

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2017-2018 Mellon Grand Classics Season

October 27, 28 and 29, 2017

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR  
ALISA WEILERSTEIN, CELLO

JAMES MCMILLAN

*Larghetto for Orchestra*

WORLD PREMIERE

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra commission in honor of the  
Tenth Anniversary of Manfred Honeck as Music Director

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Concerto in A minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 129

I. Nicht zu schnell

II. Langsam

III. Sehr lebhaft

*Played without pause*

**Ms. Weilerstein**

Intermission

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 55, "Eroica"

I. Allegro con brio

II. Marcia funèbre: Adagio assai

III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace

IV. Finale: Allegro molto

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### JAMES MACMILLAN

#### *Larghetto for Orchestra* (composed in 2009 for chorus, orchestrated in 2017)

James MacMillan was born in Kilwinning, Ayrshire, Scotland on July 16, 1959. He composed his *Larghetto for Orchestra* in 2009 as a piece for chorus, titled *Miserere*, and orchestrated it for the Pittsburgh Symphony in 2017 in honor of Manfred Honeck's 10<sup>th</sup> season as Music Director. While these performances mark the World Premiere of the orchestration, the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh gave the Pittsburgh premiere of the choral work Manfred Honeck on June 4, 2017, as part of MacMillan's Composer of the Year Residency. The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 13 minutes**

Scottish composer James MacMillan, born in Kilwinning, Ayrshire on July 16, 1959, was educated at the University of Edinburgh (B.Mus., 1981) and University of Durham (Ph.D., 1987), where his principal teacher was John Casken. After working as a lecturer at Manchester University from 1986 to 1988, MacMillan returned to Scotland, where he has since fulfilled numerous important commissions and taught at the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. He has also served as Artistic Director of the Edinburgh Contemporary Arts Trust, Affiliate Composer of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Composer/Conductor with the BBC Philharmonic, and Visiting Composer of the Philharmonia Orchestra and Artistic Director of its contemporary music series, Music Today; he became Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic in 2010. In 1993, MacMillan won both the Gramophone Contemporary Music Record of the Year Award and the Classic CD Award for Contemporary Music; he was made a CBE in 2004, given the 2008 British Composer Award for Liturgical Music, named an Honorary Patron of the London Chamber Orchestra in 2008, and was awarded a Knighthood in the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours. In October 2014, MacMillan inaugurated the Cumnock Tryst, a festival of international scope that he organized in his boyhood home in southern Scotland.

Macmillan's compositions, many of which incorporate traditional Scottish elements and bear some stamp of either his religion (Catholicism) or his politics (socialism), include two operas, a *St. John Passion*, concerted works for piano (*The Berserking*), percussion (*Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*), cello, clarinet, organ and trumpet, orchestral scores, chamber works, and pieces for solo voices and chorus. Of his creative personality, MacMillan wrote, "There are strong Scottish traits in my works, but also an aggressive and forthright tendency with a strong rhythmic physicality, showing the influence of Stravinsky, Messiaen and some minimalist composers.... My philosophy of composition looks beyond the introversion of the New Music 'ghetto' and seeks a wider communication while in no way promoting a compromising populism.... The 'modernist' zeal of the post-World War II generation of composers who attempted to eschew any continuation of tradition is anathema to me. I respect tradition in many forms, whether cultural, political or historical, and in keeping up a continuous, delicate scrutiny of old forms, ancient traditions, enduring beliefs and lasting values one is strengthened in one's constant, restless search for new avenues of expression. The existence of the influence of the old alongside the experiments of the new should not appear incongruous. Therefore, in ideological terms, my works express the timeless truths of Roman Catholicism alongside a fierce social commitment. And musically one can hopefully sense the depths of times past integrating with attempts at innovation."

*Larghetto for Orchestra* is MacMillan's instrumental version of the *a cappella Miserere* he composed for the acclaimed London-based choral ensemble The Sixteen in 2009. The text for the choral work, the penitential Psalm 51 — *Miserere mei, Deus: Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness. According to the multitude of Thy mercies, do away mine offences. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my faults ...* — is taken from the Matins service of *Tenebrae* ("darkness"), which encompasses the most solemn moments of the Christian year. The term is applied to the combined Roman Catholic services of Matins and Lauds that bracket daybreak on Thursday, Friday and Saturday of Holy Week, during which fifteen candles signifying the ebbing life of Christ are extinguished one-by-one after the singing of the obligatory Psalms. The service closes "*in tenebris*." MacMillan's *Miserere* and its *Larghetto for Orchestra* analogue not only plumb the images and

emotions of the individual verses, but also trace a slowly swelling optimism, from the recognition and repentance of the opening lines to hope of forgiveness at the close.

## ROBERT SCHUMANN

### Concerto in A minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 129 (1850)

Robert Schuman was born in Zwickau, Germany on June 8, 1810, and died in Endenich, near Bonn on July 29, 1856. He composed his Concerto in A minor for Cello and Orchestra in 1850, and it was premiered at the Leipzig Conservatory with soloist Ludwig Ebert on June 9, 1860. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the work at the Syria Mosque with conductor Fritz Reiner and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky on November 22, 1946, and most recently performed it with former Music Director Mariss Jansons and Principal Cellist Anne Martindale Williams. The score calls for flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 26 minutes**

In September 1850, the Schumanns left Dresden to take up residence in Düsseldorf, where Robert assumed the post of municipal music director. He was welcomed to the city with a serenade, a concert of his works, a supper and a ball. Though he had been cautioned by his friend Felix Mendelssohn that the local musicians were a shoddy bunch, he was eager to take on the variety of duties that awaited him in the Rhenish city, including conducting the orchestra's subscription concerts, leading performances of church music, giving private music lessons, organizing a chamber music society and composing as time allowed. Mendelssohn's advice notwithstanding, Schumann found the players acceptable, and plunged into his work with energy and enthusiasm. Surprisingly, this busy, new situation had a salutary effect on his composition, and within months he had composed the *Scenes from Goethe's "Faust"*, an Overture to Schiller's *The Bride of Messina*, many songs, the "Rhenish" Symphony (inspired by a trip upstream on September 29th to Cologne's awe-inspiring cathedral) and this lovely Cello Concerto.

Despite Schumann's promising entry into the musical life of Düsseldorf, it was not long before things turned sour. His fragile mental health, his ineptitude as a conductor, and his frequent irritability created a rift with the musicians, and the orchestra's governing body presented him with the suggestion that, perhaps, his time would be better devoted entirely to composition. Schumann, increasingly unstable though at first determined to stay, complained to his wife, Clara, that he was being cruelly treated. Proceedings were begun by the orchestra committee to relieve him of his position, but his resignation in 1853 ended the matter. By early the next year, Schumann's reason had completely given way. On February 27th, he tried to drown himself in the Rhine, and a week later he was committed to the asylum in Endenich, where he lingered with fleeting moments of sanity for nearly two-and-a-half years. His faithful Clara was there with him when he died on July 29, 1856, at the age of 46.

The Cello Concerto, a product of Schumann's first, happy months in Düsseldorf, was the result of a special affection he harbored for the instrument throughout his life. When a finger injury in 1832 ended his piano playing, he dabbled for a short time with the cello as a musical outlet. Though he never mastered the instrument, his familiarity with it is evident in this Concerto. Schumann directed that the Concerto's three movements be played without pause. The first two movements are expressive and largely contemplative, "exactly those qualities of the beloved enthusiastic dreamer whom we know as Schumann," wrote Sir Donald Tovey. The finale brings to the work a playful virtuosic verve to conclude the Concerto with a flurry of high spirits.

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Opus 55, "Eroica" (1803-1804)

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in Bonn on December 16, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He composed his Third Symphony in 1803 and 1804, and it was premiered at the Palace of Prince Joseph Lobkowitz with Beethoven conducting in December 1804. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered

the symphony at Carnegie Music Hall with Frederic Archer on January 21, 1897, and most recently performed it with Manfred Honeck on February 22, 2015. These performances are being recorded for future commercial release on Reference Recordings. The score calls for woodwinds and trumpets in pairs, three horns, timpani and strings.

**Performance time: approximately 50 minutes**

The year 1804 — the time Beethoven finished his Third Symphony — was crucial in the modern political history of Europe. Napoleon Bonaparte had begun his meteoric rise to power only a decade earlier, after playing a significant part in the recapture in 1793 of Toulon, a Mediterranean port that had been surrendered to the British by French royalists. Britain, along with Austria, Prussia, Holland and Spain, was a member of the First Coalition, an alliance that had been formed by those monarchical nations in the wake of the execution of Louis XVI to thwart the French National Convention's ambition to spread revolution (and royal overthrow) throughout Europe. In 1796, Carnot entrusted the campaign against northern Italy, then dominated by Austria, to the young General Bonaparte, who won a stunning series of victories with an army that he had transformed from a demoralized, starving band into a military juggernaut. He returned to France in 1799 as First Consul of the newly established Consulate, and put in place measures to halt inflation, instituted a new legal code, and repaired relations with the Church. It was to this man, this great leader and potential savior of the masses from centuries of tyrannical political, social and economic oppression, that Beethoven intended to pay tribute in his majestic E-flat Symphony, begun in 1803. The name "Bonaparte" appears above that of the composer on the original title page.

Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor of France in 1804 and was crowned, with the new Empress Josephine, at Notre Dame Cathedral on December 2nd, an event forever frozen in time by David's magnificent canvas in the Louvre. Beethoven, enraged and feeling betrayed by this usurpation of power, roared at his student Ferdinand Ries, who brought him the news, "Then is he, too, only an ordinary human being?" The ragged hole in the title page of the score now in the library of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna bears mute testimony to the violent manner in which Beethoven erased Napoleon from this Symphony. He later inscribed it, undoubtedly with much sorrow, "To celebrate the memory of a great man."

The "Eroica" ("Heroic") is a work that changed the course of music history. There was much sentiment at the turn of the 19th century that the expressive and technical possibilities of the symphonic genre had been exhausted by Haydn, Mozart, C.P.E. Bach and their contemporaries. It was Beethoven, and specifically this majestic Symphony, that threw wide the gates on the unprecedented artistic vistas that were to be explored for the rest of the century. In a single giant leap, he invested the genre with the breadth and richness of emotional and architectonic expression that established the grand sweep that the word "symphonic" now connotes. For the first time, with this music, the master composer was recognized as an individual responding to a higher calling. No longer could the creative musician be considered a mere artisan in tones, producing pieces within the confines of the court or the church for specific occasions, much as a talented chef would dispense a hearty roast or a succulent torte. After Beethoven, the composer was regarded as a visionary — a special being lifted above mundane experience — who could guide benighted listeners to loftier planes of existence through his valued gifts. The modern conception of an artist — what he is, his place in society, what he can do for those who experience his work — stems from Beethoven. Romanticism began with the "Eroica."

The Symphony's first movement, perhaps the largest sonata design composed to that time, opens with a brief summons of two mighty chords. At least four thematic ideas are presented in the exposition, and one of the wonders of the Symphony is the way in which Beethoven made these melodies succeed each other in a seemingly inevitable manner, as though this music could have been composed in no other way. The development section is a massive essay progressing through many moods all united by an almost titanic sense of struggle. It is in this central portion of the movement and in the lengthy coda that Beethoven broke through the boundaries of the 18th-century symphony to create a work not only longer in duration but also more profound in meaning. The composer's own words are reflected in this awe-inspiring movement: "Music is the electric soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents."

The beginning of the second movement — *Marcia funèbre* ("Funeral March") — with its plaintive, simple themes intoned over a mock drum-roll in the basses, is the touchstone for the expression of tragedy in instrumental music. The mournful C minor of the opening gives way to the brighter C major of the oboe's melody in a stroke of genius that George Bernard Shaw, during his early days as a music critic in London, admitted "ruins me," as only the expression of deepest emotion can. A development-like section, full of remarkable contrapuntal complexities, is followed by a return of the simple opening threnody, which itself eventually expires amid sobs and silences at the close of this eloquent movement.

The third movement is a scherzo, the lusty successor to the graceful minuet. The central section is a rousing trio for horns, one of the earliest examples (Haydn's "Horn Call" Symphony is an exception) of the use of more than two horns in an orchestral work.

The finale is a large set of variations on two themes, one of which (the first one heard) forms the bass line to the other. The second theme, introduced by the oboe, is a melody which appears in three other of Beethoven's works: the finale of the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, the *Contradanse No. 7* and the *Variations and Fugue*, Op. 35 for piano. The variations accumulate energy as they go, and, just as it seems the movement is whirling toward its final climax, the music comes to a full stop before launching into an extended *Andante* section that explores first the tender and then the majestic possibilities of the themes. A brilliant *Presto* led by the horns concludes this epochal work.