June 13, 14 and 15, 2014

MANFRED MARIA HONECK, CONDUCTOR
RUDOLF BUCHBINDER, PIANO

RICHARD STRAUSS — Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*, Opus 59
I. Attire of the Rose Cavalier and Duet
II. Ochs Waltzes
III. Tenor Aria
IV. Breakfast Scene
V. Trio
VI. Closing Duet

RICHARD STRAUSS — *Burleske* for Piano and Orchestra in D minor
Mr. Buchbinder

Intermission

RICHARD STRAUSS — *Elektra*: Symphonic Rhapsody
(Orchestral Suite from the Opera)
Arranged by Mr. Honeck and Tomáš Ille
WORLD PREMIERE

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born 11 June 1864 in Munich; died 8 September 1949 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*, Opus 59 (1909-1910)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Dresden, 26 January 1911
Semper Oper
Ernst von Schuch, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: 22 October 1948; Syria Mosque; Artur Rodzinski, conductor
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 21 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, celesta and strings.

Norman Del Mar titled the chapter on *Der Rosenkavalier* in his biography of Richard Strauss, "The Crowning Success." Notoriety was hardly new to Strauss when this opera appeared in 1911, but its success solidified a reputation that had elevated him, according to universal opinion, to the status of "World's Greatest Composer." The last dozen years of the 19th century saw the production of most of his tone poems, each one generating more popular interest than the one before. When *Salome* appeared in 1905 and *Elektra* followed four years later, Strauss was branded as the principal dispenser of musical modernity, stretching not only technical resources but also psychological probings in music far beyond anything previously known. It was therefore significant news when the Berlin *Boersen-Courier* learned before the premiere of Strauss' 1911 opera that the score was "absolutely un-Strausslike, inasmuch as none of the excessively modern subtleties predominates in the vocal parts or orchestration. On the contrary, the score is brimming over with exceedingly pleasant and catchy melodies, most of them in three-four time. Yes, melodies, incredible as this may sound in the case of Richard Strauss. One waltz, especially, which the tenor sings, is likely to become so popular that many people will believe it is the work, not of Richard, but of Johann Strauss…." (The two Strausses were unrelated.)

The Berlin correspondent knew what he was talking about. So popular did Strauss' bittersweet opera with the 18th-century Viennese setting prove to be that its music and fame spread through Europe like wildfire. Extra trains from Berlin and other cities had to be added to the rail schedule to handle the throngs journeying to Dresden to see this new artistic wonder. Productions were mounted within months in all the musical capitals of Europe. The 1917 catalog of the London publisher Chappell and Co. listed no fewer than 44 arrangements of music from *Der Rosenkavalier* for instrumental combinations ranging from brass band to salon orchestra, from solo mandolin to full symphony. The opera was made into a motion picture in 1924 — five years before sound movies were introduced! (A pit orchestra without singers played the much-truncated score.) The popularity of the haunting and infectious music from *Der Rosenkavalier* continues unabated today in both the opera house and the concert hall.

The libretto for *Der Rosenkavalier*, by the gifted Austrian man of letters Hugo von Hofmannsthal, is one of the masterworks of its type for the lyric stage. It gently probes the budding, young love of Octavian and Sophie, poignantly examines the fading youth of the Marschallin, and humorously exposes the blustering Baron Ochs. It is a superb evocation of sentiment, wit and vigor wedded to one of the most opulently glorious musical scores ever composed. Harold Schonberg wrote of the emotional milieu of the opera, "In *Der Rosenkavalier*, there are no Jungian archetypes, only the human condition. Instead of long narratives, there are Viennese waltzes. Instead of a monumental *Liebestod*, there is a sad, elegant lament from a beautiful, aristocratic woman who begins to see old age. Instead of death, we get a bittersweet and hauntingly beautiful trio that in effect tells us that life will go on as it has always gone on. People do not die for love in Hofmannsthal's world. They face the inevitable, surrender with what grace they can summon up, and then look around for life's next episode. As Strauss himself later said, the Marschallin had lovers before Octavian, and she will have lovers after him." *Der Rosenkavalier* is an opera wise and worldly, sophisticated and touching, sentimental and funny that contains some of the most memorable music to emerge from the opera house in the 20th century.

Burleske for Piano and Orchestra in D minor (1885-1886, 1890)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Eisenach, 21 June 1890
Eisenach City Theater
Richard Strauss, conductor
Eugène d'Albert, soloist
PSO PREMIERE: 28 February 1932; Syria Mosque; Antonio Modarelli, conductor; Walter Gieseking, soloist
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 19 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: woodwinds in pairs plus piccolo, four horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.

Richard Strauss' first public appearance in Vienna was as pianist in a recital presentation of his Violin Concerto on December 5, 1882, a concert that brought from the critic Eduard Hanslick the excited announcement that "an unusual talent" had burst onto the musical scene. A week earlier, the Dresden Court Orchestra had premiered Strauss' *Serenade for Thirteen Winds*, and the work was soon brought out in score by Eugen Spitzweg, his first publisher. Spitzweg sent a copy of the score to his friend Hans von Bülow, conductor of the Meiningen Court Orchestra, who pronounced Strauss "an uncommonly gifted young man." Bülow included the *Serenade* on the programs of his orchestra at home and on tour, first meeting Strauss when the work was performed in Berlin. Early in 1885, the post of assistant conductor at Meiningen came open and Bülow invited Strauss to fill it. Strauss accepted. He assumed his duties on October 1st, and his first appearance there came two weeks later as soloist under Bülow's direction in Mozart's C minor Piano Concerto (K. 491), for which Strauss specially composed a cadenza. The composer's biographer Willi Schuh noted that, in addition to his responsibilities for an occasional solo appearance and conducting the daily morning rehearsals of the Meiningen Orchestra, Strauss in the autumn of 1885 "started to compose a scherzo for piano and orchestra (*Burleske*), read a great deal, borrowed books from Marie von Bülow [Hans' wife], improved his French, practiced the piano and also regularly took an hour's walk."

Burleske is the earliest of Strauss' works to hint at the masterpieces to come. Though still indebted to his thorough classical training and the then-pervasive influence of Brahms, it contains, wrote Michael Kennedy, "the first authentic glimpses of the urchin humor of *Till Eulenspiegel*, the stirrings of Don Juan's ardor, the wit, fantasy, sparkle and inventiveness of the creator of a gallery of stage characters. Here above all is the fantastic conjuror of the orchestra, juggling with pianist and orchestra as if they were featherweights." Strauss never explained the title. He first called the piece a "scherzo," which literally means "joke," and he may have intended some humorous allusion for the music. George R. Marek wrote that "the *Burleske* is a spoof of the serious concerto, its mood alternating between dulcet passages and impish cavortings. It is lively, witty and good-natured." The *Burleske* is a work of high spirits with no trace of profundity — a dazzling showpiece for the virtuoso pianist. In it are clearly heard Strauss' awesome gifts for melody, orchestration, musical characterization and thematic development that were to blossom just two years later in his first undisputed masterpiece, *Don Juan*.

Elektra: Symphonic Rhapsody (Orchestral Suite from the Opera) (1906-1908)

WORLD PREMIERE

Arranged by Manfred Maria Honeck and Tomáš Ille (b. 1971)

PREMIERE OF OPERA: Dresden, 25 January 1909
Semper Oper
Ernst von Schuch, conductor
PSO PREMIERE: THESE PERFORMANCES MARK THE PSO PREMIERE
APPROXIMATE DURATION: 35 minutes
INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

In Greek mythology, Electra was the daughter of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and leader of the Greek forces in the Trojan War, and Clytemnestra, his queen. Just as Agamemnon was about to set sail

for Troy, his soldiers killed a pregnant hare and, in retribution, Artemis, the powerful goddess of the hunt, wilderness and childbirth, demanded that the king sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia so that his ships would have favorable winds for the invasion. (Ancient accounts of Iphigenia's fate vary, but in Hofmannsthal's tragedy on which Strauss based his opera, it is assumed that Agamemnon carried out Artemis' command.) Clytemnestra was furious with Agamemnon when she learned of Iphigenia's death, and plotted revenge against her husband. She took as her lover and accomplice Aegisthus, who felt that his family had been unfairly deprived of the Mycenaean throne by Agamemnon's father, and they executed their plan when the king returned home after ten years at war. To forestall potential rivals for the throne, Clytemnestra sent her son, Orestes, into exile; Electra and her surviving sister, Chrysothemis, were forbidden to marry and bear children. (Electra's name is thought to derive from "*alektros*," Greek for "without a marriage bed.") Electra became obsessed with avenging her father's murder and lived in hope that Orestes would return so they could punish their mother and her lover. Orestes appeared at last without warning and carried out his sister's sanguinary plan. Electra went on to marry Pylades, who had sheltered Orestes during his exile and in the traditional telling of the myth helped him slay Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but Orestes was pursued by the Furies until he was absolved of matricide by Athena.

The Viennese poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote his *Elektra* during three weeks of a stay in Italy in the summer of 1903, though his plans for the drama had begun two years earlier when he read the Sophocles play on which he based it. The celebrated director Max Reinhardt staged the premiere at the Kleines Theater in Berlin on October 30, 1903; it was performed ninety times during that initial run and revived in 1905, 1908 and 1909. Richard Strauss, working as a conductor at the Berlin Court Opera during that time, saw *Elektra* during its 1905 revival and immediately recognized its potential as an opera subject, though he was concerned that *Elektra*, with its ancient setting, obsessed title character and one-act form, was too similar to the brand-new *Salome*, which he premiered with great success in Dresden in December 1905. Playwright and composer met in February 1906, when Hofmannsthal was in Berlin for the premiere of his *Oedipus und die Sphinx*, and he convinced Strauss that the structure, characters and emotions of *Elektra* differed sufficiently from those of *Salome* that the new opera would not be seen as simply a sequel to Strauss' first operatic hit. (They had first met in March 1899 and the following year considered collaborating on a ballet titled *Der Triumph der Zeit [Time]*, but nothing came of that project.) Strauss, busy with extensive conducting engagements and handling the demand for performances of *Salome*, could not begin composing *Elektra* until June 1906. He worked on the score for the next two years and finally finished the orchestration, itself a massive undertaking, in September 1908. Strauss earned another success with the opera's premiere, on January 25, 1909 at the Semper Oper in Dresden conducted by Ernst von Schuch, though *Elektra* has lagged somewhat behind *Salome* (1905) and *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), which flank it in Strauss' operatic output, in the number of performances, not only because it is one of opera's most challenging and emotionally searing experiences for audiences and performers alike but also because its gigantic orchestra and singers capable of handling the supremely demanding vocal roles are available to few companies. Despite its challenges, *Elektra* has always been regarded as one of most powerful and masterful creations in the operatic repertory. In 1942, just as he was wrapping up his operatic career with *Capriccio*, Strauss judged that "many now consider *Elektra* the acme of my work."

Strauss took the lead in condensing Hofmannsthal's play into a workable libretto, retaining its form and much of its text but streamlining the action, he said, to emphasize "the tremendous increase in musical tension to the very end." Both play and opera are structured in six continuous scenes, all set in the courtyard of the royal palace at Mycenae. In Scene 1, serving women, drawing water from a well, scorn Electra for living in rags, eating like an animal and nightly bewailing her murdered father. Electra enters when they leave (Scene 2) and sings of the dead Agamemnon and her vow to avenge his death. Chrysothemis appears (Scene 3) to warn her sister that Clytemnestra and Aegisthus plan to imprison her in a dungeon and then tells of her own anguish at being confined to the palace and forbidden to marry and have children. Noise and lights issue from the palace as Clytemnestra approaches. Chrysothemis retreats. The Queen, draped in opulent robes and encrusted with jewels but moving with difficulty and looking wan and bloated, enters the courtyard with her attendants (Scene 4). When Clytemnestra is left alone with Electra, she asks if her daughter has any magic charm against the nightmares that torture her sleep. "When the appointed victim falls under the axe, you will dream no more," she replies icily. Electra terrifies her mother with gory visions of Agamemnon and the possibility that Orestes may return to avenge his death until a commotion in the palace interrupts their encounter. A confidante enters and whispers something into Clytemnestra's ear that causes her wild joy. She hurries back inside. Chrysothemis rushes in (Scene 5) to report that word has reached the palace that Orestes is dead. Electra refuses to believe it,

but she tries to convince her sister that they must now act on their own. Chrysothemis refuses and runs back into the house, so Electra determines to carry out her plan alone. A silhouette appears at the courtyard gate (Scene 6). It is Orestes. His reunion with Electra is cut short when he heads into the palace to carry out the task for which he has returned to Mycenae. Clytemnestra's screams are heard from inside. Aegisthus rushes into the courtyard looking for lights. No sooner has he gone back into the palace than he is seen at a window crying out for help as he is attacked. Chrysothemis reappears to report that all are hailing Orestes as the new king. Electra proclaims, "There is only one thing fitting for those as happy as we: to be silent and dance." She takes a few triumphant steps and collapses lifeless to the ground.

The *Elektra* orchestra, in both its huge scale and its use (in its original scoring for 110 players, it requires the largest orchestra of any opera in the repertory), is integral to Strauss' musical recreation of this stunning tale of antiquity. Instrumental tone color here is not merely a decorative element, but the essential means of conveying the play's thrust and emotions. When fully unleashed, the orchestra is meant to bludgeon the audience, matching the ferocity of dramatic feeling with sheer volume of sound. Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who portrayed Clytemnestra at the premiere, publicly referred to the "horrible din" of the orchestration, and an editorial cartoon showed the audience squeezed into the pit while instrumentalists occupied the rest of the auditorium; one critic predicted that Strauss' next work would also include four locomotives, ten jaguars and several rhinoceroses. But *Elektra*'s overwhelming effect, its cathartic purging of emotion, the *raison d'être* for Greek tragedy, could have been achieved in no other way. "When a mother is slain on stage, do they expect me to write a violin concerto?" Strauss asked. *Elektra*, perhaps more than any other opera, confirms the ability of the orchestra to excite feelings that are as profound and timeless as civilization itself.

Just as no opera surpasses *Elektra* in the size of its orchestral ensemble, so no opera depends more fully on the instruments for its realization and effect. The characters on stage articulate the text and mime its actions, but the essence of the story is unfolded by the orchestra. The score is therefore especially amenable to treatment as a "symphonic rhapsody" by Manfred Honeck and Czech composer and guitarist Tomáš Ille (b. 1971), a graduate of the Prague Conservatory and Academy of Music, who has written for concert, film, theater and educational activities, and had his compositions and arrangements performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, Czech Nonet, Pilsen Philharmonic and other leading soloists and ensembles.