

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

December 7 and 9, 2018

YAN PASCAL TORTELIER, CONDUCTOR
SIMONE LAMSMA, VIOLIN

HECTOR BERLIOZ

The Roman Carnival Overture, Opus 9

ERICH KORNGOLD

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35

- I. Moderato nobile
- II. Romance: Andante
- III. Finale: Allegro assai vivace

Ms. Lamsma

Intermission

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances, Opus 45

- I. Non allegro
- II. Andante con moto (Tempo di valse)
- III. Lento assai — Allegro vivace

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

HECTOR BERLIOZ

The Roman Carnival Overture, Opus 9 (1843)

Hector Berlioz was born in La Côte-Saint-André on December 11, 1803, and died in Paris on March 8, 1869. He composed *The Roman Carnival Overture* in 1843, using material from his failed opera *Benvenuto Cellini*, and it was premiered in Paris with Berlioz conducting on February 3, 1844. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Victor Herbert in November 1899, and most recently performed with conductor Gianandrea Noseda in November 2016. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, cymbals, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 9 minutes.

The failure of Berlioz's opera *Benvenuto Cellini* at its premiere in September 1838 was nearly complete. Except for the original overture to the opera, everything else, Berlioz reported, "was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity." Five years later, he mined the opera for thematic material for a new overture that he could use either as an independent concert work or as the introduction to the second act of *Benvenuto*. With the flavor of the opera's setting and his own Italian travels as guides, he named it *Roman Carnival*. The Overture had a resounding success at its concert premiere in Paris on February 3, 1844, and was encored. It immediately joined the *Symphonie Fantastique* as the most popular of Berlioz's music, and it was among the works he programmed most frequently on the concerts he conducted.

The *Roman Carnival Overture* borrows two melodies from *Benvenuto Cellini*. The slow theme, presented by the solo English horn, is based on Benvenuto's aria *O Teresa, vous que j'aime* ("O Teresa, whom I adore"), a melody originally composed for the cantata *La Mort de Cléopâtre*, Berlioz's unsuccessful attempt to win the Prix de Rome in 1829. The Overture's other theme is a bubbling *saltarello* reminiscent of the folk dances Berlioz heard in Rome. The Overture is in two large sections, preceded by an introductory flourish based on the *saltarello* melody. The theme of the work's first section is presented by the English horn. As it proceeds and is repeated, this lovely strain is wrapped in Berlioz's characteristic, glowing orchestral fabric. (Note, for example, the shimmering gloss applied to the sound by the tambourine and triangle.) Following this love song, the strains of the *saltarello* launch the Overture into a rousing carnival dance. Amid the swirling gaiety of this street festival, the simple strain of the love song from the first section is heard in the rich sonorities of bassoons and trombones. The rollicking exuberance of the *saltarello* soon resumes to close this musical Mardi Gras with some dazzling rhythmic and harmonic surprises.

ERICH KORNGOLD

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35 (1945)

Erich Korngold was born in Brünn, Austria (now Brno, Czech Republic) on May 29, 1897, and died in Hollywood, California on November 29, 1957. Korngold came to the United States to work on the score for the film *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1934, and he ultimately settled in California, becoming a United States citizen in 1943. He composed his Violin Concerto in 1945, and it was premiered by the St. Louis Symphony with conductor Vladimir Golschmann and the famed violinist Jascha Heifetz on February 15, 1947. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work with conductor Andre Previn and soloist Itzhak Perlman in May 1980, and most recently performed it with conductor Gianandrea Noseda and soloist Nikolaj Znaider in March 2009. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings. Performance time: approximately 25 minutes.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (his middle name honored Mozart), born on May 29, 1897 in Brünn, Austria (now Brno, Czech Republic), was the younger son of Julius Korngold, a protégé of Eduard Hanslick and one of Vienna's most influential music critics at the turn of the 20th century. By age five, Erich was playing piano duets with his father; two years later he began composing; at nine, he produced a cantata (*Gold*) that convinced his father to enroll him as a student of Robert Fuchs at the Vienna Conservatory. When Gustav Mahler heard Erich play his cantata the following year, he proclaimed the boy "a genius" and arranged for him to take lessons with Alexander Zemlinsky. Korngold made remarkable progress under Zemlinsky — his Piano Sonata No. 1 was published in 1908, when he had ripened to the age of eleven. The following year he wrote a ballet, *Der Schneemann* ("The Snowman"), orchestrated by Zemlinsky, which was staged at the Vienna Royal Opera at the command of Emperor Franz Josef. Next came a piano trio and another piano sonata, both of which Artur Schnabel played all over Europe. For the Gewandhaus concerts, Artur Nikisch commissioned Korngold's first orchestral work, the *Schauspiel Ouvertüre* ("Overture to a Play"), and premiered it in Leipzig in 1911. Later that same year the budding composer gave a concert of his works in Berlin, in which he also appeared as piano soloist. Korngold was an international celebrity at thirteen. "It seems that nature amassed all its gifts in music and laid them in the cradle of this extraordinary child," marveled Felix Weingartner.

In 1915 and 1916, Korngold wrote the first two of his five operas: *Der Ring des Polykrates*, a comedy, and *Violanta*, a tragedy. Bruno Walter premiered this complementary pair of one-acters in tandem at the Vienna Opera on March 28, 1916. Following a two-year stint in the Austrian army playing piano for the troops during World War I, Korngold composed some incidental music for a production of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Burgtheater in Vienna, and then turned again to opera, producing his dramatic masterpiece, *Die Tote Stadt* ("The Dead City"), which was premiered simultaneously in Hamburg (where he served as conductor for three years after the war) and Cologne on December 4, 1920. The work appeared on the stages of 83 opera houses around the world during the following months; it was the first German opera performed at the Met after World War I (November 19, 1921, with Maria Jeritza in her American debut). After Korngold returned to Vienna in 1920, he was appointed professor of opera and composition at the Staatsakademie and served as music consultant for revivals of several of Johann Strauss' operettas, including one pastiche that reached Broadway in 1934 as *The Great Waltz*. A poll by the *Neue Wiener Tagblatt* ("New Vienna Daily") in 1928 showed that newspaper's readers thought Korngold and Arnold Schoenberg were the two greatest living Austrian composers.

In 1934, the Austrian director Max Reinhardt was conscripted by Warner Brothers Studio in Hollywood to film a version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Olivia de Havilland, Dick Powell, James Cagney, Joe E. Brown and Mickey Rooney. Reinhardt chose to use Mendelssohn's incidental music as background, and he took Korngold along to arrange the score. Korngold, who, as a Jew, felt increasingly uneasy in Austria, accepted other offers in Hollywood, and, when the Nazi Anschluss in 1938 prevented him from returning home, he settled permanently in California. (He became a United States citizen in 1943.) For the next seven years, he devoted his talents to creating a body of film music unsurpassed by that of any other composer in the genre, and won two Academy Awards (for *Anthony Adverse* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*). His father's death in 1945, however, caused him to re-evaluate his career, and he returned to writing concert music with concertos for violin and cello, and a large symphony that Dmitri Mitropoulos called "one of the most significant works of the century." These new pieces caused little stir among critics and public, however, who by and large felt that such music was merely a warmed-over manifestation of an earlier age. (Romanticism was a badly battered notion during those dodecaphony-dominated post-World War II years.) Korngold went to Vienna for an extended visit, but returned to Hollywood, where he suffered a series of heart attacks. He died on November 29, 1957, and his remains were interred in the Hollywood Cemetery, within a few feet of those of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., D.W. Griffith and Rudolf Valentino.

The first work Korngold undertook upon his return to composing concert music was a concerto written at the urging of the Polish violinist Bronislaw Huberman, who, like the composer, had been driven from Europe to America by the war. The piece was written largely during the summer of 1945, but its premiere was delayed until early 1947, by which time Huberman had returned home. Jascha Heifetz was therefore enlisted as soloist for the first performance, on February 15th in Saint Louis, an event one local critic reported inspired the greatest ovation in his experience; he predicted the new Concerto would endure as long as that by Mendelssohn.

Korngold's Violin Concerto has an abundance of two qualities essential in a work of its species — melody and virtuosity. The brilliance and difficulty of the writing for the soloist are evident throughout, while the work's lyricism is inherent in its thematic material, which the composer borrowed from four of his

best film scores. (Korngold's advantageous contract with Warner Brothers allowed him to retain the rights to his scores.) The haunting first theme of the opening movement is from the 1937 picture *Another Dawn*, a desert-outpost drama whose most memorable component is Korngold's music. To provide a contrasting element in this loosely woven sonata form, the composer used the gently yearning love theme from *Juarez*, the 1939 film biography of the Mexican statesman and hero, which was based in part on Franz Werfel's play *Juarez and Maximilian*. The second movement (subtitled *Romance*) is initiated by a poignant melody from Korngold's Academy Award-winning score for *Anthony Adverse*, the 1936 film about an orphan who struggles to overcome the adversities of life in early-19th-century America. The score is one of the most extensive ever composed for a Hollywood movie, containing no fewer than 43 themes and providing almost continuous background music for the film's 136 minutes. The Concerto's finale is a sparkling rondo whose witty main theme is a tarantella melody from *The Prince and the Pauper*, the 1937 screen recreation of Mark Twain's well-known story.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Symphonic Dances, Opus 45 (1940)

Composer, pianist and conductor Sergei Rachmaninoff was born in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia on April 1, 1873, and died in Beverly Hills, California on March 28, 1943. Rachmaninoff composed the *Symphonic Dances*, his last significant work, in 1940, and they were premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Eugene Ormandy on January 4, 1941. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Syria Mosque with conductor William Steinberg in April 1962, and most recently performed it with conductor Juraj Valcuha in January 2012. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, E-flat alto saxophone, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings. Performance time: approximately 37 minutes.

World War I was a trial for Rachmaninoff and his countrymen, but his most severe personal adversity came when the 1917 Revolution smashed Russia's aristocratic society — the only world he had ever known. He was forced to flee his beloved country for America and he pined for his homeland the rest of his life. He did his best to keep the old language, food, customs and holidays alive in his own household, "but it was at best synthetic," wrote American musicologist David Ewen. "Away from Russia, which he could never hope to see again, he always felt lonely and sad, a stranger even in lands that were ready to be hospitable to him. His homesickness assumed the character of a disease as the years passed, and one symptom of that disease was an unshakable melancholy." By 1940, when he composed the *Symphonic Dances*, he was filled with worry over his daughter Tatiana, who was trapped in France by the German invasion (he never saw her again), and had been weakened by a minor operation in May. Still, he felt the need to compose for the first time since the Third Symphony of 1936. The three *Symphonic Dances* were written quickly at his summer retreat on Long Island Sound, an idyllic setting for creative work, where he had a studio by the water in which to work in seclusion, lovely gardens for walking, and easy access to a ride in his new cabin cruiser, one of his favorite amusements. Still, it was the man and not the setting that was expressed in this music. "I try to make music speak directly and simply that which is in my heart at the time I am composing," he once told an interviewer. "If there is love there, or bitterness, or sadness, or religion, these moods become part of my music, and it becomes either beautiful or bitter or sad or religious."

It is nostalgic sadness that permeates the works of Rachmaninoff's later years. Like a grim marker, the ancient chant *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath") from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass for the Dead courses through the *Paganini Rhapsody* (1934), the Second (1908) and Third (1936) Symphonies and the *Symphonic Dances* (1940). The *Symphonic Dances* were his last important creation, coming less than three years before his death from cancer at age 70. There is nothing morbid about them, however. They breathe a spirit of dark determination against a world of trial, a hard-fought musical affirmation of the underlying resiliency of life. Received with little enthusiasm when they were new, the *Symphonic Dances* have come to be regarded as among the finest of Rachmaninoff's works.

The first of the *Symphonic Dances*, in a large three-part form (A–B–A), is spun from a tiny three-note descending motive heard at the beginning that serves as the germ for much of the opening section's thematic material. The middle portion is given over to a folk-like melody initiated by the alto saxophone. The return of the opening section, with its distinctive falling motive, rounds out the first movement. The

waltz of the second movement is more rugged and deeply expressive than the Viennese variety, and possesses the quality of inconsolable pathos that gives so much of Rachmaninoff's music its sharply defined personality. The finale begins with a sighing introduction for the winds, which leads into a section in quicker tempo whose vital rhythms may have been influenced by the syncopations of American jazz. Soon after this faster section begins, the chimes play a pattern reminiscent of the opening phrase of the *Dies Irae*. The sighing measures recur and are considerably extended, acquiring new thematic material but remaining unaltered in mood. When the fast, jazz-inspired music returns, its thematic relationship with the *Dies Irae* is strengthened. The movement accumulates an almost visceral rhythmic energy as it progresses, virtually exploding into the last pages, a coda based on an ancient Russian Orthodox chant (which he had earlier used in his *All-Night Vigil Service* of 1915) whose entry Rachmaninoff noted by inscribing "*Alliluya*" in the score. Was a specific message intended here? As the *Alliluya* succeeds the *Dies Irae*, did the composer mean to show that the Church conquers death? Optimism, sadness? Rachmaninoff was silent on the matter, except to say, "A composer always has his own ideas of his works, but I do not believe he ever should reveal them. Each listener should find his own meaning in the music."