

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2017-2018 Mellon Grand Classics Season

April 20, 21 and 22, 2018

MANFRED HONECK, CONDUCTOR  
JAMES EHNES, CELLO

STEVEN STUCKY

*Silent Spring*

The Sea Around Us — The Lost Wood —  
Rivers of Death — Silent Spring

PIOTR ILYICH  
TCHAKOVSKY

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Canzonetta: Andante —
- III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

**Mr. Ehnés**

Intermission

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante moderato
- III. Allegro giocoso
- IV. Allegro energico e passionato

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### STEVEN STUCKY

#### *Silent Spring* (2011)

Steven Stucky was born in Hutchinson, Kansas on November 7, 1949, and died in Ithaca, New York on February 14, 2016. He composed *Silent Spring* in 2011 on a commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony as part of his Composer of the Year residency during the 2011-12 season.

The piece marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the celebrated book *Silent Spring* by Pittsburgh-area native and Chatham College alumna Rachel Carson. The work was premiered by the Pittsburgh Symphony and music director Manfred Honeck on February 17, 2012. These performances with music director Manfred Honeck will be recorded for future commercial release on Reference Recordings. The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, percussion, harp, piano, celesta and strings.

Performance time: approximately 18 minutes

Steven Stucky, one of America's most highly regarded and frequently performed composers, was born in Hutchinson, Kansas on November 7, 1949, raised in Abilene, Texas, and studied at Baylor and Cornell universities, where his teachers in composition included Richard Willis, Robert Palmer, Karel Husa and Burrill Phillips. Stucky taught at Lawrence University in Wisconsin from 1978 until 1980, when he joined the faculty of Cornell University, where he founded the new music group Ensemble X and served as Given Foundation Professor of Composition; he also taught at the Aspen Festival, Eastman School of Music and University of California at Berkeley.

Stucky's compositions have been widely performed throughout the United States and abroad by leading chamber ensembles and symphony orchestras; many were written on commissions from the orchestras of Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland, Singapore, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Baltimore, Cincinnati and St. Louis, as well as from the National Endowment for the Arts, Yale University, Boston Musica Viva, Cornell University and other distinguished organizations. He was among the ten composers selected internationally to contribute a work to the centennial celebration of New York's Carnegie Hall; *Angelus* was premiered by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in that celebrated auditorium on September 27, 1990. Stucky was Composer-in-Residence with the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1988 to 2009, and hosted the New York Philharmonic's Hear & Now concert series from 2005 until 2009. His other residencies included the Pittsburgh Symphony, American Academy in Rome, Princeton University, Cleveland Institute of Music, Curtis Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia, Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing and National University of the Arts in Taipei.

In addition to composing, Stucky was also active as a conductor, writer, lecturer and contributor to music journals in America and Britain; he won the ASCAP Deems Taylor Prize for his 1981 book, *Lutosławski and His Music*. Among his other honors are the ASCAP Victor Herbert Prize and First Prize from the American Society of University Composers, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, American Council of Learned Societies, National Endowment for the Humanities, Guggenheim Foundation, Bogliasco Foundation and American Academy of Arts and Letters; in 2005, he won the Pulitzer Prize for Music for his *Second Concerto for Orchestra*. He was a trustee of the American Academy in Rome, chair of the American Music Center, a board member of the Koussevitzky Music Foundation, and a member of both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The composer wrote, "Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was serialized in *The New Yorker* beginning in June 1962, then published in book form that September. It was not the celebrated marine biologist's first bestseller: that had been *The Sea Around Us* in 1951. But with *Silent Spring*, the Pittsburgh-area native and Chatham College alumna galvanized public opinion and earned a permanent place in 20th-century American history. The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in collaboration with the Rachel Carson Institute marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication by commissioning this new work for orchestra.

"Those years around 1960 saw an intense intersection between scientific progress and public discourse: the incontrovertible link between smoking and lung cancer (first established in 1950, but widely

known a few years later); the first manned space flights in 1961 by Yuri Gagarin and Alan Shepherd; the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, signed in 1963. The world view of my own generation, just coming of age in those years, was strongly shaped by these discourses, including of course the one about conservation and the environment, still ongoing, that Rachel Carson helped so forcefully to launch.

"I was delighted, therefore, to be asked to create this musical tribute. But I was perplexed, too: how to make a connection between science and music, or more to the point between *her* science and *my* music? I reread *Silent Spring* and Carson's other work, and I reveled again in the distinctive mixture of hard science and eloquent lyricism that defines her voice. But how to make music about that?

"I didn't try to. Instead, I gathered together four of Carson's own titles: *The Sea Around Us*; *The Lost Wood* and *Rivers of Death* (both chapter titles in *Silent Spring*); and *Silent Spring* itself. With these phrases as cues, I could fashion a one-movement orchestral tone poem in four sections that tries to create its own dramatic and emotional journey from beginning to end, without referring specifically to any scientific details.

"The result is music at once 'abstract' and 'programmatic' (admittedly fuzzy terms). *The Sea Around Us* is murky water music: it rises from the depths of the orchestra until it reaches a grand but melancholy chorale evoking the vast expanses of the sea. *The Lost Wood* calls forth a desolate chaconne (i.e., a set of variations over a cyclic chord progression). The somber atmosphere grows more and more intense until it leads to a short, scathing scherzo, *Rivers of Death*. This diabolical 'death scherzo,' too, escalates until it cannot go any further, instead bursting into the ecstatic mass singing that begins the final section, *Silent Spring*. But — like the insects and birds that Rachel Carson wrote about — one by one those ecstatic orchestral voices fall quiet. We are left with near-silence.

"Rachel Carson's trenchant writing gave us facts and figures, gave us marching orders, gave us the heart to change some of our habits. But, like all great writing, it also gave us the spiritual and psychological space in which to contemplate our own thoughts about the world around us, about our own place in that world, about our own hopes and fears. Music can aspire to do the same. It cannot — should not attempt to — explain, preach, proselytize, comment on external life. Its domain is emotional life, not 'real' life. It is non-specific, non-semantic, non-representational. But music aspires to (and my *Silent Spring* aspires to) grant us access to our deepest emotional planes, to that region where — beyond words, beyond numbers, beyond theories and proofs — we live our fullest lives."

## PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

### Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35 (1878)

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk on May 7, 1840, and died in St. Petersburg on November 6, 1893. He composed his Violin Concerto in 1878, and it was eventually premiered in by the Vienna Philharmonic with Hans Richter conducting and Adolf Brodsky as soloist on December 4, 1881. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the concerto at Carnegie Music Hall with music director Victor Herbert and soloist Alexander Petschnikoff on November 24, 1899, and most recently performed it with conductor Kazem Abdullah and soloist Nicola Benedetti on May 12, 2013. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.  
Performance time: approximately 36 minutes

In the summer of 1877, Tchaikovsky undertook the disastrous marriage that lasted less than three weeks and resulted in his emotional collapse and attempted suicide. He fled from Moscow to his brother Modeste in St. Petersburg, where he recovered his wits and discovered he could find solace in his work. He spent the late fall and winter completing his Fourth Symphony and the opera *Eugene Onégin*. The brothers decided that travel outside of Russia would be an additional balm to the composer's spirit, and they duly installed themselves at Clarens on Lake Geneva in Switzerland soon after the first of the year.

In Clarens, Tchaikovsky had already begun work on a piano sonata when he heard the colorful *Symphonie espagnole* by the French composer Edouard Lalo. He was so excited by the possibilities of a work for solo violin and orchestra that he set aside the sonata and immediately began a concerto of his own. By the end of April, the work was finished. Tchaikovsky sent the manuscript to Leopold Auer, a friend who headed the violin department at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and who was also Court Violinist to the Czar, hoping to have him premiere the work. Much to the composer's regret, Auer returned the piece as "unplayable," and apparently spread that word with such authority to other violinists that it

was more than three years before the Violin Concerto was heard in public. It was Adolf Brodsky, a former colleague of Tchaikovsky at the Moscow Conservatory, who first accepted the challenge of this Concerto when he premiered it with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1881.

The Concerto opens quietly with a tentative introductory tune. A foretaste of the main theme soon appears in the violins, around which a quick crescendo is mounted to usher in the soloist. After a few unaccompanied measures, the violin presents the lovely main theme above a simple string background. After an elaborated repeat of this melody, a transition follows which eventually involves the entire orchestra and gives the soloist the first opportunity for pyrotechnical display. The second theme begins a long buildup leading into the development, launched with a sweeping presentation of the main theme. The soloist soon steals back the attention with breathtaking leaps and double stops. The sweeping mood returns, giving way to a flashing cadenza as a link to the recapitulation. The flute sings the main theme before the violin it takes over, and all then follows the order of the exposition.

The *Andante* begins with a chorale for woodwinds that is heard again at the end of the movement to serve as a frame around the musical picture inside. On the canvas of this picture is displayed a soulful melody for the violin suggesting a Gypsy fiddler. The finale is joined to the slow movement without a break. With the propulsive spirit of a dashing Cossack *Trepak*, the finale flies by amid the soloist's dizzying show of agility and speed.

## JOHANNES BRAHMS

### Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Opus 98 (1884-1885)

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He composed his Fourth Symphony from 1884-1885, and it was premiered by the Meiningen Court Orchestra with Brahms on the podium on October 25, 1885. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the work at Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Emil Paur on January 5, 1906, and it was most recently performed with music director Manfred Honeck on June 7, 2014. These performances with music director Manfred Honeck will be recorded for future commercial release on Reference Recordings. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo and contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle and strings.

Performance time: approximately 43 minutes

In the popular image of Brahms, he appears as a patriarch: full grey beard, rosy cheeks, sparkling eyes. He grew the beard in his late forties as, some say, a compensation for his late physical maturity — he was in his twenties before his voice changed and he needed to shave — and it seemed to be an external admission that Brahms had allowed himself to become an old man. The ideas did not seem to flow so freely as he approached the age of fifty, and he even put his publisher on notice to expect nothing more. Thankfully, the ideas did come, as they would for more than another decade, and he soon completed the superb Third Symphony. The philosophical introspection continued, however, and was reflected in many of his works. The Second Piano Concerto of 1881 is almost autumnal in its mellow ripeness; this Fourth Symphony is music of deep thoughtfulness that leads “into realms where joy and sorrow are hushed, and humanity bows before that which is eternal,” wrote the eminent German musical scholar August Kretzschmar.

One of Brahms' immediate interests during the composition of the Fourth Symphony was Greek drama. He had been greatly moved by the tragedies of Sophocles in the German translations of his friend Gustav Wendt (1827-1912), director of education in Baden-Baden (Wendt dedicated the volume to Brahms upon its publication in 1884), and many commentators have seen the combination of the epic and the melancholy in this Symphony as a reflection of the works of that ancient playwright. Certainly the choice of E minor as the key of the work is an indication of its tragic nature. This is a rare tonality in the symphonic world, and with so few precedents such a work as Haydn's in that key (No. 44), a doleful piece subtitled “Mourning Symphony,” was an important influence. That great melancholic among the Romantic composers, Tchaikovsky, chose E minor as the key for his Fifth Symphony.

Repeatedly accused of being forbiddingly metaphysical or overly serious, the Fourth Symphony was not easily accepted by audiences. The crux of the problem was the stony grandeur of the finale, which undeniably confirms the tragedy of the work. The normal expressive function for a symphonic finale is to be an uplifting affirmation of the continuity of human experience. The classic models are Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and Sir Donald Tovey pointed out that in all that master's works, only three

have minor tonality endings. Even that great prophet of *Weltschmerz*, Gustav Mahler, ended only his Sixth Symphony on a pessimistic note. So, in this last of his symphonies, it would seem that Brahms grappled with his innermost feelings and found a hard-fought acceptance of his own mortality. The outward sign of his perceived great age, his magnificent beard, found its counterpart in tone in this grand Symphony, perhaps the greatest work in the form since those of Schubert and even Beethoven.

The Symphony's first movement begins almost in mid-thought, as though the mood of sad melancholy pervading this opening theme had existed forever and Brahms had simply borrowed a portion of it to present musically. The movement is founded upon the tiny two-note motive (short-long) heard immediately at the beginning. Tracing this little germ cell demonstrates not only Brahms' enormous compositional skills but also the broad emotional range that he could draw from pure musical expression. To introduce the necessary contrasts into this sonata form, other themes are presented, including a broadly lyrical one for horns and cellos and a fragmented fanfare. The movement grows with a wondrous, dark majesty to its closing pages.

"A funeral procession moving across moonlit heights" is how the young Richard Strauss described the second movement. Though the tonality is nominally E major, the movement opens with a stark melody, pregnant with grief, in the ancient Phrygian mode. The mood brightens, but the introspective sorrow of the beginning is never far away.

The third movement is the closest Brahms came to a true scherzo in any of his symphonies. Though such a dance-like movement may appear antithetical to the tragic nature of the Symphony, this scherzo is actually a necessary contrast within the work's total structure since it serves to heighten the pathos of the surrounding movements, especially the granitic splendor of the finale.

The finale is a *passacaglia* — a series of variations on a short, recurring melody. There are some thirty continuous variations here, though it is less important to follow them individually than to feel the massive strength given to the movement by this technique. The opening chorale-like statement, in which trombones are heard for the first time in the Symphony, recurs twice as a further supporting pillar in the unification of the movement.