

## PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

### CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born 22 August 1862 in Saint-Germain-en Laye, near Paris; died 26 March 1918 in Paris.

*Petite Suite* (composed for piano four-hands in 1889; orchestrated in 1907)

Orchestrated by Henri-Paul Büsser

Born 16 January 1872 in Toulouse, France.

Died 30 December 1973 in Paris.

PREMIERE OF PIANO FOUR-HANDS VERSION: Paris, 1 March 1889; private salon; Claude Debussy and Jacques Durand

PREMIERE OF ORCHESTRAL VERSION: Paris, 4 November 1907; Orchestre Lamoureux; Camille Chevillard, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 16 October 1980; Heinz Hall; Kiril Kondrashin, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 14 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, percussion, harp and strings.

During the early years of his life, before he fell under the influence of Eric Satie and the Symbolist poets, Debussy turned to the refined style of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) for inspiration in his instrumental music. Several works of that time are modeled on the Baroque dance suite, including the well-known *Clair de Lune*, originally conceived as a simple slow movement for the *Suite Bergamasque* of 1889, the year from which the *Petite Suite* also dates. Like the *Suite Bergamasque*, the *Petite Suite* comprises brief dance movements that reflect the concise form and clear melody of their models. Though written for piano-four hands, the work's greatest success has been in the sensitive orchestral setting by Henri-Paul Büsser. Büsser, like Debussy a graduate of the Paris Conservatoire and a recipient of the *Prix de Rome*, was a composer, conductor and organist who died as recently as 1973 at the imposing age of 101. He participated in the early performances of *Pelléas et Mélisande* as choral director and conductor, and the diaphanous orchestral garb he provided for the *Petite Suite* is testimony to his sympathy for Debussy's style.

Each of the four movements of the *Petite Suite* bears a title reflecting its general character. *En Bateau* ("In a Boat") is a lullaby-barcarolle that uses whole-tone scales in its central section. *Cortège* displays none of the funereal solemnity usually associated with pieces of that name, but rather calls to mind a pleasant stroll along the sun-dappled bank of a bubbling stream. Since Debussy associated the paintings of Watteau with Rameau's music, this *Cortège* may have been meant to summon the elegant sensuality of such a canvas as *The Embarkation to Cythera*. The following *Menuet* is a wistful evocation of the most durable of all Baroque dances. The lively *Ballet* that closes the *Petite Suite* is not music for choreography, but rather recalls the Italian *balletti* of the 16th century, the dance-like vocal pieces for home entertainment that were imported into England as *balletts* (the "tt" is pronounced) and distinguished by their characteristic "fa-la-la" refrains.

### JOAQUÍN RODRIGO

Born on 22 November 1901 at Sagunto, Valencia; died on 6 July 1999 in Madrid.

*Concierto de Aranjuez* for Guitar and Orchestra (1939)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Barcelona, 9 November 1940; Palau de la Música Catalana; Orquesta Filarmónica de Barcelona; César Mendoza Lasalle, conductor; Regino Sainz de la Maza, soloist

PSO PREMIERE: 18 February 2000; Heinz Hall; Norio Ohga, conductor; Christopher Parkening, soloist

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 24 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets and strings.

The small town of Aranjuez, thirty miles south of Madrid on the River Tagus, is a green oasis in the barren plateau of central Spain. In the mid-18th century, a palace, set amid verdant forests and parks, was built at Aranjuez as a summer retreat for the Spanish court. Generations of Spanish kings thereafter settled into Aranjuez every spring, when the countless nightingales would serenade them from the cedars and laurels, the court ladies would promenade in the cooling shade, and the men would hone their equestrian skills with the famous cream-colored Andalusian horses bred nearby. When Joaquín Rodrigo sought inspiration for a new concerto in the difficult, war-torn year of 1939, it was to the elegant symbol of by-gone Spain represented by Aranjuez that he turned. "Having conceived the idea of a guitar concerto," he recalled, "it was necessary for me to place it in a certain epoch and, still more, in a definite location — an epoch at the end of which *fandangos* transform themselves into *fandanguillos*, and when the *cante* and the *bulerías* vibrate in the Spanish air." He further stated that he had in mind the early decades of the 19th century when composing this *Concierto de Aranjuez*. Of the work's mood and the character of its solo instrument, the composer wrote, "Throughout the veins of Spanish music, a profound rhythmic beat seems to be diffused by a strange phantasmagoric, colossal and multiform instrument — an instrument idealized in the fiery imagination of Albéniz, Granados, Falla and Turina. It is an imaginary instrument that might be said to possess the wings of the harp, the heart of the grand piano, and the soul of the guitar.... It would be unjust to expect strong sonorities from this *Concierto*; they would falsify its essence and distort an instrument made for subtle ambiguities. Its strength is to be found in its very lightness and in the intensity of its contrasts. The *Aranjuez Concierto* is meant to sound like the hidden breeze that stirs the tree tops in the parks, as dainty as a veronica."

In his *Concierto de Aranjuez*, Rodrigo adapted the three traditional movements of the concerto form to reflect different aspects of the soul of Spanish music — the outer movements are fast in tempo and dance-like, while the middle one is imbued with the bittersweet intensity of classic flamenco *cante hondo* ("deep song"). The soloist opens the *Concierto* with an evocative, typically Spanish rhythmic pattern of ambiguous meter that courses throughout the movement. The orchestra, in colorful fiesta garb, soon enters while the guitar's brilliant, virtuoso display continues. The haunting *Adagio*, among the most beautiful and beloved pieces ever written for guitar, is based on a theme of Middle Eastern ancestry, given in the plangent tones of the English horn, around which the soloist weaves delicate arabesques as the music unfolds. The finale's lilting simplicity (one commentator noted its similarity to a Spanish children's song) serves as a foil to the imposing technical demands for the soloist, who is required to negotiate almost the entire range of the instrument's possibilities.

## PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born 7 May 1840 in Votkinsk, Russia; died 6 November 1893 in St. Petersburg.

### *Manfred Symphony*, Opus 58 (1885)

PREMIERE OF WORK: Moscow, 23 March 1886; Russian Musical Society; Max von Erdmannsdörfer, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 29 November 1907; Carnegie Music Hall; Emil Paur, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 56 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION: piccolo, three flutes, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, organ and strings.

One of the highlights of Hector Berlioz's second visit to Russia, in 1867-1868, was the performance of his composition inspired by Byron's *Childe Harold*, the symphony *Harold in Italy*. The Russian passion for Byron was still strong after it had largely run its course in the rest of Europe, and Berlioz's colorful, programmatic work created a considerable stir among both public and musicians. *Harold in Italy* was the direct inspiration for Rimsky-Korsakov's *Antar Symphony* of 1868 and also caused Vladimir Stassov (the influential journalist and philosophical shepherd of the group of nationalistic composers known as "The Five") to concoct a literary program for a four-movement symphony based on another of Byron's writings, *Manfred*. Stassov sent his précis to Mili Balakirev, one of the group of nationalist composers known as "The Five," who, finding the sketch "not in harmony with my intimate moods," chose not to set it to music. Balakirev elaborated Stassov's outline, and he sent it to Berlioz with the hope of inspiring a sequel to *Harold in Italy*. He even suggested the use in the proposed work of an *idée fixe* — a melody heard in every movement — a technique that had proven successful in the *Symphonie Fantastique*. Berlioz, tired, ill and nearing the end of his life, declined. Balakirev's scenario lay fallow for fourteen years.

In 1882, Balakirev wrote Tchaikovsky a letter full of praise for the tone poems *The Tempest* and *Francesca da Rimini* and thanking him for the recent dedication of the revised version of *Romeo and Juliet*, whose form and subject he had originally suggested. He took the occasion to offer Tchaikovsky the long-dormant *Manfred* program. Tchaikovsky replied that the plan seemed too close to the Berlioz model to allow for much originality, and told Balakirev that he was not interested. Two years later, Balakirev met Tchaikovsky at the first performance of *Eugene Onégin* at St. Petersburg's Imperial Theater, and again urged him to consider *Manfred*. Tchaikovsky, having become more familiar with the poet's works since Balakirev first suggested the topic, arrived at the realization that this might indeed be a subject for him. Balakirev sent him a revised version of the scenario, even suggesting keys, moods and forms, and Tchaikovsky took it and a newly purchased copy of the original poem with him on a visit to Switzerland. He decided to go ahead with the project, despite reservations about composing to a literary plan. ("It is a thousand times pleasanter to compose without a program," he confided to a friend.) He made sketches for *Manfred* during his spring 1885 travels, and settled down to serious work on the score when he returned home in the summer.

The new piece did not come easily. "Nothing has ever been so difficult for me or cost me so much effort as the symphony I am now composing," he wrote in a letter. Work on *Manfred* was made more difficult by his busy schedule. He was beginning production plans for the just-completed opera *Cherevitzi*, and he had a waiting commission for another opera (*The Enchantress*) that he had to begin before *Manfred* could be finished. When *Manfred* was finally completed in December, he was curiously ambivalent about it. He called it "my finest symphonic composition" yet refused to accept any payment from his publisher, Jurgenson, because he thought it would never be popular enough with audiences to repay the investment. Though the work has never enjoyed the acclaim of the late numbered symphonies, it remains one of Tchaikovsky's most gripping orchestral essays.

Though Byron called *Manfred* a drama, he never intended that it be staged but rather read as a poetic recitation. He wrote to his publisher that it was "*quite impossible* to stage," and that negotiations with the Drury Lane Theatre to mount a production "have given me the greatest contempt." In 1817, Byron described the haunted, illusionary world of *Manfred*: "It is in three acts, of a very wild, metaphysical and inexplicable kind. Almost all of the persons — but two or three — are spirits of the earth and air, or the waters; the scene is in the Alps; the hero is a kind of magician, who is tormented by a species of remorse, the cause of which is left half unexplained. He wanders about invoking these spirits, which appear to him, and are of no use; he at last goes to the very abode of the Evil Principle, in *propria persona*, to evocate a ghost, which appears and gives him an ambiguous and disagreeable answer; and in the third act he is found by an attendant dying in the tower, where he had studied his art."

The symphonic plan that Stasov and Balakirev wove around Byron's play contains four scenes, which are faithfully mirrored by Tchaikovsky's music.

"I. *Manfred* wanders over the Alps," begins Balakirev's outline. "His life is ruined; many burning questions remain unanswered; nothing remains to him but memory. The form of the ideal Astarte floats before his fancy; in vain he calls to her; only the echoes of the rocks give back her name. His thoughts and memories burn his brain and eat out his heart; he seeks and pleads for oblivion which none can give him.

"II. *Scherzo fantastique*. The spirit of the Alps appears to Manfred in the rainbow of the waterfall.

"III. A mood entirely different from the earlier movements. Program: the customs of the Alpine huntsmen, patriarchal, simple and kindly. With these customs Manfred comes into contact, and is in sharp contrast. Naturally, you must first of all have a little hunting motive, only here the greatest caution is necessary so as not to fall into triviality. Heaven preserve you from the commonplaces after the manner of German fanfares and hunting music!

"IV. *Finale*. A wild *Allegro* that depicts the caves of Arimanes, to which Manfred has gone to seek a meeting with Astarte. The contrast to this infernal orgy will be given by the appearance of Astarte's shade. The music must be light, clear and maidenly. Then a repetition of the pandemonium; then sunset and the death of Manfred."

In composing *Manfred*, Tchaikovsky not only followed Balakirev's program but also adopted the technique of *idée fixe* that he suggested. The *idée fixe* melody, symbolizing Byron's romantic protagonist, is presented at the Symphony's outset and occurs in every movement. The work, especially in its opening movement, does not follow traditional symphonic forms, and it is perhaps for that reason that Tchaikovsky did not include it among his numbered symphonies, considering it rather a multi-movement symphonic poem.

So truly do the individual movements reflect the literary scheme given above that they need little further comment. *Manfred* is one of Tchaikovsky's most colorful orchestral pictures, exhibiting a richness and variety of instrumental sonorities unsurpassed by any of his other compositions. "Of all Tchaikovsky's works, it is *Manfred* which has least deserved its fate," wrote John Warrack in his

biography of the composer. "He constructs a form of his own that is remarkably successful as an expression of his program.... It is a musical portrait, as strongly drawn as Berlioz's *Harold*, of the guilty, doomed sensibility which was perhaps the aspect of Byron which most vividly appealed to the Russians."

— Dr. Richard E. Rodda