

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2017-2018 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 16 and 18, 2018

ROBERT SPANO, CONDUCTOR
CRAIG KNOX, TUBA

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Prélude à “L’Après-midi d’un faune”
(*Prelude to “The Afternoon of a Faun”*)

JENNIFER HIGDON

Tuba Concerto

- I. Dynamo
 - II. Crescent Line
 - III. Adamant Scherzo
- Mr. Knox**

WORLD PREMIERE
COMMISSIONED BY THE PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Intermission

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14

- I. Reveries and Passions: Largo — Allegro agitato
e appassionato assai
- II. A Ball. Valse: Allegro non troppo
- III. In the Country: Adagio
- IV. March to the Scaffold: Allegretto non troppo
- V. Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath: Larghetto — Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Prélude à "L'Après-midi d'un faune" (Prelude to "The Afternoon of a Faun") (1892-1894)

Claude Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris on August 22, 1862, and died in Paris on March 25, 1918. He composed *Prélude à "L'Après-midi d'un faune"* from 1892-1894, originally as the music for a theatrical production based on the poem by Stéphane Mallarmé, and it was premiered in Paris by the Orchestra of the Société Nationale and conductor Gustave Doret on December 22, 1894. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work in Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Emil Paul on November 27, 1908, and most recently performed it on subscription in Heinz Hall with conductor Hannu Lintu on March 7, 2009. The score calls for three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two harps, antique cymbals and strings. Performing time: approximately 10 minutes

Stéphane Mallarmé was one of those artists in *fin-de-siècle* Paris who perceived strong relationships among music, literature and the other arts. A number of his poems, including *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, were not only inspired, he said, by music, but even aspired to its elevated, abstract state. The young composer Claude Debussy had similar feelings about the interaction of poetry and music, and he and Mallarmé became close friends, despite the twenty years difference in their ages. When Mallarmé completed his *L'Après-midi d'un faune* in 1876 after several years of writing and revising, he envisioned that it would be used as the basis for a theatrical production. Debussy was intrigued at this suggestion, and set about planning to provide music to a choreographic version that would be devised in consultation with Mallarmé, but he completed only the scenario's first portion, perhaps realizing, as had others, that the poet's misty symbolism and equivocal language were not innately suited to the theater.

Mallarmé's poem is deliberately ambiguous in its sensuous, symbolist language; its purpose is as much to suggest a halcyon, dream-like mood as to tell a story. Robert Lawrence described its slight plot, as realized by Debussy, in his *Victor Books of Ballets*: "Exotically spotted, a satyr is taking his rest on the top of a hillock. As he fondles a bunch of grapes, he sees a group of nymphs passing on the plain below. He wants to join them, but when he approaches, they flee. Only one of them, attracted by the faun, returns timidly. But the nymph changes her mind and runs away. For a moment he gazes after her. Then, snatching a scarf she has dropped in her flight, the faun climbs his hillock and resumes his drowsy position, astride the scarf."

As the inherent eroticism of the plot suggests, the Debussy/Mallarmé faun is no Bambi-like creature, but rather a mythological half-man, half-beast with cloven hooves, horns, tail and furry coat, a being which walks upright and whose chief characteristic is its highly developed libido. Mallarmé's poem is filled with the ambiguities symbolized by the faun: is this a man or a beast? is his love physical or fantasy? reality or dream? The delicate subtlety of the poem finds a perfect tonal equivalent in Debussy's music.

JENNIFER HIGDON

Tuba Concerto (2017)

American composer Jennifer Higdon was born in Brooklyn, New York on December 31, 1962, and currently resides in Philadelphia and serves on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music. She composed her Tuba Concerto on a commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Curtis Institute in 2017. These performances with soloist and fellow Curtis alumni Craig Knox mark the world premiere. The score calls for two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, bassoon, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 19 minutes

Jennifer Higdon, born in Brooklyn, New York on New Year's Eve 1962 and raised in Atlanta and Tennessee, is one of America's foremost composers. She took her undergraduate training in flute

performance at Bowling Green State University, and received her master's and doctoral degrees in composition from the University of Pennsylvania; she also holds an Artist Diploma from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Her teachers have included George Crumb, Marilyn Shrude, David Loeb, James Primosch, Jay Reise and Ned Rorem in composition, Judith Bentley and Jan Vinci in flute, and Robert Spano in conducting. Higdon joined the composition faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia in 1994 after having served as conductor of the University of Pennsylvania Orchestra and Wind Ensemble and Visiting Assistant Professor in music composition at Bard College; she now holds the Milton L. Rock Chair in Composition Studies at Curtis. She has also served as Karel Husa Visiting Professor at Ithaca College (2006-2007) and Composer-in-Residence at the Mannes College The New School for Music (2007-2008).

Jennifer Higdon's works have been performed across the country and internationally, and she has received grants, awards and commissions from the orchestras of Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Atlanta, Baltimore, Minnesota, Indianapolis, Delaware and Dallas, The President's Own Marine Band, Tokyo String Quartet, Guggenheim Foundation, American Academy of Arts and Letters, International League of Women Composers, ASCAP, National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer, Pew Charitable Trusts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society and other leading organizations and ensembles; her orchestral work *Shine* was chosen by *USA Today* as Best New Contemporary Classical Work of 1996. In 2010, Higdon received a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for her Percussion Concerto, as well as the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto, composed for Hilary Hahn, which the citation described as "a deeply engaging piece that combines flowing lyricism with dazzling virtuosity"; she received her second Grammy in 2018 for her Viola Concerto.

Higdon has served as Composer-in-Residence with the Green Bay Symphony, Fort Worth Symphony, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Institute at Deer Valley, Music From Angel Fire Festival, Bard College Conductors' Institute, Philadelphia Singers, Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival, Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, University of Wyoming and other prominent ensembles and institutions. In 2003, she became the first American female composer featured at the prestigious Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood; during the 2005-2006 season, she was the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Composer of the Year. Among Higdon's recent projects is the opera with a libretto by Gene Scheer based on Charles Frazier's best-selling novel *Cold Mountain*, premiered at Santa Fe Opera in August 2015; it received the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere and was nominated for Grammy Awards as Best Opera Recording and Best Contemporary Classical Composition. She was also recently presented with the Distinguished Arts Award by Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett.

Jennifer Higdon composed her Tuba Concerto in 2017 on a joint commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Curtis Institute of Music for Craig Knox, Principal Tuba of the PSO, where he holds the Dr. Mary Ann Craig Chair. Mr. Knox has kindly provided the following background for the Concerto's premiere:

"Jennifer Higdon and I first met when we were in school at the Curtis Institute of Music, in Philadelphia, in the late 1980s. There are only about 150 students in the school, so everybody knew everybody. Although I was aware that she was studying composition, I don't think I ever heard any of her music until years after we graduated. I watched with interest as her career developed, and had many occasions to play her music in orchestras I performed with across the country. I came to expect that her music would always have an interesting and challenging tuba part, which is not the case with all composers. I had the chance to reconnect with her from time to time, when she would come to hear her performances; she was in Pittsburgh frequently during my first year in the PSO when she was our Composer of the Year. And so when the PSO offered to commission a new Tuba Concerto, she was one of the first people I thought of, knowing that she seemed to take an earnest interest in the instrument.

"By the time we started talking about the new Concerto, we were also both on the faculty at the Curtis Institute, so it was fairly easy to meet and discuss the project. I appreciated very much her willingness to consider the range of possibilities for the piece, including the strengths and challenges of the instrument, and the way it has been utilized by other composers. She asked for a repertoire list of orchestral pieces with notable tuba parts and familiarized herself with the existing solo repertoire. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to preview preliminary sketches for the piece, which she shared with me and asked me to play for her to make sure they worked as she imagined.

"It was a thrill to receive the final draft of the new concerto and begin preparing it. The dazzling opening movement is filled with technical passages that I hope may surprise most listeners. The centerpiece of the work, in my opinion, is the lengthy second movement. One of my favorite aspects of the tuba is the way the instrument can emulate the bass voice, and I'm so pleased to have the

opportunity to display that characteristic in this very lyrical and expressive movement. The piece finishes with a driving, rhythmic finale.

"The tuba was one of the last acoustic instruments to be invented and added to the standard symphony orchestra, around 1830. When I was a student, there was essentially one concerto for tuba, by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Since then, more have been added, but the list of substantial pieces by major composers is still quite small. Through this whole process, I've been very aware of what a special opportunity it is for me to be part not only of the development of a new piece, but also of the history of the instrument itself."

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Symphonie fantastique, Opus 14 (1830)

Hector Berlioz was born in Côte-Saint-André, France on December 11, 1803, and died in Paris on March 8, 1869. He composed *Symphonie fantastique* in 1830, and it was premiered by the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra and conductor François Habeneck on December 5, 1830. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Emil Paur on December 22, 1905, and most recently performed it in Heinz Hall with music director Manfred Honeck on September 21, 2014. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, clarinet in E-flat, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, tenor and bass tubas, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings.

Performance time: approximately 49 minutes

By 1830, when he turned 27, Hector Berlioz had won the *Prix de Rome* and gained a certain notoriety among the fickle Parisian public for his perplexingly original compositions. Hector Berlioz was also madly in love. The object of his amorous passion was an English actress of middling ability, one Harriet Smithson, whom the composer first saw when a touring English theatrical company performed Shakespeare in Paris in 1827. During the ensuing three years, this romance was entirely one-sided, since the young composer never met Harriet but only knew her across the footlights as Juliet and Ophelia. He sent her such frantic love letters that she never responded to any of them, fearful of encouraging a madman. Berlioz, distraught and unable to work or sleep or eat, wandered the countryside around Paris until he dropped from exhaustion and had to be retrieved by friends.

Berlioz was still nursing his unrequited love for Harriet in 1830 when, full-blown Romantic that he was, his emotional state served as the germ for a composition based on a musical "Episode from the Life of an Artist," as he subtitled the *Symphonie fantastique*. In this work, the artist visualizes his beloved through an opium-induced trance, first in his dreams, then at a ball, in the country, at his execution and, finally, as a participant in a witches' sabbath. She is represented by a musical theme that appears in each of the five movements, an *idée fixe* (a term Berlioz borrowed from the just-emerging field of psychology to denote an unhealthy obsession) that is transformed to suit its imaginary musical surroundings. The *idée fixe* is treated kindly through the first three movements, but after the artist has lost his head for love (literally — the string pizzicati followed by drum rolls and brass fanfares at the very end of the *March to the Scaffold* graphically represent the fall of the guillotine blade and the ceremony of the formal execution), the *idée fixe* is transmogrified into a jeering, strident parody of itself in the finale in music that is still original and disturbing almost two centuries after its creation. The sweet-to-sour changes in the *idée fixe* (heard first in the opening movement on unison violins and flute at the beginning of the fast tempo after a slow introduction) reflect Berlioz's future relationship with his beloved, though, of course, he had no way to know it in 1830. Berlioz did in fact marry his Harriet–Ophelia–Juliet in 1833 (when news of the nuptials drifted back across the channel, one waggish London critic wrote, "We trust this marriage will insure the happiness of an amiable young woman, as well as secure us against her reappearances on the English boards"), but their initial bliss faded quickly, and they were virtually estranged within a decade.

Berlioz wrote of the *Symphonie fantastique*, "PART I: *Reveries and Passions*. The young musician first recalls that uneasiness of soul he experienced before seeing her whom he loves; then the volcanic love with which she suddenly inspired him, his moments of delirious anguish, of jealous fury, his returns to loving tenderness, and his religious consolations. PART II: *A Ball*. He sees his beloved at a ball, in the midst of the tumult of a brilliant fête. PART III: *Scene in the Country*. One summer evening in the country he hears two shepherds playing a *ranz-des-vaches* in alternate dialogue; this pastoral duet, some hopes

he has recently conceived, combine to restore calm to his heart; but she appears once more, he is agitated with painful presentiments; if she were to betray him! ... One of the shepherds resumes his artless melody, the other no longer answers him. The sun sets ... the sound of distant thunder ... solitude ... silence ... PART IV: *March to the Scaffold*. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned to death, and led to execution. The procession advances to a march that is now somber and wild, now brilliant and solemn. At the end, the *idée fixe* reappears for an instant, like a last love-thought before the fatal stroke. PART V: *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*. He sees himself at the Witches' Sabbath, amid ghosts, magicians and monsters of all sorts, who have come together for his obsequies. He hears strange noises, groans, shrieks. The *beloved melody* reappears, but it has become an ignoble, trivial and grotesque dance-tune; it is *she* who comes to the Witches' Sabbath.... She takes part in the diabolic orgy ... Funeral knells, burlesque parody on the *Dies Irae* [the ancient '*Day of Wrath*' chant from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead]. Witches' Dance. The Witches' Dance and the *Dies Irae* together."

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