

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2019-2020 Mellon Grand Classics Season

February 14, 15 and 16, 2020

VASILY PETRENKO, CONDUCTOR
RAY CHEN, VIOLIN

EDWARD ELGAR *Cockaigne (In London Town)*, Concert Overture, Opus 40

JEAN SIBELIUS Concerto in D minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 47

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio di molto
- III. Allegro ma non tanto

Mr. Chen

Intermission

MAURICE RAVEL Suites Nos. 1 and 2 from the *Daphnis et Chloé*
Nocturne — Interlude — Danse Guerrière
Daybreak — Pantomime — General Dance

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

EDWARD ELGAR

Cockaigne (In London Town), Concert Overture, Opus 40 (1900-1901)

Edward Elgar was born in Broadheath, England on June 2, 1857, and died in Worcester on February 23, 1934. He composed *Cockaigne* in 1900-1901, and it was premiered by the London Philharmonic in Queen's Hall with Elgar conducting on June 20, 1901. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the overture at Carnegie Music Hall with Music Director Victor Herbert in 1902, and most recently performed it in Heinz Hall with conductor Michael Lankester in 1987. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 15 minutes

"Cockaigne" (or, often, "Cockayne") is the imaginary land of Medieval lore where life is an idler's paradise: the rivers run with wine, the houses are built from sugar cakes, roast geese wander about waiting to be made a meal, buttered larks fall from the sky, shopkeepers pass out their goods for free. The word apparently originated in the Latin *coquere* — "to cook" — and survives in the German term for "cake" — *Kuchen*; thus, "Cockaigne," or "the land of cakes." (Despite its similarity, the name of the addictive drug, which derives from the coca plant, is unrelated in origin.) Fabled Cockaigne figured in the literature of both Britain and France beginning in the 13th century, where it often provided the venue for satires visited upon clergy and others of high station with easy access to the good life. Though the word "Cockney" apparently came from an altogether different source (the Middle English *cokeney*, or "foolish person"), Cockaigne became associated with the residents of London's East End (i.e., those born and raised, according to Cockney tradition, within the sound of the Bow Church bells), and, by extension, with the whole city of London.

In November 1900, a year after the triumph of his "Enigma" Variations had elevated him to the front rank of British composers, Edward Elgar reported that he was "one dark day in the Guildhall: while looking at the memorials of the city's great past & knowing well the history of its unending charity, I seemed to hear far away in the dim roof a theme, an echo of some noble melody ..." The theme that Elgar conjured from the spirits of the ancient Guildhall served as the catalyst for the *Cockaigne Overture*, which he subtitled "*In London Town*" when the score was completed the following March. He conducted the London Philharmonic in the work's premiere, at Queen's Hall on June 20, 1901, an event that his wife, Alice, told her diary was a "great glorious success." Her opinion was echoed by the press: "The score is a masterpiece," wrote one critic; "it is music that does one good to hear — invigorating, humanizing, uplifting," wrote another. *Cockaigne* was performed in Boston within five months of its London premiere, and in Berlin (conducted by Richard Strauss) the following year. It became a staple of British concert programs, not least on those conducted by the composer himself, and has remained one of Elgar's most frequently performed works.

Though Elgar did not offer any specific program for *Cockaigne*, he wrote to the conductor Hans Richter, a leading proponent of his music, "Here is nothing deep or melancholy — it is intended to be honest, healthy, humorous and strong but not vulgar." He told Joseph Bennett, who was preparing a program note for the Overture's premiere, "It calls up to my mind all the good humour, jollity and something deeper in the way of English good fellowship (as it were) abiding still in our capital." Elgar labeled one motive in his sketches "the lovers"; he called for an organ in the closing pages; he included a section, accompanied by bass drum and rattling tambourine, that evokes (parodies?) a Salvation Army band. Commentators have woven from Elgar's few clues detailed scenarios for the *Cockaigne Overture*. David Ewen concluded that it is "a tonal picture of the city in the time of Edward VII — its sights and sounds as absorbed by two lovers taking a stroll. They enter a church, then exchange love messages in a park. The martial sound of a band and the religious music of a church organ form part of the music's texture." George Grove, founder of the authoritative music encyclopedia that still bears his name, thought that this music "represented London's parks and open spaces, the bands marching from Knightsbridge to Buckingham Palace, Westminster with its dignified associations of Church and State ... mirrored in glowing orchestral colors." In the preface to a re-publication of the score during the dark days of 1942, British musicologist Edwin Evans eschewed specific images and associations, but captured, rather

longingly, the essential mood of this grand testament of English pride and vigor: “Elgar’s Overture reflects a London that is animated, but not hectic, occasionally grave but never despondent, and appreciative but not boastful of its resources, of which it had not learned the limitations. Listening to the music at this distance of time from its inception, across the many events that have intervened, it is perhaps the note of unimpaired health, of cheerful sanity, that strikes us most among its many attractive features.”

JEAN SIBELIUS

Concerto in D minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 47 (1903, revised 1905)

Jean Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland on December 8, 1865, and died in Järvenpää, Finland on September 20, 1957. He composed in Violin Concerto 1903 and later revised it in 1905, and it was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic with Sibelius conducting and Viktor Nováček as soloist on February 8, 1904. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Syria Mosque with Music Director Fritz Reiner and violinist Jascha Heifetz in 1945, and most recently performed it at Heinz Hall with conductor Osmo Vänskä and violinist James Ehnes in 2016. The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.

Performance time: approximately 31 minutes

By 1903, when he was engaged on his Violin Concerto, Sibelius had already composed *Finlandia*, *Kullervo*, *En Saga*, the *Karelia Suite*, the four *Lemminkäinen Legends* (including *The Swan of Tuonela*) and the first two symphonies, the works that established his international reputation. He was composing so easily at that time that his wife, Aino, wrote to a friend that he would stay up far into the night to record the flood of excellent ideas that had come upon him during the day. There were, however, some disturbing personal worries threatening his musical fecundity.

Just after the premiere of the Second Symphony in March 1902, Sibelius developed a painful ear infection that did not respond easily to treatment. Thoughts of the deafness of Beethoven and Smetana plagued him, and he feared that he might be losing his hearing. (He was 37 at the time.) In June, he began having trouble with his throat, and he jumped to the conclusion that his health was about to give way, even wondering how much time he might have left to work. Though filled with fatalistic thoughts at that time, he put much energy into the Violin Concerto. The ear and throat ailments continued to plague him until 1908, when a benign tumor was discovered. It took a dozen operations until it was successfully removed, and the anxiety about its return stayed with him for years. (Sibelius, incidentally, enjoyed sterling health for the rest of his days and lived to the ripe age of 91, a testament to the efficacy of his treatment.)

The Violin Concerto’s opening movement employs sonata form, modified in that a succinct cadenza for the soloist replaces the usual development section. The exposition consists of three theme groups — a doleful melody announced by the soloist over murmuring strings, a yearning theme initiated by bassoons and cellos with rich accompaniment, and a bold, propulsive strophe in march rhythm. The development-cadenza is built on the opening motive and leads directly into the recapitulation of the exposition themes.

The second movement could well be called a “Romanza,” a descendant of the long-limbed lyricism of the *Andantes* of Mozart’s violin concertos. It is among the most avowedly Romantic music in any of Sibelius’ works for orchestra. The finale launches into a robust dance whose theme the esteemed English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey thought could be “a polonaise for polar bears.” A bumptious energy fills the movement, giving it an air reminiscent of the Gypsy finales of many 19th-century violin concertos. The form is sonatina, a sonata without development, here employing two large theme groups.

MAURICE RAVEL

Suites Nos. 1 and 2 from *Daphnis et Chloé* (1909-1912)

Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, France on March 7, 1875, and died in Paris on December 28, 1937. He composed *Daphnis et Chloé* in 1909-1912 on a commission from Sergei Diaghilev and the *Ballet Russe*, and it was premiered in Paris at the Théâtre du Châtelet with Pierre Monteux conducting on June 8, 1912. As a ballet, *Daphnis* had a lukewarm reception and is rarely performed today, but the music immediately entered the repertory of the world's orchestras and has remained one of the most popular of 20th-century scores. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed music from the ballet with conductor Carlos Chavez in 1939, and most recently performed Suite No. 2 with conductor Gustavo Gimeno in 2015. The score calls for two piccolos, three flutes, alto flute, two oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, two harps and strings. Performance time: approximately 28 minutes

The *Ballet Russe* descended on Paris in 1909 with an impact still reverberating through the worlds of art, music and dance. Its brilliant impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, went shopping among the artistic riches of the French capital, and soon had gathered together the most glittering array of creative talent ever assembled under a single banner: Falla, Picasso, Nijinsky, Fokine, Bakst, Monteux, Stravinsky, Massine, Debussy, Matisse, Prokofiev, Pavlova, Poulenc, Milhaud. Early in 1910 Diaghilev approached Maurice Ravel with a scenario by Fokine for a ballet based on a pastoral romance derived from the writings of the 5th-century Greek sophist Longus. In his 1928 autobiographical sketch, Ravel wrote, "I was commissioned by the director of the Russian Ballet to write *Daphnis et Chloé*, a choreographic symphony in three movements. My aim in writing it was to compose a vast musical fresco, and to be not so much careful about archaic details as loyal to my visionary Greece, which is fairly closely related to the Greece imagined and depicted by French painters at the end of the 18th century. The work is constructed like a symphony, with a very strict system of tonality, formed out of a small number of themes whose development assures homogeneity to the work." Ravel's refined view of *Daphnis* through the eyes of Watteau was at variance with the primitive one held by others on the production staff, especially Léon Bakst, who was doing the stage designs. There were many squabbles and delays in mounting the production, and, as a ballet, *Daphnis* had a lukewarm reception at its premiere at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris on June 8, 1912. Ravel's score, however, was greeted with enthusiasm, perhaps because the orchestra was the only facet of the production that was completely prepared. The music immediately entered the repertory of the world's orchestras and has remained one of the most popular of 20th-century scores, though the ballet is rarely seen.

One of the marks of a great musical work is the way in which it creates and envelops the listener in its own characteristic world. Ravel, through his masterful orchestration, sensitivity to color and atmosphere, and careful construction, created such a sound world in his *Daphnis et Chloé*. Ravel's world is one of elegant sensuality and dream-like refinement, one that grew from the composer's idealized vision not so much of Greece as of the court of Louis XIV at Versailles and its precise etiquette governing life and love. The young lovers of the ballet are not ancient primitives, but pink-cheeked shepherds who have stepped from a delicate canvas of Fragonard to amuse *Le Roi Soleil*. In considering the wondrous effect of *Daphnis*, Jean Cocteau wrote, "It is one of those works that land in the heart like a meteorite, from a planet whose laws will remain forever mysterious and beyond our understanding." Igor Stravinsky called it "one of the most beautiful products of French music."

Daphnis et Chloé opens in a meadow bordering a sacred wood on the island of Lesbos. Greek youths and maidens enter with wreaths and flowers to place at the altar of the Nymphs as the shepherd Daphnis descends from the hills. His lover, Chloé, crosses the meadow to meet him. The girls are attracted to the handsome Daphnis and dance seductively around him, inciting Chloé's jealousy. Chloé, in her turn, becomes the object of the men's advances, particularly a crude one from the clownish goatherd Dorcon. Daphnis' jealousy is now aroused and he challenges Dorcon to a dancing contest, the prize to be a kiss from Chloé. Dorcon performs a grotesque dance and he is jeered by the onlookers. Daphnis easily wins Chloé's kiss with his graceful performance. The crowd leads Chloé away, leaving Daphnis alone to lapse into languid ecstasy. Daphnis' attention is suddenly drawn to the clanging of arms and shouts of alarm from the woods. Pirates have invaded and set upon the Greeks. Daphnis rushes off to protect Chloé, but she has been captured.

In Scene Two, set on a jagged seacoast, the brigands enter their hideaway laden with booty. Chloé, hands bound, is led in. She pleads for her release. When the chief refuses, the sky grows dark and the god Pan, arm extended threateningly, appears upon the nearby mountains. The frightened pirates flee, leaving Chloé alone.

Scene Three is again set amid the hills and meadows of the ballet's first scene. It is sunrise. Herdsmen arrive and tell Daphnis that Chloé has been rescued. She appears and throws herself into Daphnis' arms. The old shepherd Lammon explains to them that Pan has saved Chloé in remembrance of his love for the nymph Syrinx. In gratitude, Daphnis and Chloé re-enact the ancient tale, in which Syrinx is transformed into a reed by her sisters to save her from the lustful pursuit of Pan, who then made a flute from that selfsame reed — the pipes of Pan — upon which to play away his longing. Daphnis and Chloé embrace tenderly and join in the general joyous dance that ends the ballet.

From the complete ballet, Ravel extracted two Suites comprising some two-thirds of the work's length. The First Suite includes the *Nocturne* in which the nymphs console Daphnis after Chloé's abduction, the *Interlude* between Scenes One and Two, and the *Warlike Dance of the Pirates*. The Second Suite parallels the action of the ballet's final Scene: *Daybreak*, *Pantomime* of the adventure of Pan and Syrinx, and the concluding *General Dance*.

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