

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2017-2018 Mellon Grand Classics Season

February 23, 24 and 25, 2018

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR
YEFIM BRONFMAN, PIANO

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
37

Concerto No. 3 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus

- I. Allegro con brio
 - II. Largo
 - III. Rondo: Allegro
- Mr. Bronfman**

Intermission

ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 9 in D minor

- I. Feierlich – Sehr ruhig
- II. Scherzo: Bewegt, lebhaft — Trio: Schnell
- III. Adagio: Sehr langsam, feierlich

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 3 in C minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 37 (1797-1803)

Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in Bonn on December 16, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He composed his Third Piano Concerto from 1797 to 1803, and it was premiered in Vienna at the Theater an der Wien with Beethoven as the soloist on April 4, 1803. The Pittsburgh Symphony gave their premiere performance at Syria Mosque with Fritz Reiner conducting and Claudio Arrau as soloist on October 25, 1946, and most recently performed the concerto with Manfred Honeck and soloist Till Fellner on April 23, 2017. The score calls for woodwinds, horns and trumpets in pairs, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 34 minutes

By 1803, Emanuel Schickaneder, the colorful character who figured so prominently in the closing pages of Mozart's life as the librettist and producer of *The Magic Flute*, had taken over the management of Vienna's Theater-an-der-Wien. His house was locked in a fierce competitive battle with the court-subsidized Kärntnertheater, run by Baron Peter von Braun. When von Braun hired the distinguished Luigi Cherubini as resident composer, Schickaneder felt obliged to counter with his own music master, and he approached Beethoven with an offer. Beethoven, who had felt the need to write for the stage for some time, accepted gladly — especially since the job carried free lodgings in the theater as part of the compensation. He and Schickaneder dutifully plowed through a small library of possibilities for an operatic subject, but none inspired Beethoven until he took up work on *Fidelio* late in 1803.

In the meantime, Beethoven took advantage of his theatrical connection to put some of his instrumental works on display. Since opera was forbidden in Catholic countries during Lent at that time, the Theater-an-der-Wien was available for concerts in the early spring, and Beethoven scheduled such an event during April 1803. It had been fully three years since he last presented a concert entirely of his own music, and he had several scores that were awaiting their first performances, including the Second Symphony, the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* and the Third Piano Concerto. He programmed all of these, and, for good measure, tossed in the First Symphony, which had been premiered at his concert three years earlier.

Beethoven proceeded enthusiastically with plans for the concert, working right up to the last minute putting finishing touches on the new compositions. (His pupil Ferdinand Ries found him in bed writing trombone parts for the oratorio only three hours before the rehearsal began.) He had only a single rehearsal on the concert day for this wealth of unfamiliar music, and, with his less-than-adept players, it is little wonder that it went poorly. The public and critical response to the concert was lukewarm, undoubtedly due in large part to the inadequate performance. Beethoven, however, was delighted to have played his music for the Viennese public, and he was well on his way to becoming recognized more for his ability as a composer than as a pianist.

The Third Concerto's first movement opens with the longest introductory orchestral *tutti* in Beethoven's concertos, virtually a full symphonic exposition in itself. The strings in unison present immediately the main theme, "a group of pregnant figures," assessed the eminent British musicologist Sir Donald Tovey, "which nobody but Beethoven could have invented." The lyrical second theme is sung by violins and clarinet in a contrasting major mode. The closely reasoned development section grows inexorably from thematic fragments heard in the exposition. The recapitulation begins with a forceful restatement of the main theme by the full orchestra. The second theme and other melodic materials follow, always given a heightened emotional weight over their initial appearances, and lead to a cadenza written by Beethoven that takes on the character of a development section for the soloist. The orchestra re-enters, at first accompanied by quiet, ethereal chords in the piano but soon rising to a stern climax which draws the movement to a close.

The second movement is a nocturne of tender sentiments and quiet moods. Though analysis reveals its form to be a three-part structure (A–B–A), in spirit it is simply an extended song — a marvelous juxtaposition of hymnal tranquility and sensuous operatic love scene.

The traditional, Classical rondo was a form of simple, high spirits meant to send the audience away in a bubbling mood. Mozart, in his incomparable late concertos, had begun to explore the emotional depth

possible with the rondo, and in this Third Concerto Beethoven continued that search. (Mozart's Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491 was an important model for Beethoven's work.) Beethoven incorporated elements of sonata design into the finale to lend it additional weight, even inserting a fugal passage in the second episode. Only in the closing pages is the dark world of C minor abandoned for a vivacious romp through C major to close this wonderful work.

ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 9 in D minor (1887, 1891-1896)

Anton Bruckner was born in Ansfelden, near Linz, Austria on September 4, 1824, and died in Vienna on October 11, 1896. He sketched his Ninth Symphony in 1887, and eventually completed it between 1891 and 1896. Ferdinand Löwe conducted the Orchestra of the Vienna Concert Society in the premiere on February 11, 1903. The Pittsburgh Symphony first premiered the symphony at Syria Mosque under the direction on William Steinberg on May 5, 1967, and most recently performed it with Manfred Honeck on April 12, 2015. The score calls for three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons, eight horns, four Wagner tubas, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 67 minutes

"Often, I found him on his knees in profound prayer. As it was strictly forbidden to interrupt him under these circumstances, I stood by and overheard his naive, pathetic interpolations in the traditional texts. At times he would suddenly exclaim, 'Dear God, let me get well soon; you see I need my health to finish the Ninth.'" This touching report of Anton Bruckner during his last months came from one Dr. Richard Heller, a physician who attended the ailing composer while he was in a fierce race against death to complete his D minor Symphony.

Bruckner began sketching his Ninth Symphony in 1887, as soon as he had completed the Symphony No. 8. He collected many ideas for the new work, but decided to set the piece aside so that he could revise several of his earlier symphonies, notably the First and the just-completed Eighth. These painstaking revisions caused Bruckner great difficulties, dragging on for four years and sapping much of his strength and spirit. By 1889, when he turned 65, Bruckner began to suffer from dropsy, the accumulation of fluids in the body tissues, the painful disease that had afflicted Beethoven. In the spring of the following year, he was stricken with a chronic catarrh, or inflammation, of the larynx, and began to show signs of an abnormal nervous condition. In the fall, he was relieved of his duties as organ professor at the Vienna Conservatory; he retired as professor emeritus in January 1891.

Despite his deteriorating health, Bruckner returned to the D minor Symphony in April, telling the conductor Herman Levy, "I have already written down most of the themes." The first movement was done by October 1892, the same year that he left his position as organist at the Court Chapel, but work on the Symphony became more difficult with each passing month. A severe attack of dropsy in the fall of 1893, worsened by an attendant heart condition, prevented the completion of the *Scherzo* and *Adagio* until 1894.

During the remaining two years of his life, after he had given his last lecture at the University of Vienna and largely withdrawn from the world, Bruckner worked solely on the gigantic finale he planned to crown his Symphony. He realized that this would be his last composition (one theme in the *Adagio* is labeled "Farewell to Life"), and he prayed daily (and often invited his visitors to join him) that God would grant him the time to complete the score: "I have done my duty on earth. I have accomplished what I could, and my only wish is to be allowed to complete my Ninth Symphony.... There remains only the finale. I trust Death will not deprive me of my pen.... If He refuses, then He must take the responsibility for its incompleteness." Finished or not, the deeply religious Bruckner told Dr. Heller of his plans for the dedication of the new work: "I have made dedications to two earthly majesties: poor King Ludwig [of Bavaria], as a patron of the arts, and to our illustrious dear Emperor Franz Joseph, as the highest earthly majesty that I know. Now I dedicate to the Lord of lords, to my dear God, my last work, and hope that He will grant me enough time to finish it and will generously accept my gift."

Bruckner tried mightily to bring the Symphony to a conclusion. He worked on the finale whenever he felt able, sometimes even arising in the middle of the night to scratch down some thought or other. His housekeeper, Kathi Kachelmeyer (Bruckner never married), remonstrated with him for being out of bed when his health was so poor, but he responded by telling her, "One must compose when the right idea

comes.” And ideas there were in abundance for the closing movement. The six extant variants of the finale, among whose shaky pen-strokes are scattered phrases from *The Lord's Prayer*, stretch to some 400 measures, but none of the versions includes an ending, the necessary coda that would round out Bruckner's overall vision of the work. It seems likely that the composer, who also suffered mental lapses in his last year, could not conceive the finish of the Symphony — could not bring about the overwhelming catharsis demanded by the earlier movements. (The sketches indicate that this finale would have been of a larger dimension than even those for the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies. An attempt by the American musicologist William Carragan in 1984 to make a performing edition from the available material was generally judged as unsuccessful.) In the event that death prevented the completion of the score, Bruckner suggested that the choral *Te Deum* of 1885 should be used as the finale. That request had more to do with his sense of classical formal balance, which demanded a symphony of four movements, than it did with musical suitability, however, and his stop-gap measure is seldom used. Despite his fervent prayers and hopeful determination, the Ninth Symphony was left incomplete. He worked on the manuscript on the morning he died — October 11, 1896.

In 1896, the poor state of Bruckner's health was more widely known than was his progress on the Ninth Symphony, and it was assumed that he left the work in an unperformable state. Great was the public surprise, then, when the Bruckner disciple Ferdinand Löwe announced, six years after the composer died, that he had completed the score of the first three movements from the manuscript, added the *Te Deum* as the finale, and would perform the Symphony with the Vienna Concert Society on February 11, 1903. The composer's biographer Josef V. Wöss reported that the audience was “spellbound” by the performance. However, some questions about the fidelity of Löwe's edition to Bruckner's true thoughts were raised. In the periodical *Zeitschrift für Musik*, Max Auer asked, “Where are those abrupt, Bruckneresque transitions between the passages? Why do the various phrases end in gentle expirations? In short, whence comes this odd finesse, this smooth polish, into the work of a composer universally noted for his rugged individuality?” The questions remained unanswered until the Bruckner Society sponsored a private concert in Munich on April 4, 1932 at which were performed both the Löwe edition and a new one by Robert Haas and Alfred Orel, which resurrected Bruckner's original version. It was found that Löwe had made radical changes in the score, altering the dynamic scheme, many of the tempo indications, much of the orchestration, and even parts of the harmonic structure. That concert in Munich was perhaps the most important stimulus toward the modern view of Bruckner, which holds that he knew exactly what he was doing, and that the revisions of his symphonies he and others undertook only clouded the brilliance of the originals in concept and in detail. The Ninth Symphony is almost always performed today in the original three-movement version, without finale.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony loomed as inspiration and challenge over all of Bruckner's symphonic works, and nowhere larger than in this piece. “It grieves me that I conceived the theme of the Ninth in D minor,” the composer told his early biographer August Göllerich. “People will say, ‘Obviously, Bruckner's Ninth *had* to be in the same key as Beethoven's Ninth.’ But I cannot discard or transpose the theme because it appeals to me just the way it is, and it sounds so well in D minor.” In addition to a certain technical kinship, both symphonies inhabit a world of the most profoundly universal yet personal emotions. “For grandeur and loftiness,” wrote Max Auer, “Bruckner's Ninth Symphony surpasses all its predecessors. [Here] the master left us his most sublime work.”

The majestic scale of the work is established with the grandiose sonata form of the opening movement. The main theme group comprises three thematic motives. The first motive is intoned by the horns above a premonitory quivering in the strings. The second motive builds directly into the stentorian unison statement of the third, an octave-leap motive by the full orchestra. The second theme is a long melody of tender warmth played by the strings. The closing theme, an arch-shaped strain based on open chordal intervals, is initiated by the winds in imitation. The development section elaborates the moods and themes established in earlier pages. The recapitulation rolls in on an overwhelming wave of sound enfolding the third (octave-leap) motive. “When they hear that, they won't know what to make of it; but by that time, I'll be in my grave,” predicted Bruckner of the spectral Scherzo. He referred specifically to the movement's daring harmonic vocabulary and its haunted mood and violent outbursts. Bruckner called the *Adagio* the most beautiful of all his slow movements, and it is hard to imagine what music could follow this sublime statement of the composer's intense, mystical faith.