Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

May 31, June 1 and 2, 2019

PIETARI INKINEN, CONDUCTOR
BEATRICE RANA, PIANO

JEAN SIBELIUS — *Pohjola's Daughter*, Opus 49

SERGEI PROKOFIEV — Concerto No. 3 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 26

I. Andante — Allegro
II. Theme and Variations: Andantino
III. Allegro ma non troppo

Ms. Rana

Intermission

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY — Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36

I. Andante sostenuto — Moderato con anima
II. Andantino in modo di canzona
III. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato (Allegro)
IV. Finale: Allegro con fuoco

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

JEAN SIBELIUS

Pohjola's Daughter, Opus 49 (1906)

Jean Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, on December 8, 1865, and died in Järvenpää, Finland, on September 20, 1957. He composed *Pohjola's Daughter* in 1906, and it was premiered in St. Petersburg by the Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theater with Sibelius conducting on December 29, 1906. These performances mark the Pittsburgh Symphony premiere of the work. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, harp and strings. Performance time: approximately 14 minutes.

Kaleva — "*Land of Heroes*" — is the Finns' ancient poetic name for their country. It was founded, according to legend, by Väinämöinen, the "eternal sage," who exerted order over chaos to establish a land centered in Karelia (historically the eastern region of Finland but since the Soviet-Finnish War of 1940, a part of Russia). Tales of Kaleva and Väinämöinen, of the primeval smith Ilmarinen and the reckless adventurer Lemminkainen, of Louhi, the female ruler of Pohjola, the threatening neighbor to the north, and of the tragic hero Kullervo, forced by fate to be a slave from childhood, had been part of the oral tradition for thousands of years before the physician and folklorist Elias Lönnrot began collecting and organizing them into a single epic poem in the 1830s; his original *Kalevala* was published in 1835 and appeared in a revised and expanded edition fourteen years later. After centuries of Swedish rule, Lönnrot's *Kalevala* became a pillar of Finnish culture, serving not only to reinvigorate the country's language and codify its communal myths, but also to provide a rallying point for the calls for Finland's political freedom. The *Kalevala* also worked a powerful influence on the country's art, literature, theater and music, and served to inspire some of the most important compositions of Jean Sibelius, who became a national hero at age 27 with his *Kullervo Symphony*; five years later the Finnish government granted him a substantial annual stipend to encourage his creativity.

As the basis for his 1906 tone poem *Pohjola's Daughter*, Sibelius took an episode related in the eighth canto of the *Kalevala* in which Väinämöinen sets out from Kaleva to the northern land of Pohjola to woo the daughter of its ruler, Louhi. The maiden, however, has already been promised by Louhi to the smith Ilmarinen in return for his forging the "*sampo*," a magical mill that produces salt, meal and gold and is a talisman of happiness and prosperity. Väinämöinen first sees Louhi's daughter seated upon a rainbow weaving a golden tapestry. Thrilled by her beauty, he pleads, "Come down here to me, O fair one," but she coyly replies that she will descend to him only if he can accomplish a series of such seemingly impossible tasks as splitting a horsehair with a blunt knife, or tying an egg into invisible knots, or carving a block of ice without making any splinters. These he does, but when she then demands that he build a boat from fragments of her spindle and shuttle, Väinämöinen, under the influence of an evil spirit, slips with his axe and drives it into his knee. Unable to stop the flow of blood with his own spells and devices, Väinämöinen finds an old conjurer who stanches the bleeding and binds the wound. Väinämöinen, having had his fill of this daughter of Pohjola, heads for home: "Full of anger, sorely wounded, Since the fair one has renounced him, To his sleigh he springs ... and onward!"

The tone poem Sibelius formed around this fabled encounter of Väinämöinen and the daughter of Pohjola is one of his most colorful and richly scored works, and one of his most overtly programmatic. The somber opening portrays the meditative side of "the vigorous old man" Väinämöinen, and the music of mounting intensity that follows, climaxing in a stentorian proclamation from the brass, his journey into the hostile north country. Glistening passages from harp and strings and a playful oboe melody evoke the maiden and her rainbow throne. The intertwining of their themes — his determined, hers mocking — evokes their conversation. Väinämöinen's Herculean accomplishments and his misfortune are implied by the following music, which again culminates in the brasses' stentorian proclamation. Broad melodic phrases unsettled by a slowly rising tremolo line in the low strings signal his anger, which subsides quickly as he leaves behind the mists and disappointments of the land of Pohjola and its unattainable daughter.

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Concerto No. 3 in C major for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 26 (1921)

Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontzovka, Russia, on April 23, 1891, and died in Moscow on March 5, 1953. He composed his Third Piano Concerto in 1921, and it was premiered in Chicago by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra with conductor Frederick Stock conducting and Prokofiev as soloist on December 16, 1921. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Syria Mosque with Fritz Reiner and pianist Beveridge Webster in March 1944, and most recently performed it with conductor Christoph König and pianist Gabriela Montero in November 2011. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 30 minutes.

In a 1962 interview, Madame Lina Llubera Prokofiev, the composer's first wife, recalled her husband's working method at the time he wrote the C major Piano Concerto: "Prokofiev toiled at his music. His capacity for work was phenomenal. He would sit down to work in the morning 'with a clear head,' as he said, either at the piano or at his writing desk. He usually composed his major works in the summer, in the mountains or at the seaside, away from the turmoil of city life. Always he sought places where the rhythm of work was not interrupted, where he could rest and take long walks. So it was with the Third Piano Concerto, which he completed during the summer of 1921 while staying at St. Brévin-les-Pins, a small village on the Atlantic coast of Brittany in France."

The composition of this Concerto was not a sudden inspiration for Prokofiev. The plan for a large virtuoso work to follow the first two piano concertos emerged in 1911, but he made little progress on it except for one passage he eventually placed at the end of the first movement. By 1913, he recalled in his memoirs, "I had composed a theme for variations, which I kept for a long time for subsequent use. In 1916-1917, I had tried several times to return to the Third Concerto. I wrote a beginning for it (two themes) and two variations on the theme for the second movement." At that time, he was also working on what he called a "white" quartet (i.e., in a diatonic style, playable on the white keys of the piano) but abandoned it because he thought the result would be monotonous. He shuttled two themes from this aborted quartet into the Concerto. "Thus," he continued in his autobiography, "when I began [in 1921] working on the Third Concerto, I already had the entire thematic material with the exception of the subordinate theme of the first movement and the third theme of the finale."

Prokofiev provided the following description of the score: "The first movement opens quietly with a short introduction. The theme is announced by an unaccompanied clarinet and is continued by the violins for a few bars. Soon the tempo changes to Allegro, and the strings lead to the statement of the principal subject by the piano. Discussion of this theme is carried on in a lively manner, both the piano and the orchestra having a good deal to say on the matter. A passage in chords for the piano alone leads to the more expressive second subject, which is heard in the oboe with a pizzicato accompaniment. The second movement consists of a theme with five variations. The finale begins with a staccato theme for bassoons and pizzicato strings, which is interrupted by the blustering entry of the piano. The orchestra holds its own with the opening theme, however, and there is a good deal of argument, with frequent differences of opinion as regards key. Eventually the piano takes up the first theme and develops it to a climax. With a reduction of tone and a slackening of tempo, an alternative theme is introduced in the woodwinds. The piano replies with a theme that is more in keeping with the caustic humor of the work. This material is developed, and there is a brilliant coda."

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Opus 36 (1877-1878)

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk on May 7, 1840, and died in St. Petersburg on November 6, 1893. He composed his Fourth Symphony in 1877-1878, and it was premiered in Moscow by the Orchestra of the Russian Musical Society with conductor Nikolai Rubinstein conducting on Feburary 22, 1878. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the Symphony at

Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Victor Herbert in November 1900, and most recently performed it with music director Manfred Honeck in May 2016. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds plus piccolo, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 45 minutes.

The Fourth Symphony was a product of the most crucial and turbulent time of Tchaikovsky's life — 1877, when he met two women who forced him to evaluate himself as he never had before. The first was the sensitive, music-loving widow of a wealthy Russian railroad baron, Nadezhda von Meck, who became not only the financial backer who allowed him to quit his irksome teaching job at the Moscow Conservatory to devote himself entirely to composition, but also the sympathetic sounding-board for reports on the whole range of his activities — emotional, musical, personal. Though they never met, her place in Tchaikovsky's life was enormous and beneficial.

The second woman to enter Tchaikovsky's life in 1877 was Antonina Miliukov, an unnoticed student in one of his large lecture classes at the Conservatory who had worked herself into a passion over her professor. Tchaikovsky paid her no special attention, and had quite forgotten her when he received an ardent love letter professing her flaming and unquenchable desire to meet him. Tchaikovsky (age 37), who should have burned the thing, answered the letter of the 28-year-old Antonina in a polite, cool fashion, but did not include an outright rejection of her advances. He had been considering marriage for almost a year in the hope that it would give him both the stable home life he had not enjoyed in the twenty years since his mother died, as well as to help dispel the all-too-true rumors of his homosexuality. He believed he might achieve both those goals with Antonina. He could not see the situation clearly enough to realize that what he hoped for was impossible — a pure, platonic marriage without its physical and emotional realities. Further letters from Antonina implored Tchaikovsky to meet her, and threatened suicide out of desperation if he refused. What a welter of emotions must have gripped his heart when, just a few weeks later, he proposed marriage to her! Inevitably, the marriage crumbled within days of the wedding amid Tchaikovsky's searing self-deprecation.

It was during May and June that Tchaikovsky sketched the Fourth Symphony, finishing the first three movements before Antonina began her siege. The finale was completed by the time he proposed. Because of this chronology, the program of the Symphony was not a direct result of his marital disaster. All that — the July wedding, the mere eighteen days of bitter conjugal farce, the two separations — postdated the actual composition of the Symphony by a few months. What Tchaikovsky found in his relationship with this woman (who by 1877 already showed signs of approaching the door of the mental ward in which, still legally married to him, she died in 1917) was a confirmation of his belief in the inexorable workings of Fate in human destiny.

After the premiere, Tchaikovsky explained to Mme. von Meck the emotional content of the Fourth Symphony: "The introduction [blaring brasses heard immediately in a motto theme that recurs throughout the Symphony] is the kernel of the whole Symphony. This is Fate, which hinders one in the pursuit of happiness. There is nothing to do but to submit and vainly complain [the melancholy, syncopated shadow-waltz of the main theme, heard in the strings]. Would it not be better to turn away from reality and lull one's self in dreams? [The second theme is begun by the clarinet.] But no — these are but dreams: roughly we are awakened by Fate. [The blaring brass fanfare over a wave of timpani begins the development section.] Thus we see that life is only an everlasting alternation of somber reality and fugitive dreams of happiness. The second movement shows another phase of sadness. How sad it is that so much has already *been* and *gone*! And yet it is a pleasure to think of the early years. It is sad, yet sweet, to lose one's self in the past. In the third movement are capricious arabesques, vague figures which slip into the imagination when one has taken wine and is slightly intoxicated. Military music is heard in the distance. As to the finale, if you find no pleasure in yourself, go to the people. The picture of a folk holiday. [The finale employs the folk song *A Birch Stood in the Meadow*.] Hardly have we had time to forget ourselves in the happiness of others when indefatigable Fate reminds us once more of its presence. Yet there still *is* happiness, simple, naive happiness. Rejoice in the happiness of others — and you can still live."

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