

The University Musical Society

of

The University of Michigan

Presents

The ANN ARBOR

May Festival

THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
EUGENE ORMANDY, *Music Director and Conductor*
WILLIAM SMITH, *Assistant Conductor*

EUGENE ORMANDY, *Conducting*

SOLOIST

ISAAC STERN, *Violinist*

SATURDAY EVENING, MAY 5, 1973, AT 8:30
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

PROGRAM

*Prelude to *Parsifal* WAGNER

Romance in G major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 40 BEETHOVEN
ISAAC STERN

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat major for Violin and Orchestra, K. 207 MOZART
Allegro moderato
Adagio
Presto

MR. STERN

INTERMISSION

*Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36 TCHAIKOVSKY
Andante sostenuto; moderato con anima
Andantino in modo di canzona
Scherzo; pizzicato ostinato
Finale: allegro con fuoco

* Available on Columbia Records RCA Red Seal

PROGRAM NOTES

by

GLENN D. MCGEOCH

Prelude to *Parsifal* WAGNER

Parsifal, the last product of Wagner's long creative activity, is different in many ways from his previous works and from any other lyric drama. In substance and style, and in its general effect upon the stage, it is unique. Wagner's designation of it as a "Buhnenweihfestspiel" or "stage consecrating festival drama" is highly significant. He regards the stage here not merely as a medium for diversion and entertainment but for experiences that stand apart from those of ordinary life and bring us into close contact with and lift us to a realm of profound spiritual mood. This grand and elevated aesthetic conception builds upon foundations of mystical, religious, and ethical ideas and incidents, and the music that accompanies this noble dramatic structure shows differences in style and manner, as well as in general quality of inspiration. There is in the music of *Parsifal* none of the passion and sensuous longing or ecstatic ardor of *Tristan und Isolde*, nor is there that Olympian grandeur and heroic splendor one finds in *Götterdämmerung*.

The music, being essential to the character of the text, is prevailingly deliberate and slow in pace to accompany the leisurely unfolding of the story. Now rich and glowing in mystical harmonies, stately and solemn in its rhythm, the music is evolved from those sections of the text that have to do with the castle of the knights of the Holy Grail. During the Communion scene, by the same token, the music is charged with a mystical poignancy that transcends all earthly associations, and at the end of the work, when the Grail sheds its benefaction on the holy knighthood, the music becomes seraphic, and we are at one with the worshiping company of knights before the revelation of immortal beauty.

From the host of medieval legends concerning the Holy Grail, Wagner found in the version of the old German minnesinger Wolfram von Eschenbach, whom he had introduced as a character in his earlier opera *Tannhäuser*, those elements that best suited his dramatic purpose. This poetic and mystic legend inspired Wagner at the age of sixty-eight to write some of the most sublime music of his long career.

Romance in G major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 40 BEETHOVEN

Beethoven wrote two Romances for violin and orchestra in short succession during the years 1802-3—Op. 40 in G major on tonight's program and Op. 50 in F major. They came from the same period in which he wrote the *Heiligenstadt Testament* (October 6, 1802), in which he threatened to take his own life to escape the agonizing realization that he was losing his hearing. They were momentary releases from a tortured mind. Their tender lyricisms and serenity flowed from the same pen that produced the first sketches of the epic *Eroica Symphony*, and belie the torrential emotions that were raging within him. Within their small framework, they are musically inventive, conveying romantic expressions, with a complete absence of self-pity or sentimentality.

Concerto No. 1 in B-flat, K. 207, for Violin and Orchestra MOZART

In keeping with his custom of going into a subject thoroughly from its very foundation, and gaining proficiency by continuous work in one direction, Mozart (1765-91) composed five concertos for the violin between April and December, 1775. These works are by no means the slight, fugitive attempts of a nineteen-year-old youth, but carefully conceived works of considerable compass. Unlike his *divertimenti*, the violin concertos are less complicated works, making little of virtuosity yet striving continuously for a newer freedom of form and expression. Under the guidance of his father, a famous violin teacher, Mozart had become familiar with the brilliant concertos of such great Italian masters as Vivaldi, Corelli, Tartini, Geminiani, and Locatelli. On his visits to Italy, he heard the more contemporary music of the younger generation of composers, particularly that of Nardini and Boccherini, music in which the former galant style, strict in form and full of technical effect, was giving way to a more elastic and sensuous one. The transition can easily be detected from the traditional Vivaldi- and Corelli-like writing of the first two concertos (B-flat, K. 207; D, K. 211) to the more direct and personally lyrical quality of the last three (G, K. 216; D, K. 218; A, K. 219.). In these Mozart reveals a new profundity and fluency of expression for which there is no factual explanation.

Within the three months that separated the second and third concertos, Mozart, for some reason unrevealed by the researcher's probe, gained an artistic maturity and insight that lifted the last three concertos to the creative level of his most characteristic works. "Suddenly," writes Einstein, "there is a new depth and richness to Mozart's whole language."

Although this, the first of Mozart's violin concertos, may not reveal his true genius in terms of inventive technique, depth of expression, or profound musical perfection, or present a particular challenge to the ear, its naïve charm is indeed infectious.

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, Op. 36 TCHAIKOVSKY

Goethe described Byron in the fine phrase "His being consists in rich despair." The whole age bears his stamp as artists wrapped themselves in his dark mantle and stalked from one anguish to another. Literature had become "a splendid greeny-gold growth, glittering and seductive, but filled with intoxicating saps that corrode."

From the same over-fertilized emotional soil grew a prolific school of composers. Too much self-contemplation and brooding tend to substitute futile or morbid imaginings for solid realities of life. The over-introspective and supersensitive artist cuts himself off from the larger arc of experience and is prone to exaggerate the importance of the more tragic emotions, and when, as in the nineteenth century, such a tendency is widespread, a whole school may become febrile and erotic.

Tchaikovsky, like his literary contemporaries, was a victim of "the grief that saps the mind." His personal unassuageable grief and the tragedies and frustrations of his own life he poured out in his music. His penchant for melancholy expression, his feverish sensibility, his revulsions of artistic feeling, and his fitful emotions, which sank him into morbid pessimism, deadening depression, and neurotic fears on the one hand or raised him to wild hysteria on the other, paint him in the framework of his age.

The constant oscillation between sudden exultation, violent passion, and unresisted submission in his temperament excluded the sustaining and impersonal elements necessary to the true epic. He gave himself up, as Sibelius noted when speaking of his music, to every situation without looking beyond the moment. But such is the beauty and power of his themes and so masterful and effective is the use he makes of the orchestral palette that we cannot consider it a weakness that his compositions, in his own words, often "show at the seams and reveal no organic union between the separate episodes." In fact, Tchaikovsky's faults embrace his virtues, and this is the enigma of his genius. Searching through words to make his emotional meaning explicit (an overpowering desire on the part of nineteenth-century composers, with the exception of Brahms) Tchaikovsky wrote to Mme Von Meck a verbal meaning to his Fourth Symphony:

"Our symphony has a program. That is to say, it is possible to express its contents in words, and I will tell you—and you alone—the meaning of the entire work and its separate movements. . . .

"The *Introduction* is the germ, the leading idea of the whole work. This is Fate, that inevitable force which checks our aspirations towards happiness ere they reach that goal, which watches jealously lest our peace and bliss should be complete and cloudless—a force which, like the sword of Damocles, hangs perpetually over our heads and is always embittering the soul. This force is inescapable and invincible. There is no other course but to submit and inwardly lament. This sense of hopeless despair grows stronger and more poignant. Is it not better to turn from reality and lose ourselves in dreams? O joy! A sweet and tender dream enfolds me. A bright and serene presence leads me on. How fair! How remotely now is heard the first theme of the *Allegro!* Deeper and deeper the soul is sunk in dreams; Fate awakens us roughly. So all life is but a continual alternation between grim truth and fleeting dreams of happiness. There is no haven. The waves drive us hither and thither until the sea engulfs us. This is approximately the program of the first movement.

"The *second movement* expresses another phase of suffering. Now it is the melancholy which steals us when at evening we sit indoors alone, weary of work, while the book we have picked up for relaxation slips unheeded from our fingers. A long procession of old memories goes by. How sad to think how much is already *past and gone!* And yet these recollections of youth are sweet. We would fain rest awhile and look back, recalling many things. There were moments when young blood pulsed warm through our veins, and life gave us all we asked. There were also moments of sorrow, irreparable loss. All this has receded so into the past. How sad, yet sweet, to lose ourselves therein!

"In the *third movement* no definite feelings find expression. Here we have only capricious arabesques, intangible forms, which come into a man's head when he has been drinking wine and his nerves are rather excited. His mood is neither joyful nor sad. He thinks of nothing in particular. His fancy is free to follow its own flight, and it designs the strangest patterns. Sudden memory calls up the picture of a tipsy peasant and a street song. From afar come the sounds of a military band. These are the kind of confused images which pass through our brain as we fall asleep. They have no connection with actuality, but are simply wild, strange, bizarre.

"The *fourth movement*: if you find no reason in yourself, look at others. Go to the people. See how they can enjoy life and give themselves up entirely to festivity. A rustic holiday is depicted. Hardly have we had time to forget ourselves in other people's pleasures when indefatigable Fate reminds us once more of its presence. Others pay no heed to us. They do not spare us a glance nor stop to observe. We are lonely and sad. How merry and glad they all are! All their feelings are so inconsequent, so simple. And will you still say all the world is immersed in sorrow? Happiness *does* exist, simple and unspoilt. Be glad in others' gladness. This makes life possible."

After this futile attempt to utter the unutterable, Tchaikovsky concludes:

". . . For the first time in my life I have attempted to put into words and phrases my musical ideas and forms. I have not been very successful. I was horribly out of spirits all the time I was composing last winter, and this is an echo of my feelings at the time—but only an echo. But there lies the peculiarity of instrumental music; we cannot analyze it. 'Where words leave off, music begins,' as Heine has said."

The Ann Arbor May Festival

The 80th Ann Arbor May Festival becomes history after tonight's performance. Four hundred and thirty-nine concerts have taken place in this annual series in which the Boston Festival Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony (originally the Theodore Thomas Orchestra), and The Philadelphia Orchestra have participated. The world's greatest musical artists, both vocal and instrumental, have been featured under the baton of some thirty conductors. The University Choral Union has faithfully participated every year, and children from the Ann Arbor schools have sung in the "Youth Chorus" from 1913 to 1958. Since 1933 Glenn D. McGeogh has contributed illuminating and scholarly annotations to the May Festival programs. We are especially grateful to The Philadelphia Orchestra for their contribution to this tradition since 1936, and to their music director and conductor Eugene Ormandy, whose inspiring artistry and devotion to this Festival is inestimable.

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