of the movement nears, the tonality returns to F major, and there is a strong sense of struggle passed. The tension subsides, and the work ends with the ghost of the opening movement's main theme infused with a sunset glow.

RICHARD STRAUSS

Don Quixote, Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character, Opus 35 (1897)

Richard Strauss was born in Munich June 11, 1864, and died in Bavaria on September 8, 1949. He composed *Don Quixote* in 1897, and it premiered two years later in Cologne, Germany on March 8, 1898. The premiere was conducted by Franz Wüllner with cellist Friedrich Grützmaker. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed *Don Quixote* at Syria Mosque on November 14, 1941, led by Fritz Reiner with soloists Gregor Piatigorsky and Henri Temiánka. Most recently, the Pittsburgh Symphony performed the work on October 21, 2006, led by Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos with soloists Randolph Kelly and Ralph Kirshbaum. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tenor and bass tubas, harp, timpani, percussion, strings, and solo cello and viola.

Performance time: approximately 42 minutes.

Don Quixote by Cervantes is not only among the earliest examples of the novel in world literature (1605), but also one of the most admired and widely enjoyed. Cervantes sketched his hero thus: "Through little sleep and much reading, he dried up his brains in such sort as he wholly lost his judgment." Thereupon, "He fell into one of the strangest conceits that a madman ever stumbled on in this world ... that he should become a knight-errant, and go throughout the world with his horse and armor to seek adventures and practice in person all he had read was used by knights of yore...."

Knights in shining armor were as much out of fashion in Cervantes' day as covered wagons and the pony express are in ours, but the nostalgic, historical romance that they represent is the source of much of the poignancy that *Don Quixote* elicits and that served as the emotional engine for Richard Strauss' superb tone poem, as well as for works by some sixty other composers, including Telemann and Purcell. In his setting, Strauss chose to emphasize the dramatic elements of the tale by assigning a theme representing Quixote to the solo cello, and then varying the melody to depict several episodes from the novel. Along for the adventure (as well as much abuse from his master) is the faithful squire, Sancho Panza, usually played by solo viola, but also given to the tenor tuba and bass clarinet.

Strauss' tone poem portrays ten of Quixote's exploits, described in a summary of the action that appeared in the two-piano version of the score:

"Introduction: The elderly hero's fancy teems with the 'impossible follies' of the romantic works he has been reading. He goes mad [a sharp dissonance following a harp glissando] and in his madness he vows that he will become a knight-errant.

"Theme: 'Don Quixote, the Knight of the Rueful Countenance; Sancho Panza.' Here the theme of the hero is announced by the solo cello. Sancho Panza's theme emerges first in the bass clarinet, then in the tenor tuba; later, however, it is given to the solo viola.

"Variation I. 'The Knight and his Squire Start on Their Journey.' Inspired by the beautiful Dulcinea of Toboso, the Knight attacks some 'monstrous giants,' who are nothing more than windmills revolving in the breeze. The sails knock him down and he is in a 'very evil plight.'

"Variation II. 'The Victorious Battle Against the Host of the Great Emperor Alifanfaron.' A huge army approaches in a swirling cloud of dust. It is only a great herd of sheep, but the Knight's tottering mind perceives the flashing weapons of soldiery. He rushes into the charge, unmindful of Sancho's warnings, and the muted brass depicts the pitiful bleating of the animals. The Knight is stoned by the shepherds, and he falls to the ground.

"Variation III. 'Colloquies of Knight and Squire.' Honor, glory, the Ideal Woman — these are the things that Don Quixote speaks on. Sancho, the realist, holds forth for a more comfortable life, but he is ordered to hold his tongue.

"Variation IV. 'The Adventure with the Penitents.' Mistaking a band of pilgrims for robbers and villains, Don Quixote attacks, only to receive a sound drubbing from them. The pilgrims depart, intoning their churchly theme, and the senseless Knight revives to the great delight of Sancho, who soon falls asleep.

"Variation V. 'The Knight's Vigil.' Don Quixote spurns sleep. He will watch by his armor instead. Dulcinea, in answer to his prayers, comes to him in a vision, as the theme of the Ideal Woman is heard in the horn.

"Variation VI. 'The Meeting with Dulcinea.' Jestingly, Sancho points to a country wench as Dulcinea. Don Quixote then vows vengeance against the wicked magician who has wrought this transformation.

"Variation VII. 'The Ride Through the Air.' Blindfolded, Knight and squire sit astride a wooden horse, which — they have been informed — will carry them aloft. Their themes surge upward and one hears the whistling of the wind, including the whine of the wind machine, though the wooden horse has never left the ground.

"Variation VIII. 'The Journey to the Enchanted Park.' In an oarless boat, Don Quixote and Sancho embark, as the theme of the Knight comes through as a Barcarolle. Though the boat capsizes, the two finally reach shore and give thanks for their safety.

"Variation IX. 'The Combat with Two Magicians.' Back on his horse and eager as ever for adventure, Don Quixote violently charges into a peaceable pair of monks, who are going by on their mules. In his maddened brain, the monks are mighty magicians, and Quixote is elated beyond measure at their utter rout.

"Variation X. 'The Duel with the Knight of the White Moon.' The greatest setback of his knightly career is suffered by Quixote at the hands of the Knight of the White Moon, who is, after all, a true friend. He explains that he hoped to cure Don Quixote of his madness, and, having won the duel, orders him to retire peacefully to his home.

"Finale. 'The Death of Don Quixote.' The worn and harried Knight is no longer bemused. It was all vanity, he reflects, and he is prepared, now, for the peace that is death."