

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2019-2020 Mellon Grand Classics Season

February 21 and 23, 2020

JURAJ VALCUHA, CONDUCTOR  
BAIDA SKRIDE, VIOLIN

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV      Valse de Concert No. 1 in D major, Opus 47

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY      Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35  
I.      Allegro moderato  
II.      Canzonetta: Andante  
III.      Finale: Allegro vivacissimo  
         **Ms. Skride**

Intermission

SERGEI PROKOFIEV      Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Opus 44  
I.      Moderato  
II.      Andante  
III.      Allegro agitato  
IV.      Andante mosso - Allegro moderato

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV

Valse de Concert No. 1 in D major, Opus 47 (1893)

**Alexander Glazunov was born in St. Petersburg on August 10, 1865, and died in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France on March 21, 1936. He composed “Valse de Concert No. 1” in 1893, and it was premiered in St. Petersburg in the Hall of Nobility with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov conducting on December 18, 1893. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Emil Paur in 1908, and most recently performed it at Syria Mosque with conductor Vladimir Bakaleinikoff in 1946. The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, oboe, English horn, three clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, harp and strings. Performance time: approximately 11 minutes**

By the turn of the 20th century, Russian music had become a mature art. The works of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and Borodin, having been played at home and abroad, established a national character and tradition that those masters wanted to see passed on to succeeding generations. The most important Russian musical torchbearer of the two decades after 1900, the time between the deaths of Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries and the rise of the modern school of Prokofiev and Shostakovich, was Alexander Glazunov.

Glazunov was gifted with an exceptional ear and musical memory (after Borodin's death, he completely reconstructed the Overture to *Prince Igor* from recollections of Borodin's piano performance of the piece), and early demonstrated his gifts in his native St. Petersburg. By age nineteen, he had traveled to Western Europe for a performance of his First Symphony. During the 1890s, he established a wide reputation as a composer and a conductor of his own works, journeying to Paris in 1889 to direct his Second Symphony at the World Exhibition. In 1899, he was engaged as instructor of composition and orchestration at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. When his teacher, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, was dismissed from the Conservatory staff in the wake of the 1905 revolutionary turmoil, Glazunov resigned in protest in April and did not return until December 14th, by which time most of the demands by the faculty for the school's autonomy had been granted. Two days later he was elected director of the Conservatory. He worked ceaselessly to improve the curriculum and standards of the Conservatory, and made a successful effort to preserve the school's independence after the 1917 Revolution. In the final years of his tenure, which lasted officially until 1930, Glazunov was criticized for his conservatism (Shostakovich, one of his students, spoke of him with both admiration and frustration) and spent much time abroad. In 1929, he visited the United States to conduct the orchestras of Boston and Detroit in concerts of his music. When his health broke, in 1932, he settled with his wife in Paris; he died there in 1936. In 1972, his remains were transferred to Leningrad and reinterred in an honored grave. A research institute devoted to him in Munich and an archive in Paris were established in his memory.

The 19th-century mania for the Viennese waltz raged in Russia as virulently as it did in the rest of Europe — Johann Strauss the Younger spent many summers at the fashionable resort of Pavlovsk, south of St. Petersburg, after he began touring in 1856 — and left its progeny in the concert and stage works of Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Liadov, Prokofiev, Shostakovich and other of the nation's composers. In 1893, Glazunov contributed two fine specimens to the genre of the concert waltz, which are based on the Viennese model that strings together several continuous strains of complementary character.

### PETER 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 by the Vienna Philharmonic with conductor Hans Richter and violinist Adolf Brodsky on December 4,**

**1881. The Pittsburgh Symphony premiered the concerto at Carnegie Music Hall with Music Director Victor Herbert and violinist Alexander Petschnikoff in 1899, and most recently performed it with Music Director Manfred Honeck and violinist James Ehnes in 2018. 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 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 composition 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 piece. 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 technical 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 musical image 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 show of agility and speed.

## SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Opus 44 (1928)

**Sergei Prokofiev was born in Sontsovka on April 23, 1891, and died in Moscow on March 5, 1953. He composed his Third Symphony in 1928, drawn on material from his opera *The Fiery Angel*. It was premiered by the Orchestra Symphonique de Paris and conductor Pierre Monteux on May 17, 1929. These performances mark the Pittsburgh Symphony premiere of the Third Symphony. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps and strings. Performance time: approximately 34 minutes**

In 1918, Sergei Prokofiev, age 27, lit out from his native Russia to set the musical world on fire. After convincing the officials of the newly proclaimed Soviet government that he could win friends abroad for the fledgling nation, he headed east on a train across his vast homeland, making his way through Vladivostok and Yokohama to America. He gave his United States debut in New York in November. Prokofiev enjoyed a great success in Chicago a few weeks later when Frederick Stock conducted the *Scythian Suite* and he played his own First Piano Concerto, an event that so impressed Cleofonte

Campanini, principal conductor and general manager of the Chicago Opera, that he awarded the gifted young Russian musician a commission to compose a new opera for his company. *The Love for Three Oranges* was written for Chicago in 1919, but Campanini's sudden death the following year delayed the premiere until December 1921. The company's new director, the celebrated soprano Mary Garden (who originated the female lead in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1902 and created a sensation a few years later in Paris, New York and Chicago with Richard Strauss' *Salome*), showed such enthusiasm for *The Love for Three Oranges* that Prokofiev began casting about for a subject for another opera that he hoped might be staged in Chicago. He settled on *The Fiery Angel* by writer, poet and translator Valery Bryusov (1873-1924), a leader of the Russian Symbolist movement, which sought to evoke rather than describe ideas and feelings through symbolic references and images.

Bryusov's literary conceit in *The Fiery Angel*, published in 1908, was that it was a translation of the accounts of a 16th-century mercenary soldier in Germany which purported "to cross that sacred edge that divides our world from the dark sphere in which float spirits and demons." In the libretto Prokofiev extracted from Bryusov's strange historical novel, the soldier, named Ruprecht, meets Renata, who has obsessed since childhood that she is watched over by a protective fiery angel called Madiel. Renata tells Ruprecht that she believes she found the physical incarnation of Madiel in Count Heinrich, with whom she lived for a year before he left her. Ruprecht, who has fallen in love with the delusional and often hysterical Renata, joins in her attempt to win back Heinrich through the dark arts. Renata is filled with remorse when Ruprecht is injured in an encounter with Heinrich, and she vows to punish her sinfulness by entering a convent. Mephistopheles turns up to take Ruprecht under his malevolent wing when she leaves. Instead of finding expiation in the convent, Renata corrupts the nuns with her weird visions and is tried before the Inquisition. Mephistopheles stands triumphantly by Ruprecht's side as Renata is condemned to death.

Prokofiev began work on *The Fiery Angel* as soon as *The Love for Three Oranges* was finished in 1919, but his busy concert and composing schedule and the dimming prospects for a production in Chicago slowed progress. The short score was not completed until late 1922, after Prokofiev had settled in Paris and dedicated a summer to the gestating opera at Ettal, in the Bavarian Alps. He revised and orchestrated the score when the State Opera in Berlin considered presenting it during the 1927-1928 season, but those plans fell through, as did the prospect for a Metropolitan Opera production in 1930. The only time Prokofiev heard any of *The Fiery Angel* was when Sergei Koussevitzky conducted an abridged version of Act II on a concert at the Paris Opéra in June 1928; it was poorly received. The complete opera was performed in concert in Paris in November 1954, twenty months after the composer's death; its stage premiere was given at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on September 14, 1955. Prokofiev considered the powerful, expressionistic *The Fiery Angel* one of his greatest achievements, and its failure during his lifetime was one of his sharpest disappointments.

Prokofiev, however, methodical and economical, was not about to let his eight years of labor on *The Fiery Angel* go completely for naught. "I was sorry the opera had not been staged and that the score lay gathering dust on the shelf," he wrote in 1928. "I was about to make a suite out of it when I remembered that for one of the entr'actes I had used the development of themes in the preceding scene, and it occurred to me that this might serve as the kernel for a symphony. I examined the themes and found that they would make a good exposition for a sonata-form movement. I found the same themes in other parts of the opera differently expressed and quite suitable for the recapitulation. In this way the plan for the first movement of the Symphony worked out quite simply. The material for the scherzo and the *Andante* was also found without difficulty. The finale took a little longer. I spent much time whipping the thing into final shape, tying up all the loose ends and doing the orchestration. The result — the Third Symphony — I consider to be one of my best compositions." Though Prokofiev insisted that "I do not like it to be called the 'Fiery Angel' Symphony," the Symphony No. 3 inevitably borrows not just several themes from the opera but also its emotional milieu and its daring modernism. "In this Symphony," he said, "I feel that I have succeeded in deepening my musical language."

The Symphony's first movement is based on three themes from *The Fiery Angel*: the ferocious opening music comes from Renata's hysterical first scene; the second theme, a broad melody begun by step-wise motion that is soon followed by an expressive leap of an octave, is associated with Renata's love for the Angel Madiel; the third theme, a smooth but angular strain initiated by the first violins above muttered chromatic scales in the second violins and violas and a simple obbligato with a limping grace note in the bassoon, belongs to the gallant Ruprecht. These motives interact in the masterful development section (begun abruptly with a mechanistic passage for woodwinds, muted trumpets and pizzicato strings), which in the opera provides the entr'acte before Ruprecht's confrontation with Heinrich. The recapitulation begins with a softened version of the ferocious music from the movement's opening before a sweeping restatement of the broad second theme is interlaced with compressed, aggressive

transformations of the angular third motive. The long coda drapes a floating, disembodied version of the second theme upon a spectral background derived from Renata's mad music.

The convent scene in which Renata tries to exorcize her demons furnishes the thematic material for what Prokofiev called "the calm and contemplative *Andante*." The hushed, ecclesiastical harmonies that open the movement preview the main theme, a long, restrained melody initiated by flutes and bassoon. The central episode is more anxious in mood and more varied in thematic content, with subliminal glisses, trills, rustlings and stunted rhythms in the divided strings underlying a circling, vaguely Oriental strain played by English horn and violins and an ethereal line suspended high in the solo violin's compass. The main theme returns in the oboes before the movement comes to a quiet but uneasy close.

Prokofiev said that the music of the scherzo, associated in the opera with Renata's invocation of her angel, was inspired by what he called the "wind-over-the-graves" finale of Chopin's "Funeral March" Sonata (No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35). The haunted, sighing string glissandos, feverish rhythms and unsettling contention among orchestral voices find consolation in the central passage, the music to which Renata tries to soothe Ruprecht after his struggle with Heinrich.

The finale opens with a ferocious dead march from the full orchestra, music associated in the opera with the sorcerer Agrippa, whom Renata consults in the quest to again find her angel. Three more thematic ideas are included in the opening section: the first is loud and aggressive, the second comprises hammered chords in slower tempo, and the contrasting third is tranquil and lyrical; the circling, Oriental strain from the *Andante* is recalled by the high woodwinds before the third theme appears. Bassoons in their sepulchral low register begin the recapitulation of the earlier themes, into which the violins insert a reminiscence of Ruprecht's melody from the first movement. The finale builds to a furious climax that the famed Russian pianist Sviatoslav Richter, after hearing a performance of the Third Symphony in 1939, likened to "grandiose masses gaping and toppling over — the end of the universe."

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