

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2019-2020 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 6 and 8, 2020

MARK ELDER, CONDUCTOR  
YULIANNA AVDEEVA, PIANO

HECTOR BERLIOZ

*King Lear Overture*, Opus 4

EDVARD GRIEG

Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Adagio —
- III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato

**Ms. Avdeeva**

Intermission

JEAN SIBELIUS

Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Opus 39

- I. Andante, ma non troppo — Allegro energico
- II. Andante, ma non troppo
- III. Scherzo: Allegro
- IV. Finale (Quasi una Fantasia): Andante — Allegro molto

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### HECTOR BERLIOZ

#### *King Lear Overture*, Opus 4 (1831)

**Hector Berlioz was born in Côte-Saint-André, France on December 11, 1803, and died in Paris on March 8, 1869. He composed *King Lear Overture* in 1831, and it was later premiered at the Paris Conservatoire with conductor Narcisse Girard on December 22, 1833. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Carnegie Music Hall with Music Director Victor Herbert in March 1902, and most recently performed it with Marek Janowski in October 2008. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 15 minutes**

After three unsuccessful attempts, Berlioz finally won the *Prix de Rome* at the end of 1830, but he then pried himself away from Paris only with the greatest reluctance. His reputation as a leader of the city's musical avant garde was just beginning to blossom (the *Symphonie Fantastique* was premiered on December 5th), and a recent passion conceived for the pianist Camille Moke had resulted in their betrothal. Upon his arrival in Rome, Berlioz installed himself in the French Academy at the Villa Medici, and proceeded to worry more about the lack of correspondence from Camille than about his creative work. He passed his time poking about the ancient ruins, touching up the score of the *Symphonie Fantastique*, and immersing himself in Byron's poem *The Corsair*, reading much of it in, of all places, St. Peter's Basilica. By April, waiting for word from Paris had proven intolerable to him, and he broke the terms of his *Prix* appointment by bolting north from Rome.

Berlioz's journey was halted for several days in Florence by fever and a sore throat, and he speeded his recovery by reading Shakespeare's *King Lear* on the banks of the Arno. He was overwhelmed by the drama: "I uttered a cry of admiration in the face of this work of genius; I thought I would burst from enthusiasm, I rolled around (in the grass, honestly), I rolled convulsively to appease my utter rapture." Immediately upon the heels of this literary revelation, however, came a letter from Camille's mother, who reported to Berlioz that her daughter had married the noted piano maker Ignaz Pleyel. Revenge, the jilted composer vowed, must be done upon his faithless fiancée. He purchased two revolvers and a measure of laudanum and strychnine, as well as some serving maid's clothes (!) that he planned to use as a disguise to sneak into the Pleyel-Moke abode. He got as far as Nice, where his reason apparently gave way, and threw himself into the ocean in an attempted suicide. After being "yanked out like a fish," as he put it in his memoirs, his rage completely drowned, and he spent the next three weeks recovering ("the happiest twenty days of my existence"). He sketched out some ideas later used in his *Corsaire Overture*, but worked mainly on a concert overture inspired by *King Lear*. He returned to Rome, made amends with Horace Vernet, the French historical painter then heading the Academy, and finished *King Lear* by May 10th. The work had to await its premiere until December 22, 1833, when Narcisse Girard led it (Berlioz did not debut as a conductor until 1835) on a program that also featured the *Symphonie Fantastique* and the composer's friend Franz Liszt playing Weber's *Konzertstück*. It was following that concert that Nicolò Paganini approached Berlioz with the commission for *Harold in Italy*. Berlioz valued his early *King Lear* highly, and conducted it many times after its publication in 1839. At one concert in Germany a few years before his death, he was again amazed by his own inspiration: "Why, it is overwhelming. Did I really write that? ... Perhaps Father Shakespeare would not curse me for having made his old British King and his sweet Cordelia speak in such strains."

Though Berlioz left no specific program for *King Lear* relating the score's progress to the characters and events of the drama (the eminent English musicologist Sir Donald Tovey claimed that this Overture was not programmatic at all, but simply "a magnificent piece of orchestral rhetoric in tragic style"), he did give a hint that the music has some pictorial qualities. In responding to a letter from the Baron von Donop in 1858 asking how the Overture was to be interpreted, Berlioz noted, "It used to be the custom at the court of Charles X, as late as 1830, to announce the King's entrance into his chambers (after Mass on Sundays) to the sound of an enormous drum. From this, I had the idea of accompanying Lear into his council chamber for the scene of the division of the kingdom by a similar effect on the timpani. I did not intend his madness to be represented until the middle of the *Allegro*, when the basses bring in the theme

of the introduction in the middle of the storm." Lear himself seems to be evoked by the commanding unison string figure that begins the extended slow introduction. Cordelia enters with the plaintive melody in the oboe above pizzicato strings. The return of Lear's theme at the end of the introduction is heightened by thundering rolls on the timpani. The main body of the Overture, in fast tempo, largely follows traditional sonata form, with a violent main theme placated by two gentle strains unfolded by oboe and bassoon. There is much contention between the contrasting emotional states of the principal thematic material in the development and recapitulation sections until Lear's motto from the introduction reappears as a menacing recitative for basses that leads to the stormy closing pages of the Overture.

## EDVARD GRIEG

### Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 16 (1868-1869)

**Edvard Grieg was born in Bergen, Norway on June 15, 1843, and died there on September 4, 1907. He composed his Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra in 1868-1869, and it was premiered in Copenhagen by the Royal Danish Orchestra with conductor Holger Simon Paulli and pianist Edmund Neupert on April 3, 1869. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Carnegie Music Hall with Music Director Victor Herbert in March 1900, and most recently performed it with conductor Yan Pascal Tortelier and pianist Valentina Lisitsa in May 2013. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings. Performance time: approximately 39 minutes**

Grieg completed his studies at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1863. Rather than heading directly home to Norway, however, he settled in Copenhagen to study privately with Niels Gade, at that time Denmark's most prominent musician and generally regarded as the founder of the modern Scandinavian school of composition. During his three years in that lovely city, Grieg met Rikard Nordraak, another young composer from Norway who was filled with the glowing ambition of establishing a distinctive musical identity for his homeland. His enthusiasm kindled Grieg's nationalistic interests, and together they established the Euterpe Society to help promote Scandinavian music. Grieg's concern with folk music grew stronger during the following years, especially when he was left to carry on the Euterpe project alone after Nordraak's premature death in 1866 at the age of 23. Also during this Danish sojourn, Grieg met Nina Hagerup, a fine singer and his cousin. More than familial affection passed between the two, however, and they soon found themselves in love. Nina's mother disapproved of the match ("He is nothing. He has nothing. And he makes music no one wants to hear," was the maternal judgment), and plans for a wedding were postponed.

Back in Norway, Grieg's creative work was concentrated on the large forms advocated by his Leipzig teachers and by Gade. By 1867, he had produced the Piano Sonata, Op. 7, the first two violin and piano sonatas, a symphony (long unpublished and made available only as recently as 1981), and the concert overture *In Autumn*. He also carried on his work to promote native music, and gave an unprecedented concert exclusively of Norwegian compositions in 1866. Its excellent success brought him a notoriety that lifted him to the front rank of Scandinavian musicians: he was appointed conductor of the Philharmonic Society in Christiania (Oslo), had a full schedule of pupils, and was popular as a piano recital artist. As a result of his success, he was able to retrieve his fiancée, Nina, from Copenhagen, and the couple were married in June 1867. The daughter born the following spring was yet another mark of Grieg's increasingly happy life.

Grieg arranged to have the summer of 1868 free of duties, and he and Nina returned to Denmark for an extended vacation. They deposited the baby with grandparents in Copenhagen, and then went off to a secluded retreat at Sölleröd. It was there that Grieg wrote his Piano Concerto. He thoroughly enjoyed that summer. He slept late, took long walks, ate well, and tipped a glass in the evenings with friends at the local inn. The sylvan setting also spurred his creative energies, and he composed freely for several hours each afternoon. When the couple returned to Norway in the fall, the Concerto was largely completed. He tinkered with the work throughout the winter, and had it ready for its premiere the following April in Copenhagen. The piece was well received, but his joy over this success was tempered by the death of his thirteen-month-old daughter only a few weeks later.

The Concerto's first movement opens with a bold summons by the soloist. The main theme is given by the woodwinds and taken over almost immediately by the piano. A transition, filled with skipping

rhythms, leads to the second theme, a tender cello melody wrapped in the warm harmonies of the trombones. An episodic development section, launched by the full orchestra playing the movement's opening motive, is largely based on the main theme in dialogue. The recapitulation returns the earlier themes, after which the piano displays a tightly woven cadenza. The stern introductory measures are recalled to close the movement. The *Adagio* begins with a song filled with sentiment and nostalgia played by the strings and rounded off by touching phrases from the solo horn. The soloist weaves elaborate musical filigree above the simple accompaniment before the lovely song returns in an enriched setting. The themes of the finale's outer sections are constructed in the rhythms of a popular Norwegian dance, the *halling*. The movement's central portion presents a wonderful melodic inspiration, introduced by the solo flute, that derives from the dreamy atmosphere of the preceding movement.

## JEAN SIBELIUS

### Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Opus 39 (1898-1899)

**Jean Sibelius was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland on December 8, 1865, and died in Järvenpää, Finland on September 20, 1957. He composed his First Symphony in 1898-1899, and it was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra with Sibelius himself conducting on April 26, 1899. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the symphony at Syria Mosque with conductor Antonio Modarelli in November 1934, and most recently performed it with conductor Yan Pascal Tortelier in March 2012. The score calls for two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 38 minutes**

By the time he was 34, when he finished his First Symphony, Sibelius was already a fêted national hero. He came to maturity when his native Finland was searching for its national cultural and political identity after centuries of domination by Sweden and Russia, and his music gave vent to the aspirations of his countrymen at the time when the Czar's representatives forbade inflammatory, patriotic words. To invest his works with a powerful nationalistic message, he turned for inspiration to the epic compilation of Finnish legends, the *Kalevala*. A series of stirring works based on those old stories preceded the First Symphony — *En Saga* and *Kullervo* (1892), *Karelia Suite* (1893), and *Four Legends*, which include the haunting *Swan of Tuonela* (1893-1895). *Finlandia* was born in the same year — 1899 — as the E minor Symphony. As early as 1897, Sibelius was granted an annual sustenance stipend from the Finnish Senate as recognition of his contribution to the life of the nation so that he would be free to continue his creative work.

The First Symphony shows the influence both of Sibelius' study of German music in Berlin and of the Russian dominance of Finland's artistic life. Coming, as it does, in the last year of the Romantic century, the Symphony looks back for its formal precedents to the orchestral works of the great masters of the German tradition, specifically Beethoven and Brahms. In melodic material, instrumentation and certain points of style, however, it turns further east, to the music of Borodin and, especially, Tchaikovsky, whose Sixth Symphony had been composed only six years before and performed in Helsinki in 1894 and 1897. Sibelius even told his wife, Aino, of Tchaikovsky that "there is much in that man that I recognize in myself." Against this Russo-German background, Sibelius placed his own strong musical personality in establishing himself as a symphonist with a work given to broad emotions and dramatic gestures in an expansive, Romantic mood.

The first movement is introduced by a bardic clarinet solo played above a timpani pedal point. (It is with such orchestral touches that Sibelius admitted trying to evoke the topography of his homeland, in this case, the solitary reddish granite blocks jutting from the sea along Finland's Baltic coast.) The sonata form proper is begun with the entry of the strings proclaiming the main theme, a typically Sibelian melody begun with a sustained note intensifying to a quick rhythmic flourish. A richly lyrical theme for violins and cellos follows. The second theme, related to the main theme in shape and rhythm, is given by the woodwinds. The development section utilizes the thematic material heard in the exposition, to which are added the stern brass chords so characteristic of Sibelius' orchestral technique. The recapitulation includes most of the material from the exposition given in a heightened setting.

The *Andante*, warm and lyrical, opens with a nostalgic melody for violins and cellos. The central section is led by the horn choir playing a serene theme above the undulating accompaniment of the harp and strings. The long closing section elaborates the opening theme. The *Scherzo*, in traditional three-part form (A–B–A), comprises brassy, energetic outer sections surrounding a slow, sustained, contrasting trio. The finale begins with the solo clarinet melody that opened the Symphony. Though the movement is marked “Quasi una Fantasia,” it follows sonata form, with an expressive second theme for strings in slower tempo. The functions of development and recapitulation are fused.

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