

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra  
2019-2020 Mellon Grand Classics Season

April 24, 25 and 26, 2020

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER, CONDUCTOR  
GIL SHAHAM, VIOLIN

WOLFGANG AMADEUS  
MOZART

Concerto No. 5 in A major for Violin and Orchestra,  
K. 219, "Turkish"

- I. Allegro aperto
- II. Adagio
- III. Rondo: Tempo di Menuetto

**Mr. Shaham**

MAURICE RAVEL

*Tzigane*, Rapsodie de Concert for Violin and Orchestra

**Mr. Shaham**

Intermission

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER

*Ex Nihilo* for Chamber Orchestra

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

*La Mer*, Three Symphonic Sketches

- I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer  
("From Dawn to Noon on the Sea")
- II. Jeux de vagues ("Play of the Waves")
- III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer  
("Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea")

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Concerto No. 5 in A major for Violin and Orchestra, K. 219, "Turkish" (1775)

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791. He composed the Violin Concerto No. 5 in 1775, and it was premiered in Salzburg by the Archiepiscopal Orchestra with Mozart as soloist, likely in December 1775. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Carnegie Music Hall with conductor Emil Paur and soloist Alexander Petschnikoff in November 1906, and most recently performed it with conductor Arild Remmereit and soloist Gil Shaham in December 2012. The score calls for two oboes, two horns and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 30 minutes**

Mozart's five authentic Violin Concertos were all products of a single year — 1775. At nineteen he was already a veteran of five years experience as concertmaster of the archiepiscopal court in Salzburg, for which his duties included not only playing, but also composing, acting as co-conductor with the keyboard player (modern orchestral conducting was not to originate for at least two more decades), and soloing in concertos. It was for this last function that Mozart wrote these concertos. He was, of course, a quick study at everything that he did, and each of these works builds on the knowledge gained from its predecessors. It was with the last three (K. 216, 218, 219) that something more than simple experience emerged, however, because it was with these compositions that Mozart indisputably entered the era of his musical maturity. These are his earliest pieces now regularly heard in the concert hall, and the last one, No. 5 in A major, is the greatest of the set. A. Hyatt King wrote that this is not only the best of Mozart's concertos for violin, "but has no rival throughout the second half of the 18th century."

The opening movement is in sonata-concerto form, but has some curious structural experiments more usually associated with the music of Haydn than with that of Mozart. After the initial presentation of the thematic material by the orchestra, the soloist is introduced with the surprising device of a brief, stately *Adagio*, a technique perhaps derived from the D major Clavier Concerto of C.P.E. Bach, Johann Sebastian's musically adventurous Son No. 2. When the *Allegro* tempo resumes, the soloist plays not the main theme already announced by the ensemble, but a new lyrical melody for which the original main theme becomes the accompaniment. More new material fills the remainder of the exposition. The development section is invested with passages of dark harmonic color that cast expressive shadows across the generally sunny landscape of the movement, and lend it emotional weight. The recapitulation calls for restrained, elegant virtuosity from the soloist.

The second movement is a graceful song in sonatina form (sonata-allegro without development). The final movement is an extended rondo in the style and rhythm of a minuet. It is from one of the episodes separating the returns of the theme that the work acquired its sobriquet, "Turkish." This passage occurs before the theme is heard for the last time, and stands in surprising contrast to its elegant surroundings by changing its tempo, meter and mood to recreate a vivacious contradance in the style popular at the time in the dance halls of Vienna. A number of short tunes comprise this section. Most are, according to A. Hyatt King, derived from Hungarian folk music (known, vaguely, as "Turkish" in the 18th century), though one was part of a ballet titled *Harem Jealousies* that Mozart borrowed from his opera *Lucio Silla* of 1772. After the wonderful clangor of this episode, which even calls for the basses to strike their strings with the wood of the bow, the return of the minuet theme is guaranteed to bring a smile — as though the dancers had collapsed from exertion and had only enough strength left for something slow and easy. The end of the work is quiet, and wistful, and unforgettable.

### MAURICE RAVEL

*Tzigane*, Rapsodie de Concert for Violin and Orchestra (1924)

**Maurice Ravel was born in Ciboure, France on March 7, 1875, and died in Paris on December 28, 1937. He composed *Tzigane* for the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi in 1924, and the orchestral version heard today was premiered in Paris with conductor Gabriel Pierné and d'Aranyi as soloist on November 30, 1924. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed *Tzigane* with conductor Hans Graf and soloist Pierre Amoyal in March 1992, and most recently performed it with Music Director Manfred Honeck and soloist Joshua Bell in June 2019. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, trumpet, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 9 minutes**

Exoticism had great appeal for Maurice Ravel: he was fascinated, as was Debussy, by the Oriental and Russian music he heard as a young lad at the Paris International Exhibition of 1889; he harbored a special fondness for stimulating condiments and unusual dishes; he filled his home with *chinoiserie* and quaint knick-knacks from earlier times and other cultures. Among his musical compositions, his interest in exotic themes is evidenced by *Daphnis et Chloé* (ancient Greece), *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (Rococo France), *Mother Goose* (fantasy tales), and the "Concert Rhapsody" for Violin and Orchestra, *Tzigane*, which evokes the colorful Gypsy idioms of Eastern Europe.

While in England in July 1922, Ravel was a guest at a soirée at which the Hungarian violinist Jelly d'Aranyi participated in a performance of his Sonata for Violin and Cello. When the formal part of the evening's entertainment had been accomplished, Ravel asked Mlle. d'Aranyi to play some Gypsy melodies from her native land, and she filled the night until dawn with music that enthralled the composer. Ravel, though captivated by the passionate Hungarian music and determined to compose a new work of Gypsy cast for Mlle. d'Aranyi, had been mired in a fallow period since the end of the World War I, and it was almost two years before he was able to compose *Tzigane*.

*Tzigane*, which follows in the tradition of the Gypsy-inspired compositions of Liszt and Enesco, comprises several structural sections played without pause following an extended introduction for unaccompanied violin. Each section is a virtual miniature dance movement that reaches its own climax before making way for the next dance-section. The tempo of the last section goes from faster to fastest, and *Tzigane* ends in the dazzling whirl of the soloist's *moto perpetuo* pyrotechnics.

## MATTHIAS PINTSCHER

*Ex Nihilo* ("Out of Nothing") for Chamber Orchestra (2011)

**Matthias Pintscher was born in Marl, Germany on January 29, 1971, and enjoys a dual career as a conductor and composer. He composed *Ex Nihilo* in 2011, and it was premiered by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra on January 22, 2012. According to Pintscher, the piece is meant to suggest "awaking, jet-lagged and disoriented, in a strange, dark hotel room. The composition's overall impression is one of dread and foreboding." These performances mark the Pittsburgh Symphony premiere of *Ex Nihilo*. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, alto flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, harp, piano, percussion, and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 9 minutes**

Matthias Pintscher has been Artist-in-Residence with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra since 2011, and he inaugurated his residency by composing *Ex Nihilo*, which he premiered with that ensemble in Glasgow on January 22, 2012. Pintscher did not explain the title nor indicate a specific narrative for the work, but he did say that it is meant to suggest "awaking, jet-lagged and disoriented, in a strange, dark hotel room. The composition's overall impression is one of dread and foreboding." The term "*Ex nihilo*," in Latin, means "out of nothing." It has always carried divine associations — *creatio ex nihilo*: God created the cosmos out of nothing — and is also integral in a number of ancient creation myths, but it could imply the act of artistic creation as well: making something where nothing had been before. Art is an act of drawing order out of chaos — making a Ninth Symphony from a million random notes, a *Guernica* from a box of paints, a *Swan Lake* from the limitless movements of the human body — and *Ex Nihilo* seems to search for reason and focus in the disorienting night sounds of a strange place: whispers, groans and

mutterings, unexplainable shuffling, a distant trumpet playing midnight jazz, an explosive noise. When Pintscher performed *Ex Nihilo* with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in 2018, the orchestra's annotator, Ken Melzer, wrote, "The piece begins from nothing in the bass and percussion as a murmur, an audible hush, and is ponderously slow in developing the collective awakening of the ensemble. Metallic sounds emerge from the depths of the orchestra, untethered to the rest of the music and floating in the ether. The impact is overwhelming and devastatingly beautiful."

## CLAUDE DEBUSSY

*La Mer*, Trois Esquisses Symphoniques ("The Sea, Three Symphonic Sketches") (1903-1905)

**Claude Debussy was born in St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris on August 2, 1862, and died in Paris on March 25, 1918. He composed *La Mer* in 1903-1905, and it was premiered in Paris by the Concert Lamoureux with conductor Camille Chevillard on October 15, 1905. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed *La Mer* at Syria Mosque with Music Director Fritz Reiner in February 1940, and most recently performed it with conductor Juraj Valcuha in April 2014. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two cornets, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, and strings.**

**Performance time: approximately 25 minutes**

"You may not know that I was destined for a sailor's life and that it was only quite by chance that fate led me in another direction. But I have always held a passionate love for the sea." With these lines written on September 12, 1903 to the composer-conductor André Messager, Debussy prefaced the notice that he had begun work on *La Mer*. Debussy's father was a sailor and his tales of vast oceans and exotic lands held Claude spellbound as a boy. A family trip to Cannes when he was seven years old ignited his life-long fascination with the thoughts and moods evoked by moving water. Twenty years later, he discovered an aspect of the sea very different from the placid one he had seen on the resort beaches of the Mediterranean. In early June of that year, he was traveling with friends along the coast of Brittany. Their plans called for passage in a fishing boat from Saint-Lunaire to Cancale, but at the time they were scheduled to leave a threatening storm was approaching and the captain advised canceling the trip. Debussy insisted that they sail. It turned out to be a dramatic, storm-tossed voyage with no little danger to crew and passengers. Debussy relished it. "Now there's a type of passionate feeling that I have not before experienced — Danger!" he declared. These early experiences of the sea — one halcyon, the other threatening — were captured years later in *La Mer*.

In addition to the memories of his own experience of the ocean, Debussy brought to *La Mer* a sensitivity nourished by his fascination with visual renderings of the sea. He was certainly in sympathy with the Impressionistic art of his French contemporaries, but more immediate inspiration for the work seems to have come from the creations of two foreign artists — the Englishman Turner, whom Debussy called "the finest creator of mystery in art," and the Japanese Hokusai. A selection of Turner's wondrous, swirling sea paintings, as much color and light as image, was shown in Paris in 1894 and probably seen there by Debussy. Eight years later, during the 1902-1903 Turner exhibit at London's National Gallery, Debussy again sought out these brilliant canvases, and that visit may have been the catalyst for creating *La Mer*. (A half-century before Debussy, Turner experienced the violence of the sea first-hand when he had himself lashed to a ship's mast during a furious storm just to see what it was like.) Japanese sea- and landscapes were popular in Paris during the 1890s as a result of their introduction there at the Universal Exhibition of 1889. The exquisite drawings of Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) so pleased Debussy that he chose one of them, *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa*, for the cover of the score of *La Mer*.

*From Dawn to Noon on the Sea*, built around the play of thematic and rhythmic fragments rather than conventional melodies, is perfectly suited to expressing the changing reflections of the morning sun in the air, clouds and water. *The Play of the Waves* is a brilliant essay in orchestral color, woven and contrasted with the utmost evocative subtlety. *Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea* reflects the awesome power of the sea as well as its majesty.