Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2017-2018 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 2 and 4, 2018

MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR
BENJAMIN GROSVENOR, PIANO

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 5, Opus 100

I. Andante
II. Allegro moderato
III. Adagio
IV. Allegro giocoso

Mr. Grosvenor

Intermission

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 19

I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio
III. Rondo: Molto allegro

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

Sinfonietta

I. Allegretto
II. Andante — Allegretto
III. Moderato
IV. Allegretto
V. Andante con moto

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 5, Opus 100 (1944)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontzovka, Russia on April 23, 1891, and died in Moscow on March 5, 1953. He composed his Fifth Symphony in 1944, and it was premiered in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory by the USSR State Symphony Orchestra with Prokofiev conducting on January 13, 1945. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the work at Syria Mosque with conductor Fritz Reiner on November 28, 1947, and most recently performed it with Leonard Slatkin on March 24, 2013. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, harp and strings.
Performance time: approximately 46 minutes

"In the Fifth Symphony I wanted to sing the praises of the free and happy man — his strength, his generosity and the purity of his soul. I cannot say I chose this theme; it was born in me and had to express itself." The "man" that Prokofiev invoked in this description of the philosophy embodied in this great Symphony could well have been the composer himself. The work was written in the summer of 1944, one of the happiest times he knew. His home life following marriage to his second wife four years earlier was contented and fulfilling; he was the most famous and often-performed of all Soviet composers; and Russia was winning World War II. In fact, the success of the Fifth Symphony's premiere was buoyed by the announcement immediately before the concert that the Russian army had just scored a resounding victory on the River Vistula. The composer's mind was reflected in the fluency and emotional depth of his music.

Prokofiev never hinted that there was a program underlying the Fifth Symphony except to say that "it is a symphony about the spirit of man." During the difficult years of the war, Soviet music, according to Boris Schwartz, "was meant to console and uplift, to encourage and exhort; nothing else mattered." Though some, like Martin Bookspan, find "ominous threats of brutal warfare" lurking beneath the surface of Prokofiev's music, there is really nothing here to match such symphonies born of the violence of war as Shostakovich's Seventh and Vaughan Williams' Fourth. Rather it is a work that reflects the composer's philosophy after he returned to Russia in the 1930s from many years of living in western Europe and America. In his 1946 autobiographical sketch, he wrote, "It is the duty of the composer, like the poet, the sculptor or the painter, to serve his fellow men, to beautify human life and point the way to a radiant future. Such is the immutable code of art as I see it."

The Symphony's opening movement is a large sonata form that begins without introduction. The wide-ranging main theme is presented by flute and bassoon; flute and oboe sing the lyrical second subject. The development gives prominence in its first portion to the opening theme and a skittish motive heard at the end of the exposition; it later focuses on the second theme. The recapitulation is heralded by the brass choir. The scherzo is one of those pieces Prokofiev would have classified as "motoric": an incessant two-note rhythmic motive drives the music through its entire first section. The central section is framed by a bold, strutting phrase. The brooding third movement is in a large three-part design. The outer sections are supported by the rhythmic tread of the low instruments used to underpin a plaintive melody initiated by the clarinets. A sweeping theme begun by the tuba serves as the basis for the middle section. The finale opens with a short introduction comprising two gestures based on the first movement's main theme: a short woodwind phrase and a chorale for cellos. The main body of the movement is a sonata-rondo structure propelled by an insistent rhythmic motive. The movement accumulates a large amount of thematic material as it progresses, though it is the solo clarinet playing the main theme that begins each of its important structural sections. An energetic coda ignites several of the movement's themes into a grand close.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 19 (1794-1795, revised in 1798 and 1800)

Ludwig Van Beethoven was born in Bonn on December 16, 1770, and died in Vienna on March 26, 1827. He composed his Second Piano Concerto from 1794 to 1795, and later revised it in 1798 and 1800. The concerto was premiered in Vienna with Beethoven as both the conductor and soloist on March 29, 1795. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Syria Mosque with conductor William Steinberg and soloist Anton Kuerti on April 17, 1959, and most recently performed it on with conductor Andris Nelsons and soloist Jonathan Biss on March 27, 2011. The score calls for flute, pairs of oboes, bassoons and horns, and strings.
Performance time: approximately 28 minutes

In November 1792, the 22-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven, full of talent and promise, arrived in Vienna from his native Bonn. So undeniable was the genius he had already demonstrated in a sizeable amount of piano music, numerous chamber works, cantatas on the death of Emperor Joseph II and the accession of Leopold II, and the score for a ballet that the Elector of Bonn underwrote the trip to the Habsburg Imperial city, then the musical capital of Europe, to help further the young musician's career (and the Elector's prestige). Despite the Elector's patronage, however, Beethoven's professional ambitions consumed any thoughts of returning to the provincial city of his birth, and, when his alcoholic father died in December, he severed for good his ties with Bonn in favor of the stimulating artistic atmosphere of Vienna.

The occasion of Beethoven's first Viennese public appearance was a pair of concerts — "A Grand Musical Academy, with more than 150 participants," trumpeted the program in Italian and German — on March 29, 1795 at the Burgtheater whose proceeds were to benefit the Widows' Fund of the Artists' Society. It is likely that Antonio Salieri, Beethoven's teacher at the time, had a hand in arranging the affair, since the music of one Antonio Cordellieri, another of his pupils, shared the bill. Beethoven chose for the occasion a piano concerto in B-flat major he had been working on for several months, but which was still incomplete only days before the concert. In his reminiscences of the composer, Franz Wegeler recalled, "Not until the afternoon of the second day before the concert did he write the rondo, and then while suffering from a pretty severe colic which frequently afflicted him. I relieved him with simple remedies so far as I could. In the anteroom sat copyists to whom he handed sheet after sheet as soon as they were finished being written." The work was completed just in time for the performance. It proved to be a fine success ("he gained the unanimous applause of the audience," reported the *Wiener Zeitung*), and did much to further Beethoven's dual reputation as performer and composer. For a concert in Prague three years later, the Concerto was extensively revised, and it is this version that is known today. The original one has vanished.

Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto is a product of the Classical age, not just in date but also in technique, expression and attitude. Still to come were the heaven-storming sublimities of his later works, but he could no more know what form those still-to-be-written works would take than tell the future in any other way. A traditional device — one greatly favored by Mozart — is used to open the Concerto: a forceful fanfare motive immediately balanced by a suave lyrical phrase. These two melodic fragments are spun out at length to produce the orchestral introduction. The piano joins in for a brief transition to the re-presentation of the principal thematic motives, applying brilliant decorative filigree as the movement unfolds. The sweet second theme is sung by the orchestra alone, but the soloist quickly resumes playing to supply commentary on this new melody. An orchestral interlude leads to the development section, based largely on transformations of the principal theme's lyrical motive. The recapitulation proceeds apace, and includes an extended cadenza. (Beethoven composed cadenzas for his first four concertos between 1804 and 1809.) A brief orchestral thought ends the movement.

The touching second movement is less an exercise in rigorous, abstract form than a lengthy song of rich texture and operatic sentiment. The wonderfully inventive piano figurations surrounding the melody are ample reminder that Beethoven was one of the finest keyboard improvisers of his day, a master of embellishment and piano style.

The finale is a rondo based on a bounding theme announced immediately by the soloist. Even at that early stage in Beethoven's career, it is amazing how he was able to extend and manipulate this simple, folk-like tune with seemingly limitless creativity. Though his music was soon to explore unprecedented areas of expression and technique, this Concerto stands at the end of an era, paying its debt to the composer's great forebears and announcing in conventional terms the arrival of a musician who was soon to change forever the art of music.

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

Sinfonietta for Orchestra (1926)

Leoš Janáček was born in Hukvaldy, Moravia on July 3, 1854, and died in Ostrava, Czechoslovakia on August 12, 1928. He composed *Sinfonietta* in 1926, inspired by Czech military bands and dedicated to the Czech Armed Forces. The composition was premiered at the *Sokol* festival in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Václav Talich on June 29, 1926. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the work with conductor Michael Lankester on February 13, 1987, and most recently performed it with conductor Charles Dutoit on April 5, 2008. The score calls for piccolo, four flutes, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, twelve trumpets, two bass trumpets, four trombones, two tenor tubas, bass tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.
Performance time: approximately 25 minutes

In the summer of 1917, when he was 63, Leoš Janáček fell in love with Kamila Stösslová, the 25-year-old wife of a Jewish antiques dealer from Písek. They first met in a town in central Moravia during World War I, but, as he lived in Brno with Zdenka, his wife of 37 years, and she lived with her husband in Písek, they saw each other only infrequently thereafter and remained in touch mostly by letter. The true passion seems to have been entirely on his side ("It is fortunate that only I am infatuated," he once wrote to her), but Kamila did not reject his company, apparently feeling admiration rather than love for the man who, with the successful staging of his *Jenůfa* in Prague in 1915 eleven years after its premiere in Brno, was at that time acquiring an international reputation as a master composer. Whatever the details of their relationship, Kamila's role as an inspiring muse during the last decade of Janáček's life was indisputable and beneficent — under the sway of his feelings for her he wrote his greatest music, including the operas *Katya Kabanova*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *The Makropoulos Affair*, the song cycle *The Diary of the Young Man Who Disappeared*, the two String Quartets (the second of which he titled "Intimate Letters"), the *Glagolitic Mass* and the *Sinfonietta* for Orchestra.

The conception of the *Sinfonietta* dates to Janáček's visit with Kamila in Písek during the summer of 1925. "One sunny day," recounted the composer's biographer Jaroslav Vogel, "[they] were sitting in the local park listening to a military band concert. The well-rehearsed musicians played, among other things, some fanfares that took Janáček's fancy not only as such but also by the way in which they were performed. The players — possibly dressed in historical costumes — stood up to play their solos and then sat down again. This refreshing experience, enhanced by the close presence of Kamila and by the park setting, made a deep impression on Janáček, who afterwards referred to it continually in his letters to Kamila." The following winter, Janáček was approached by the Czech patriotic and gymnastic society known as *Sokol* ("Falcon") to write some fanfares for their quadrennial national jamboree to be held in Prague that summer. Bursting with national pride ever since the freeing of Czechoslovakia from Austro-Hungarian hegemony at the end of the First World War and with the pleasant memory of the Písek band concert still in his mind, he readily agreed to accept the commission. He set about the project early in March 1926, beginning with a stentorian fanfare for brass, but the piece quickly outgrew its rather modest original purpose and blossomed into a full-fledged symphonic essay spread across five movements. The *Sinfonietta*, according to the composer, was meant to express "the contemporary free man, his spiritual beauty and joy, his strength, courage and determination to fight for victory." Janáček's immediate reference with these words was to the summer games in Prague, but they also touch on the wider political situation in his beloved homeland — the score was at first dedicated to the Czech Armed Forces. The *Sinfonietta* was introduced during the *Sokol* festival, on June 29, 1926 in Prague in a performance by Václav Talich and the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, and introduced to both Germany and the United States within a year by Otto Klemperer, one of the composer's staunchest early champions. It has remained the most popular of Janáček's orchestral compositions.

When the *Sinfonietta* was new, Janáček appended to each of its movements a title: *Fanfares*, *The Castle*, *The Queen's Monastery*, *The Street* and *The Town Hall*. In a journal article of 1927 called "My Town," Janáček explained that these sobriquets denoted landmarks in Brno, which he remembered as "small and inhospitable" in its Austro-Hungarian days during his youth and early professional life, but which, after gaining its freedom, "underwent a miraculous change. I lost my dislike of the gloomy Town Hall, my hatred of the hill from whose depths so much pain was screaming, my distaste for the street and

its throng. As if by a miracle, liberty was conjured up, glowing over the town — the rebirth of 28 October 1918. I saw myself in it. I belonged to it. And the blare of the victorious trumpets, the holy peace of the Queen's Monastery, the shadows of night, the breath of the green hill and the vision of the growing greatness of the town, of my Brno, were all giving birth to my *Sinfonietta*." Though the music is devoid of explicit programmatic reference, it churns throughout with an unquenchable vitality and exuberance that undoubtedly grew from Janáček's ardent nationalism. The music is never far from folk song, which, in its melodic leadings and speech rhythms, served as the springboard for Janáček's art. Though the movements are mostly constructed in sections, they surge forward with the sort of cumulative structural logic typical of Janáček that is more easily heard than explained. The piece is brought round full circle when the brazen fanfare of the opening movement is recalled in the finale to create a stunning climax to one of the most splendid and innovative masterworks in 20th-century music.

On July 11, 1926, just two weeks after the premiere of the *Sinfonietta*, Janáček was honored by the placing of a memorial plaque on the house of his birth in Hukvaldy. In his remarks for the occasion, he said, "I think I succeeded best in getting as close as possible to the mind of the simple man in my latest work, my *Sinfonietta*. I would like to continue on that road.... My latest creative period is also a kind of new sprouting from the soul which has made its peace with the rest of the world and seeks only to be nearest to the ordinary Czech man."